

The maximum loads which it was found practicable to lift in the various types of landing craft were:—

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|---------|-----|----------|
| L.C.T.* | ... | 900 |
| L.C.A.† | ... | 60 to 70 |
| L.C.M.‡ | ... | 150. |

Although every endeavour was made to obtain as many local craft as possible, these could not be relied upon except in cases when British officers were in command, and the number of British officers available was limited.

11. It should be emphasised that the landing craft mentioned in paragraph 10 had neither any adequate A.A. armament, nor were they supplied with wireless; a very grave handicap under the circumstances.

Communications.

12. The naval responsibility was the establishment of a direct W/T link to naval authorities and ships. While at Athens, this was maintained through Botannikos W/T station whose personnel were extremely helpful and co-operative. After leaving Athens the link depended on an R.A.F. G.P. set manned by naval ratings.

13. The events of the night 26th/27th April, which cut all inland communications to beaches and nearly broke the all important naval line, demonstrated the necessity for taking an early decision on the location of the new site and making alternative transport arrangements before moving Headquarters, if its communications were to continue to function efficiently.

Officers and Men.

14. The conduct of officers and men throughout was excellent and all duties were performed with cheerfulness and efficiency. The question of those officers and men whom I consider to be worthy of special mention or recognition forms the subject of a separate letter.

(Signed) H. T. BAILLIE-GROHMAN,

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REPORT ON EVACUATION OF BRITISH TROOPS FROM GREECE, APRIL, 1941.

Thursday, 17th April.

I left Cairo for Greece by air at 0930 with a small staff of four specially selected officers. My orders were to plan and arrange the evacuation of our troops from Greece in concert with the two other Services. I arrived at Athens at 1700 and took up my Headquarters in the Hotel Acropole, where G.H.Q., B.T.G., was already established. A Joint Planning Staff was at once formed and a conference held at G.H.Q. at 2200, when a general review of the situation was given by the Army authorities. The point that at least four days notice was required for the arrival of shipping in Greek waters was emphasised as strongly as possible; also that between 22nd April and 2nd May moonless nights would be in our favour should evacuation be decided upon. I was informed that the withdrawal of our Army to the Thermopylae

position had just begun; the new position to be occupied was from Molos on the N.E. coast to Bralos Pass, and south westward to the sea covering Giona, Oros and Eratine. The N.Z. Division was to occupy the right sector from the sea to the summit of the ridge, blocking the coast road south of Lama, and the 6th Australian Division Bralos Pass and to westwards of it.

2. It was decided to send out combined naval and military parties to reconnoitre all suitable beaches and landing places in Euboea, the Gulf of Corinth, the south and east coast between Khalkis and the Corinth Canal, and the south and east coasts of the Morea between the Corinth Canal and Kalamata.

Friday, 18th April.

3. I proceeded to take stock of the naval situation in the Athens—Piraeus area. This took some time. I found that Rear Admiral Turle, the Naval Attaché, whose offices were distant about two miles from G.H.Q., in addition to his political duties, controlled all shipping movements, the staff of Naval Control Service Officer and Divisional Sea Transport Officer being located in his office together with the cypher staff.

He was also in close touch with the harbour authorities in Piraeus. Three British minesweepers (HYACINTH, SALVIA and MUROTO) were under his orders. He was, in fact, performing the duties of Senior British Naval Officer, Greece, as well as being Naval Attaché. It soon became obvious that to control the evacuation, I would have to control the local Greek and other shipping in Greek waters, and this could not be done in an office two miles away, whose staff was under the orders of another officer. The work of the Naval Control Service Officer and Divisional Sea Transport Officer whose small staff had been greatly reduced by casualties and sickness, had been to a great extent carried out through the Greek harbour authorities, and the smooth working of the organisation was almost entirely dependent upon their efforts. Owing to the exploding of an ammunition ship in the harbour a few nights previously, after an air raid, some twelve merchant ships in Piraeus harbour were lost. Great damage was done to the harbour facilities, tugs and small craft of all sorts were destroyed; the telephone system was put out of action, and only five berths out of the total of twelve were left available for the use of shipping. In addition there were some twenty or more merchant ships, mostly Greek, gathered round Phaleron Bay, Salamis Bay, Piraeus and off Eleusis, who, owing to damage done to Piraeus, could not obtain water or coal. It was estimated that ten of these would have to sail not later than Saturday night, 19th April, otherwise they would run short of fuel.

4. About the time of my arrival the Greek harbour authorities in Piraeus showed signs of ceasing to function, including the Greek pilots on whom we had depended to berth ships. Each day the situation in this respect deteriorated, and the control of shipping, loading and so on became more and more difficult. Ships' Agents also disappeared. The arrangements for reporting the arrival of ships in the roadstead collapsed completely, and it was a matter of the greatest difficulty to discover what ships were in the harbour, were sailing, or expected to arrive, or even their whereabouts.

Admiralty footnotes:—

* L.C.T.—Landing Craft, Tanks.

† L.C.A.—Landing Craft, Assault (personnel).

‡ L.C.M.—Landing Craft, Mechanised vehicles.