

## General Information

### IN MEMORIAM



#### Jean BOURGOIN (1925-2013) and Michel LE GOUIC (1953-2013)

*Gilles Bessero  
Director, IHB*

*Former French Hydrographer*

With the death earlier this year of Jean Bourgoïn and Michel Le Gouic, the French Hydrographic Office (SHOM) lost two champions of the widest possible use of hydrography, precisely this year when the theme of the World Hydrography Day is "Hydrography - underpinning the Blue Economy". This note is a tribute to their foresighted contributions to this principle as well as personal homage to two dear and esteemed colleagues with whom I had the privilege to serve.

*Avec la disparition au début de cette année de Jean Bourgoïn et de Michel Le Gouic, le Service hydrographique français (SHOM) a perdu deux champions de l'utilisation la plus large possible de l'hydrographie, précisément l'année où le thème de la journée mondiale de l'hydrographie est « L'hydrographie - à l'appui de l'économie bleue ». Cette note est à la fois un témoignage de leurs contributions clairvoyantes à ce principe et un hommage personnel à deux chers et estimés collègues avec qui j'ai eu le privilège de servir.*



*Jean Bourgoïn*

Jean Bourgoïn joined the French Hydrographic Office in 1947. A secondment to the French Polar Expeditions in Greenland exposed him from the start to some unusual applications of hydrographic techniques such as levelling the surface of ice sheets.

He then pursued his career as a hydrographer in a wide variety of conditions, both in metropolitan France and overseas, mainly along the coasts of North and West Africa. He made a major contribution to the renewal of the nautical charts of Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire, undertaking extensive geodetic and survey works, including some of the first overseas deployments of radio-positioning systems.

As Head of the Study & Research Section from 1964, he specialized in coastal processes which led him to be involved in a broad range of related activities and to develop an extensive network across the whole spectrum of organizations dealing with the marine environment. From 1966 to 1968 he was involved in a joint mission of the United Nations and the World Bank to develop the hydrographic infrastructure of Nicaragua. Head of External Affairs of the newly renamed SHOM

SHOM from 1971 to 1976, he looked after the participation of SHOM in the emergence of modern oceanography and directed the "Oceanology" graduate programme at "Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Techniques Avancées", which he had started to assemble in 1969 to broaden the scope of the former "Hydrography" graduate programme. As Director of SHOM Brest Establishment from 1976 to 1981 and then as the French Hydrographer from 1981 to 1987, he continued to push for an integrated approach to hydrography and oceanography and to develop SHOM's involvement in international forums. He was attentive to maintaining active relationships with all the stakeholders, raising awareness on the importance of hydrography. The establishment in 1981, at his instigation, of the "Amicale des hydrographes", allowing hydrographers who had joined the private sector to keep a link with SHOM, the public distribution of SHOM annual report initiated in 1982 and the creation of a users' committee in 1983 are examples of practical measures he took to that end. He hosted the first Conference of the Eastern Atlantic Hydrographic Commission in Paris in 1986 after the establishment of the Commission at the instigation of Portugal.

After retiring from active duty, Jean Bourgoïn continued to provide generously and quietly his extensive expertise and knowledge on many fronts as long as his health allowed it. He was elected member of the French Maritime Academy in 1989. From 1988 to 2005, he produced or contributed to more than thirty reports and papers covering prospective as well as historical subjects, including an article in the *International Hydrographic Review* (Bourgoïn and Taillemite, 2002). In his farewell speech in 1987, he had noted that: "*Hydrography is not an end in itself. It must benefit to the exploitation of the oceans regarded as a theatre of military operations, a means of communication, a source of natural resources, a place of recreation. Hydrography is always the foundation for all these activities.*" This was a perfect summary of what we mean today by "Hydrography - underpinning the blue economy".

