

CONCERNING TWO DANGERS OF DOUBTFUL EXISTENCE OFF THE COASTS OF ANNAM

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In the French Sailing Directions N° 311 of 1919, page 347, last paragraph, appear the following details with reference to the Duperré Breakers (Brisants Duperré) — dangers which are inserted on the French charts off the coasts of Annam :

“DUPERRÉ BREAKERS (*Brisants Duperré*) : These breakers appear to be “three in number. Rear-Admiral O’NEILL, then a lieutenant, landed upon “these reefs when they were sighted by the vessel *Duperré* on 16th May, 1861. “Since that date they have never again been sighted, although the position “indicated places them in the neighbourhood of frequented tracks ; they are “not inserted on British charts.” (By error the Directions show the figures 1811)

The same phrase, almost word for word, is to be found in Directions Nos 909 (of the year 1909) and 747 (1894) which preceded Directions N° 311.

Directions N° 747 had in turn been preceded by Directions N° 666 (1884) and Directions N° 395 (1865). In the latter is given a note at the foot of page 259 to the following effect :

“On the 16th May 1861, at 2 o’clock p.m. the vessel *Duperré* proceeding “from Che fou to Saïgon, sighted at 11°13’ N. — 108°28’ E. three breakers “lying close together and in the form of a triangle ; the position of the vessel “had been determined at midday in favourable conditions and the precision “of the watches was verified on arriving near Poulo Cecir de Mer.

In Directions N° 666, page 60 of the text, the information is more briefly given, thus :— “Duperré Breakers — These breakers, three in number, appear to be 11°13’N — 108°23’E. Paris (110°43’E. Gr.)”

In these Directions N° 666 (copy of the Department of Sailing Directions) there appears, in the margin, the following *manuscript note*, undated but certainly subsequent to 1884, date of issue of the Directions in question :

“Rear Admiral O’NEILL, then lieutenant, landed upon these banks, which “he approached by means of a whale-boat.”

Evidently this marginal note is the result of a memory. The fact was accomplished in 1861. Subsequent to 1884, Mr. O’NEILL, become Rear-Admiral, declares anew that these reefs exist and gives a definite proof of their existence by stating that he landed on the Duperré breakers in a whale-boat. In all probability this statement dates from 1887, as seems to be proved by the Notice to Mariners N^o 210 of 1887, drawn up as follows:—

“N^o 210.1887. Reef Duperré off Cape Padaran, error in Directions N^o 666. “In the position given for this danger, page 60 of Directions N^o 666, instead “of the value 108°23’E. given for the longitude, should be read ‘108°28’E.’ “Note:— the existence of these reefs is not doubtful; the position alone “might be subject to slight correction. Admiral O’NEILL, then lieutenant, “landed upon these reefs which were sighted by the vessel Duperré on 16th “May 1861”.

It was easy to verify the note from memory of Rear-Admiral O’NEILL by consulting the log-book of the Duperré. The search for this log-book was a very long one. The log-books of the Duperré for the period now dealt with were, in 1914, in a cellar of the Toulon Observatory. They have since been classified and are now in the Toulon Arsenal, in premises formerly occupied by the rigging-store and in which are lodged at present the archives relating to the port.

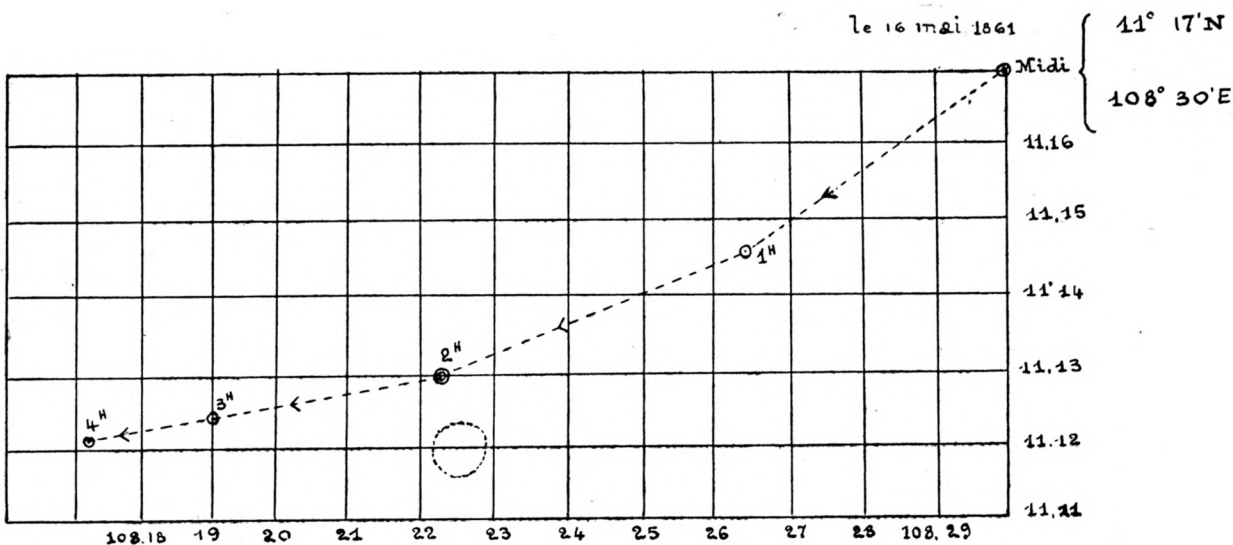
The log-table N^o 13 of the Duperré extends over the period from 11th May 1861 (front of 1st page) to Sunday 16th June (back of last page). The cover is missing.

