
OBITUARY

Léon DAMIANI

(1899-1963)

Ingénieur Hydrographe Général de 1^{re} Classe
Director of the French Central Hydrographic Office (1956-1957)
Member of the Directing Committee of the International
Hydrographic Bureau (1957-1962)

Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur
Officier du Mérite Maritime
Officier d'Académie
Chevalier du Dragon d'Annam
Chevalier de l'ordre Royal du Cambodge
Commandeur de l'ordre de Saint Olaf

Ingénieur Hydrographe Général de 1^{re} Classe LÉON DAMIANI, who for five years from 1957 to 1962 held office as a member of the Directing Committee of the International Hydrographic Bureau, died after a long and distressing illness at the Bégin Military Hospital in Paris on 6 March 1963.

Born on 18 July 1899 in Bastia LÉON DAMIANI, after a brilliant success at the Lycée in his native town and afterwards in Marseilles, entered the Ecole Polytechnique in 1918. When he left in 1920 he joined the Naval Surveying Corps.

The First World War had just finished. An immense task devolved upon the Hydrographic Office which, with a very small number of hydrographic surveyors, had not only to remake surveys of home waters but also to carry out new surveys all along the coasts of the extensive French overseas territories whose development required detailed marine cartography. For these surveys new techniques, springing from the war efforts of the participants, were put into effect with equipment still at the stage of development. It was to this particularly heavy task that Ingénieur



Hydrographe Léon DAMIANI dedicated himself at the beginning of a career of 36 years filled with unfailing devotion and conscientiousness which led him in 1956 to the post of Director of the French Hydrographic Office.

After a year of hydrographic training, followed by a six months' cruise on board the training cruiser for Sub-Lieutenants, he participated for several consecutive years in hydrographic surveys in home waters principally in the regions of Cherbourg and Saint-Malo. In between these periods afloat, during the winter months which took him to the Hydrographic Office in Paris, he contributed actively to the processing of his work at sea, without neglecting however to acquaint himself with the workings of the Central Establishment or to improve his scientific and technical knowledge.

As early as 1926 he was entrusted with the direction of the work of the French Hydrographic Mission in Indo-China.

On his return he again took part in two hydrographic surveys in the bay of Saint-Brieuc. Then from 1930 to 1932 he directed the operations of the Hydrographic Mission in Algeria. During the year 1933 he again undertook the direction of the work of the Survey in Indo-China.

Having rapidly passed through all the intermediate ranks he was in 1935 promoted Ingénieur en Chef de 2^e Classe, and in 1938 he was named the head of the most important hydrographic survey in home waters, which carried out operations on the South Coast of Brittany, and which had just been assigned a new vessel *Amiral Mouchez*, specially built for hydrographic work.

The declaration of war in 1939 interrupted the work of this survey. Ingénieur Hydrographe DAMIANI was recalled to the Central Office and was afterwards never able to resume his activities at sea. However his surveying work totalled eight years in home waters and two each on the coasts of Indo-China and Algeria.

He revealed himself as efficient in his new duties ashore as he had previously been at sea. His keen intelligence, his qualities of leadership, his sense of organisation and his administrative talent made easy for him the solution of the many problems which the war and its consequences had made particularly complicated for those responsible for French Hydrography.

Promoted to the rank of Ingénieur en Chef de 1^{re} Classe at the end of 1940 he became the head of the important section of Charts and Records which comprises all the workshops contributing to the printing of charts. He immediately occupied himself with the task of promoting modern methods of work, and to the adaptation of cartographic production, still dependent upon the methods of manual labour, to the latest technical improvements. If the difficult circumstances in which he pursued his task did not always allow him to succeed, at least he was able to formulate all the ideas which were later to aid him in guiding his successors.

Promoted Ingénieur Général de 2^e Classe and named Assistant Director of the Central Hydrographic Office in 1945, he took the major role in efforts undertaken after the end of hostilities to restore to French Hydrography the means it had lost and to give a new impulse to its activities.

He was in 1956 promoted to Ingénieur Général de 1^{re} Classe and at the same time appointed to the position of Director of the French Hydrographic Office. This nomination was the culmination of a particularly well-filled career. It gave recognition to his merits, already witnessed by numerous honorary distinctions both French and foreign, previously bestowed upon him, as well as by his election to various scientific bodies.

However a supreme honour awaited Ingénieur Général DAMIANI when the confidence of his foreign colleagues called him in 1957 to take up one of the three directorial posts at the International Hydrographic Bureau. This confidence was not only due to the eminent titles which he had acquired in the service of Hydrography, but also to his personal qualities which the delegates were able to appreciate at the 5th International Conference in 1947, during which he participated notably in the activities of the "Committee on the Work of the Bureau" and presided at the "Tides Committee", as well as during the sixth Conference in 1952 when he was again a member of the "Committee on the Work of the Bureau".

Entrusted especially with the administrative and financial questions of the International Hydrographic Bureau, as well as with the publication of the Review and the Bulletin, Ingénieur Général DAMIANI for five years discharged his tasks with an universally recognized diligence and conscientiousness to which all the delegates to the eighth International Conference were pleased to pay homage.

When he left his duties in 1962 to return to Paris he was already suffering from the relentless disease which was to lead to his death several months later.

The premature death of this eminent Ingénieur will be felt as a real loss to Hydrography, and all those who came close to him will conserve the memory of a man, particularly benevolent and sympathetic, whose exceptional qualities of intelligence and of kindly feeling were too often masked by modesty.