

## Red Balling Through the Ozarks – 1<sup>st</sup> Annual in March 2008

In August 1944, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army broke through the German lines and quickly out ran their supplies. Any serviceable truck and anyone who could drive were pressed into service to deliver fuel, food and other supplies to the Allied front. At the peak almost 6000 vehicles and 700,000 pounds of supplies were on the road. The round trip was about 700 miles and it operated 24/7. The trucks in the convoy had a red ball on them and had priority routing. Trucks that broke down were pushed off the roads and roving maintenance crews worked on them as they got to them. After a few months this Red Ball Express was shut down.

Fast forward to Friday 02 MAY 2008. My wife and I drove to Southern OK to pick up her mother and sister for a casual drive through South Eastern Oklahoma where her family was raised. We were on our way to Fayetteville, AR for the First Annual “Red Balling through the Ozarks” historic military vehicle convoy.



The host chapter was the Arkansas Military Vehicle Travelers. This would be our inaugural historic military vehicle (HMV) event.

We arrived at the hotel at about 1500 and there were about 5 HMVs in the parking lot ... my eyes were wide ... I didn't make it to the hotel room. Jeeps, deuces and weapons carriers were all over. Another HMV'er, Hal Miller and his son Michael checked in behind me, we chatted a bit at his M38CDN dressed in Air Force blue with matching trailer. The markings were from its native Canada. I rode with Hal and Mike (they are from OK) the next morning through the Ozarks.

The Friday evening briefing was informative, and I wanted to get on the road right then, but had to wait. The main topic was the new route. The original route was north and clockwise to the NE and around a huge lake to Eureka Springs then back to the hotel. The only suspension bridge in Arkansas was under water and unfortunately it was decided to not take that route. A vintage response: “Nut’s!” We will use that route next year!

The chosen route was in the opposite direction ... counter-clockwise and southwest!

After the briefing of safety and thank yous etc. there was a movie “Ike: Countdown to D-Day” starring Tom Selleck. It was great ... I want to see it again. No shooting or bombs or paratroopers jumping, but the planning and action behind the scenes of the greatest military invasion in history was excellent. Several scenes depict some famous photos that you all will probably recognize. Next year the planned movie is “The Red Ball Express”.

Saturday morning was chilly, about 40 F ... or was it just “Way cold”? It had been about 70 F in Arlington the day before when we left at 0530 for this “fun trip” and now it is almost miserable. I hoped the heater worked in Hal’s jeep ;- ) I did have a winter wait coat and gloves ... good planning. There were folks there from Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana and Missouri, but mostly from Arkansas.



Just before H-hour the folks were stirring and HMVs were getting lined up ... in three squads ... an entire parking lot was dedicated to the convoy and it was filling up with OD and the one blue RCAF jeep and trailer!

For commemorating a mostly truck convoy ... this convoy was probably typical of similar convoys in the US ... lots of jeeps! And there were also lots of jeeps. There were about 20 jeeps --- from a 1993 Alley Cat XM-141 M151’s, M38 & A1s to some MBs and GPWs. The trucks included 3 deuce and a halves, 2 weapons carriers and a 1974 Austrian Steyr Pinzgauer. It was looking like a great trip with all the vehicles with their drivers and riders in military uniforms from WW II to present including all the service except for USCG. Some folks chatting, others helping put up canvas tops. There was a scurry of pictures being made and last minute shifting of equipment and loading lunch etc. Logistics here, as was with the original Red Ball Express in late 1944 in France, was the crux of the matter. Or was it planning or fuel or mud .... Or all of the above. Some could argue lots of angles.

Our first stop was after about 30 minutes. It was at a local park with tall trees and requisite log buildings for the rangers etc. There were steep hills and lots of cold.



## ***Civil War Park***





*At the Half Way Point:*



### ***Stop for Chow***

We had lunch at Devils Den State Park ... beautiful place ... breath taking hills and rocky crags ... just fabulous. The whole day was pretty laid back and not a lot of rush.







There was lots of time to enjoy a stop and there were lots of stops. At every stop the would-be GIs piled out of the HMVs like bees out of a hive. It was fantastic. After lunch I rode in an 1967 Ford M-151A2 jeep driven by Floyd Blakeney. We shared lots of sea stories and carried on. It was a wonderful ride all the way around.

Spring was in an early stage *that close to the Arctic Circle ...* or so it seemed compared with North Texas. The oak trees were still blooming (like that is pretty) and the dog woods also (that is beautiful). Most trees still had young light green leaves and they contrasted with the much darker evergreens. Picturesque! “Mucho magnifico”

### **Trekking Through Beautiful NW Arkansas**





One point of interest in NW Arkansas that I failed to capture in a photo was the wonderful folks along the way that stopped and waved, pointed and some saluted as we drove by. It was a very patriotic atmosphere traveling through the woods and seeing the local folks stopping to watch us pass.



Heading Home, the convoy of OD trucks ---- a few old aircraft at a museum in SE Fayetteville.

After the trek of only 100 miles we had about a 2 hour break at the hotel and at 1900 we enjoyed a BBQ dinner together to round out a great weekend. I felt like I was at home with family. Everyone was so friendly and interesting (interested in me also) with mostly Olive Drab as the glue to bind us together. And Air Force Blue too. There was one

USMC green jeep but no Haze Grey Navy representation outside of one old salt in Navy dungarees and an LST ships ball cap.

The wife now wants a jeep trailer after seeing the ones at the hotel. Thanks to the Arkansas Travelers, now I don't have to convince her why I need a jeep trailer.

We have plans to be at the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Red Balling through the Ozarks ... hope to see you there or at Petit Jean Mountain in AR in Sept. More details at [www.armvpa.com](http://www.armvpa.com) and Tom's photos at [ad5zo.com](http://ad5zo.com).

*"Tom and Laurie Essary live in Arlington TX and is new to Arrowhead and the MVPA. He and his wife have spent the last 4 months reviving 1943 GPW-100709\*. Look for an update about that soon. Tom can be reached at <tom "AT" ad5zo.com> Tom spent about 8 years in the US Navy as an ET3 and LTjg. He served on the USS Luce DDG-38 in '85 and '86."*