While Jean Bourgoïn had recruited me and was one of my role models, I had a relation of comradeship with Michel Le Gouic. He joined SHOM in 1978, two years after me, and our paths crossed or merged on many occasions, until he was struck down by illness. As Jean Bourgoïn did, Michel Le Gouic also spent his entire career at SHOM. After a first experience aboard a survey ship from 1978 to 1981, he was assigned to SHOM Brest Establishment, in charge of developing remote sensing applications, including satellite based nautical charting. This development coincided with the first phase of the French satellite remote sensing programme "SPOT" and led to the elaboration of the concept of "space-based charts". Michel Le Gouic continued contributing to the project as Head of SHOM Survey Unit in French Polynesia from 1988 to 1990. This long term project came to fruition in 1990 with the publication of the first two nautical charts based on satellite data. Although the limited documented accuracy of satellite-derived bathymetry could not guarantee the safety of navigation in unsurveyed areas, the resulting charts proved much valuable as planning and management tools.

In 1990, Michel Le Gouic was assigned to SHOM Directorate in Paris, first as Deputy Head and then Head of External Affairs. He built on the work of his predecessors to continue improving the visibility of SHOM and raising awareness of the importance of hydrography. At that time, the development of ECDIS required developing a new framework of relations with national maritime administrations and chart distributors as well as a new framework of relations within the IHO. Michel Le Gouic, as representative of France, played an active role in the definition of the principles governing the World-wide Electronic Navigational Chart Database (WEND). In 1994 he was appointed Head of SHOM Mediterranean Survey Unit and in 1996 he joined SHOM Brest Establishment first as Head of the Hydrography Centre and then as Deputy Director. Besides his management and administrative responsibilities he focused on facilitating the use of and the access to digital hydrographic products and services for navigational and non-navigational applications. He also guided the necessary adaptations of the competences and initial training of the staff. He con-

tinued working along the same lines with SHOM's partners when he returned to SHOM Directorate as Head of External Affairs in 2000. In particular, he was instrumental in consolidating with SHOM's partners the joint venture Mercator Océan, the French centre for ocean analysis and forecasting, paving the way to setting up My Ocean, the preparatory programme of the operational oceanography component of the European GMES system (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security, now known as Copernicus). On the international scene, he devoted much energy to ensure that developing coastal States became fully aware of their hydrographic responsibilities. For example, he took an active part in setting up, with Portugal, the United Kingdom and the USA, the Western Africa Action Team which visited 16 countries in the region to assess their hydrographic capacities and capacity building perspectives (Le Gouic et al, 2004).



*Michel Le Gouic*

As Deputy Director of SHOM from 2005 to 2010, Michel Le Gouic was, among others, the point man in preparing and implementing the change of statute of SHOM which took effect in 2007 (Bessero, 2011). He co-chaired, with a representative of the Naval Staff, the Defence working group which prepared and monitored the transition arrangements and then the inter-ministerial working group which drafted SHOM first contract of objectives and performance. The new statute allowed significant progress in developing and promoting new services in support of marine and coastal public policies, fully in line with the vision of Jean Bourgoïn.

Beyond their different characters, Jean Bourgoïn and Michel Le Gouic shared the same understanding of hydrography as the foundation for almost everything that happens in, on or under the sea. Both of them shared the same curiosity, the same open-mindedness to new technologies, the same natural simplicity, and the same care of human resources, as they were both convinced that their competencies are the driving force of hydrographic offices. The hydrographic community is indebted to them for their exceptional contribution to the development of hydrography at the service of all seafarers and in support of the blue economy.

## References

- Bourgoïn J., Taillemite E., *The Baudin Expedition to Australia 1800-1804*, International Hydrographic Review, April 2002, p. 6-19.
- Le Gouic M., Even M., Baggio D., Pimentel F., Brandao P, Turner I., Barrit M., Bullard. B.,

*Hydrographic Capacities Assessment in Western Africa*, International Hydrographic Review, November 2004, p. 85-92.

- Bessero G., *The transformation of SHOM*, International Hydrographic Review, May 2011, p. 43-51.

### **Illustrations**

1. Jean Bourgoin, surveying in Greenland
2. Michel Le Gouic, visiting Nigeria with the Western Africa Action Team