The page for 16th May has remained in good condition. The following details are extracted from it concerning the afternoon watch.

MID-DAY.... Observed Latitude : 11°17’N. estimated 11°23’N. Variation employed 1° N.E.
Observed Longitude 108°30’E. » 108°42’E. Paris (111°02’E. Gr.).

<i>Time</i>	<i>Course</i>	<i>Knots</i>	<i>Leeway</i>	<i>Sights and Bearings of land and sails.</i>	<i>Events Observations.</i>
Midday	S. 56.W	5.0	0		
1 p. m.	S. 56.W	4.3	0	Ship sighted to S. W., close hauled on starboard tack.	From midday to 4 p. m. fine weather light breeze from S. E. calm
2 p. m.	S. 68.W	4.3	0	2 p.m. Breakers believed to have been distinguished on port hand.	sea. 3 p. m. Trimmed studding sails.
3 p. m.	S. 80.W	3.1	0		Breeze died down towards 3.15: 4 p. m. rations.
4 p. m.	S. 80.W	1.7	0		

This graph was drawn up assuming that the distance run between mid-day and 1 p. m. is 4.3 miles (and not 5 miles) which appears natural according to the information in the log-book.



Nothing in the log-table indicates that three breakers lying close together and in the form of a triangle had been sighted, as is stated in Directions N° 395 of 1865. Nevertheless, the Directions bearing a date only slightly subsequent to that of the voyage of the Duperré, it may be admitted that this information is based upon documents, sea-reports, etc. *But it appears that it may be affirmed that upon the 16th May, 1861 the Duperré did not lower a whale-boat and that Lieutenant O'NEILL did not land on that day on the breakers.*

Interesting confirmation would be found by reading the Officers' "Casernet".* Now, there certainly exists in the Archives of Toulon the *casernet* N° 6 from 8th November 1860 to 5th January 1861 and *casernet* N° 9 from 28th May to 29th July 1861; unfortunately, *casernet* N° 8, which corresponds to the date of 16th May is missing from the archives; Mr. O'NEILL signed in *casernet* N° 9, which means that he was present on board the Duperré on 28th May. It may be supposed that he was on board on 16th May also.

What conclusions may be drawn? The best proof of the existence of the Duperré breakers was that Mr. O'NEILL is stated to have landed on these breakers in a whale-boat. This proof falls to the ground. These breakers would appear to be on the track of ships proceeding from Singapore to Hong Kong. They are no longer inserted on British charts. An incomplete and, in any case, unfruitful search was made in 1909 by the "*Manche*".

Does this mean that this region is free of all dangers to navigation? It is very unlikely that such is the case. Numerous shoals have been reported in this area — the Minerva Bank, Fanny Rock, the shoal known as "*La Capricieuse*", Alexander Bank, Kiev Bank, Juanita Bank are not very far distant.

Minerva Bank is shown on the French charts with the note: P. D

(*) Wardroom Presence List.

Fanny Rock, the position of which was given as lying between Minerva Bank and the Duperré Reefs is no longer inserted; nor is the shoal "*La Capricieuse*". For the latter, however, there exists in the log-book of "*La Capricieuse*" precise information. Sailing Directions N^o 395 gives, following the information concerning the Duperré breakers, the following details:— "On the 2nd October 1853, the corvette '*La Capricieuse*' found 73 to 114 meters fine sand at 11°07'N. — 107°38'E. Paris (109°58'E. Gr.) 60 miles E.S.E. of Cape "Padaran".

The report of "*La Capricieuse*" is missing from the Archives of the Hydrographique Office where it is nevertheless catalogued. In fact, upon 2nd October 1853 "*La Capricieuse*" was not 11°07'N — 107°38'E. but 3°18'N — 102°10'E., in sight of Pulo Pisang, as confirmed by the log-book, also recovered at Toulon. However, according to the journal of the Captain, Officers and midshipmen, N^o 27, of "*La Capricieuse*", beginning 25th June and terminating 27th September 1853, now in the Archives at Toulon, "*La Capricieuse*" was in the area under consideration upon 15th September 1853.

At 9 o'clock, a sounding of 46 fathoms fine sand was found at 11°07'N. — 107°38'E. Paris (109°58'E, Gr.).

At 10 o'clock, a sounding of 90 fathoms was found.

In addition, the following information may be found for the above date: "Fine weather; light breeze from S.W. From 10 to 10.45 went about "twice in order to take soundings on the edge of a bank". The entry is signed E. MOUCHEZ.

