

**Red Ball Express** was a massive trucking system created by the United States Army Transportation Corps during World War II (1939-1945). The Red Ball Express carried supplies to Allied armies as they pushed across France toward Germany in 1944. Most of the Red Ball Express truck drivers were African Americans. At that time, the U.S. Army operated under a policy of racial *segregation* (separation), and most African Americans in the Army served as laborers. *Red Ball* referred to an old railroad term for express shipping.

By August 1944, the war had left the French railway system largely destroyed. As a result, Allied forces in France had to rely on trucks for the delivery of supplies. Combat troops needed huge quantities of food, ammunition, medical supplies, gasoline, and other supplies.

Starting from Normandy, in northwestern France, the Red Ball Express traveled to and from the front lines. Road signs and markers guided the way. Mechanics and maintenance crews worked around the clock. Special rest stops provided exhausted drivers with meals and places to sleep. In less than three months, around 6,000 Red Ball Express vehicles delivered more than 400,000 tons (360,000 metric tons) of vital supplies to the Allied armies.

In November 1944, the Allies opened the Belgian port of Antwerp, which earlier had been occupied by the Germans. The Allies then brought their supplies through Antwerp, because it was closer than Normandy to the front lines. As a result, the Red Ball Express was no longer needed.