

## Artillery logistics over the shore<sup>1</sup>

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One of the principal tests that a commander in amphibious warfare faces, after establishing and securing a beachhead, is the problem of logistics over the shore. This talk examines the process and challenges of getting artillery and artillery ammunition ashore during the August offensive. As these problems differed little from getting other stores and supplies ashore, much of my talk will not be specific to artillery, but I will talk about some of the issues of artillery ammunition, including its suitability and availability.

Before I go any further, let me provide a disclaimer: logistics at Gallipoli was not an ANZAC endeavour – indeed, apart from providing some bodies to carry supplies forward from the beaches, logistics was almost entirely a British responsibility. The British carried the burden of the Gallipoli campaign in every measurable way: strategic direction; operational planning; command; casualties; and the provision of the resources necessary for fighting and living.

In my paper I will explain the logistic cycle (request, acquisition, and distribution), the voyage to the peninsula, the bases, and administration on the lines of communication; discuss the process of disembarkation and distribution on the peninsula itself, including jointness – or more appropriately, a lack thereof; and finish, very briefly with an examination of artillery ammunition issues.

In the words of Britain's senior logistics officer during the First World War, the logistic system in place to support the Gallipoli campaign was 'abnormal and peculiar'. Being an amphibious operation fought in enemy territory, absolutely everything required for fighting and living – from bayonets to bully beef - had to be brought in from the sea. With Britain the main belligerent, and responsible for supplying both itself and its allies (except France, which looked after its own supplies), the overwhelming majority of these items came from England. At nearly 3,500 miles between England and the Gallipoli Peninsula, General Sir Ian Hamilton, who commanded the allied forces at Gallipoli, described the route as the 'biggest and most difficult ... since the day of Xerxes'.

At Gallipoli, the logistic cycle began in the theatre. It differed greatly from that employed on the Western Front where the BEF were backed by a sympathetic

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<sup>1</sup> This paper includes excerpts from Rhys Crawley, *Climax at Gallipoli: The failure of the August Offensive*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2014; Rhys Crawley, 'Logistics at Gallipoli' in D. Horner (ed.), *Gallipoli 100: Lest We Forget*, Faircount Media, Sydney, 2014, pp. 180-83; and Rhys Crawley, 'Supplying the offensive: the role of Allied logistics', in A. Ekins (ed.), *Gallipoli: a ridge too far*, Exisle Publishing, Sydney, 2013, pp. 254-71. References can be found in those publications.

civilian population; pre-existing and established Lines of Communication (L-of-C) in the form of road and rail networks; and a short sea passage between the United Kingdom and the Continent. At Gallipoli, however, the Allies had none of these elements.

Further contrasting the two fronts was the process by which stores and supplies were requested, and then delivered. At Gallipoli, the MEF employed what can be described as a 'pull' logistic system, whereby units submitted daily requests to GHQ, outlining what items they believed would be required in the immediate future. GHQ then forwarded these onto the War Office in London. While this worked, it was an inefficient system. Indeed, the amount of administrative paperwork required to keep a 'pull' system functioning was the very reason why the BEF abandoned this process and introduced a 'push' system in its place.

The administrative system of requesting, acquiring, and despatching items to the Dardanelles was complex (as you can see on the slide). The Deputy Quartermaster-General at GHQ directed all requests for supplies to one officer at the War Office in London, and all requests for stores to another. Once informed of the MEF's requirements it was the duty of the War Office to acquire these items. The absence of a 'push' system, however, meant that the War Office was unable to give adequate forethought to what would be required. Arrangements, therefore, were not made until a request was received – the result being further delay. With the acquisition complete, the War Office then organised for the transportation – mainly by train – of these items to their ports of embarkation. This necessitated a considerable amount of co-operation with the Admiralty, who were responsible for providing, loading, and then despatching the ships overseas. The items were loaded in bulk, and the *aim* was to place one type of item on one, or as few ships as possible. It did not always work like this though.

Upon leaving Avonmouth or Devonport, the portside towns of choice, the ships sailed across the Bay of Biscay and along the coast of Spain until they reached Gibraltar. After a brief stopover they continued to Malta, and then onto the main logistic base at Alexandria. On rare occasions, and only in times of great urgency, a dual L-of-C was opened, whereby items were sent from France – thus shortening the voyage by up to 2,100 miles. At such distances, and subject to further complexities caused by unfavourable weather, hostile submarines, and delays at the various ports of call, the difficulties of supplying the MEF 'were beyond description or possibility of exaggeration'.

Gibraltar and Malta were merely ports of call. Alexandria, however, was the MEF's main base, and almost all shipping from the UK was sent there rather than straight to the advanced base. With its foundation of wharves, piers, jetties, railway lines, and cranes for unloading large ships, Hamilton's CGS described Alexandria as having 'everything one wants in reason'. Because of a lack of similar facilities closer to the front, most ships bound for Gallipoli had to be disembarked, re-sorted, re-

packed (into ration sizes rather than bulk) and reloaded at Alexandria before being forwarded to the intermediate base at Mudros Harbour (Lemnos Island). This was a timely process, and caused considerable delay to the logistic system.

Due to the German submarine menace, Allied ships over 1,500 tons were prevented from travelling direct from Alexandria to the Gallipoli Peninsula. Instead, they had to proceed first to Mudros Harbour – a journey itself that was, incidentally, particularly vulnerable to German U-boats. Upon reaching the safety of the harbour the ships would transfer their cargoes into smaller craft (as these were less vulnerable to the enemy's submarines), which would then make the voyage to the peninsula. It was at Mudros, however, that the greatest delay and confusion on the L-of-C was experienced.

The first issue that caused delay at Mudros was a lack of port facilities. The second problem faced at Mudros was congestion. Delays were further compounded by the lack of available labour to load and unload cargoes during the transshipment process. Mudros also suffered from a lack of small craft. Given the absence of deep-water piers, and a lack of facilities on the island in which to store items as they arrived, the MEF had to rely on 'floating depots' (converted store ships) to store its goods. Most, for example, arrived at Mudros without a manifest of good contained onboard. This made it difficult to locate specific items, or to prioritise which ships should be unloaded first. It was not uncommon for supply ships to remain unemptied for weeks on end, or to be sent away before being cleared.

The pressures faced at Mudros were partially relieved by the smaller advanced base at Kephalos Harbour (Imbros Island). This location, however, faced even more problems than Mudros owing to its poorer facilities and greater exposure to the weather. Kephalos was much closer to the peninsula than Mudros. It was therefore used as a thoroughfare for small vessels travelling from Mudros, which could wait in its smaller harbour before proceeding to the beaches with their cargoes at night.

The journey to the peninsula, whether from Mudros or Kephalos, was generally undertaken under the cover of darkness, thus offering protection from both submarines and enemy shelling as they approached and lay off the beaches. Due to the distances involved, and the fact that unloading could only be done at night, it was not usually possible to do more than one round trip daily. Through this process the Navy were able to deliver 300-400 tons to the peninsula daily.

From the moment they left the UK, until they reached the advanced bases on the Gallipoli Peninsula, there were no fewer than six separate individuals (and their respective staffs) in charge of the naval transport for the MEF – some with overlapping roles. While the army's logistic system was theoretically less complex than the naval model, in that administration of the L-of-C fell under one individual – the IGC – it was no more efficient in practice. In effect, the IGC co-ordinated the L-

of-C, which, because of its reliance on ships, meant close co-operation with the Navy.

As is the case in most amphibious campaigns, the real difficulties were faced in getting the stores and supplies ashore, organising the beach maintenance area, and then distributing them to the troops. At Gallipoli, the first part of this process was disembarking the necessary goods at the advanced base. None of the three main beaches, which made up the advanced bases, were logistically suitable. The naval Chief of Staff complained about this noting that '[t]he lack of space for safe storage in the vicinity of the beaches was frequently given as a reason for refusing to accept stores'. It was also a reason for not accepting more artillery pieces – there simply was not enough safe space where emplacements could be constructed.

Further adding to the delay was the confusion surrounding who was responsible for disembarking the items. Add to this the confusion of enemy fire and the threat of bad weather.

Once disembarked at the beach, the various supplies were stockpiled at locations chosen by each corps' senior administrative officer, while the arrangements for distributing items from the beaches to the front line were undertaken at the divisional level. With the exception of water, which was moved by mules, everything else was collected by the units, including artillery ammunition, and carried uphill back to their positions.

The MEF, like the BEF, was restricted in its access to ammunition in 1915. Proportionally, though, there was less ammunition available at Gallipoli than on the Western Front. That said, artillery ammunition supplies for the August Offensive were in excess of what had previously been available in the theater. For example, the increase in supplies available for 9<sup>th</sup> Battery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Aust Field Arty Bde, enabled them to fire more ammunition in August than the previous three months combined. Such an increase could not be maintained for long, mainly because the shell shortage on the Western Front, beginning with the shell crisis in May, was also acute. The Dardanelles, however, was not the reason for this shortage: British industry was not prepared for a war on this scale and production had not yet caught up to demand.

Despite the overall increase in ammunition sent to the Dardanelles, the MEF was predominantly given shrapnel shells. Shrapnel, though, particularly that fired by 18-pounder field guns, was of little value for offensive operations in mountainous terrain such as that found in the Anzac and Sari Bair sectors. Shrapnel was also designed for firing on troops in the open, which meant that it did little damage to the Ottoman artillery batteries, and trenches. This was problematic given the destructive purpose of 1915 artillery barrages, which aimed to destroy obstacles and keep the enemy in their trenches until the attacking troops arrived. For these tasks the artillery required high-explosive shells. The first supplies of 18-pounder high-explosive shells did not arrive in the Anzac sector until 2 August; and then, this

amounted to a paltry 150 rounds per battery. Similarly, prior to August only *eleven* 18-pounder high-explosive shells *in total* had been fired at Helles.

It was not long before stocks became depleted and units were warned off firing unless absolutely necessary. By 12 August, for example, there were only 50 rounds of 10-pdr ammunition on the entire L-o-C. These were just some of the logistic problems faced at Gallipoli in August.