

# COMMANDANT LANCELIN

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In a previous issue of the Journal<sup>1</sup> we found a Commandant Lancelin, who provided interesting information on the usual Japanese method of teaching Go, and the different way suggested by a Chinese master. It seemed useful to find biographic data on him and, greatly helped by the internet, we found some information, as reported below.

The French family name Lancelin is not very common, but still gave us too many possibilities. For further research we badly needed a first name or his initials. Luckily, Commandant Lancelin was a writer on a broad variety of topics, mostly technical and scientific and mostly from 1927 till 1932.

In 'Le Figaro'<sup>2</sup> Lancelin signed a petition in support of Camille Aymard. On the basis of personal experience, it was attested that the behaviour of Camille Aymard in Indochina had been perfectly correct. Our Commandant is described as "ancien officier de marine, ancien directeur des Messageries Fluviales à Saïgon, officier de la Légion d'honneur". So he was a former naval officer, a former Director of the 'Messageries Fluviales' (an inland shipping company) in Saïgon and officer of the Legion of Honour. To hold the post of Director of the 'Messageries Fluviales' implies a rather long stay in Cochinchina.

'La Nature', apart from the [article on the game of Go](#), published other articles by him, mostly with scientific content or chronicles from Asia, and

he also wrote scientific articles in other journals; for example, 'L'Ouest-Éclair'<sup>3</sup>. He was a man with many interests, as is shown by some of the titles: "The transshipment in Khône of boats for Laos", "Perpetual motion", "The heating of 'eau de toilette' by means of domestic electrical equipment", "On the industrial use of tidal movement" and "How to save submarines".

Through his publications, we found one of his initials. In the magazine 'Recherches et inventions' he signed himself as Commandant G. Lancelin. This led us to yet more articles, published earlier, around the turn of the century. His earlier articles are adaptations of German naval publications. [One of these](#) he signed as **Gaston** Lancelin, and we found that he was stationed on the 'Charles Martel', a battleship. To our surprise we found two Lancelins on that boat, Louis and Henri, but no Gaston. As Louis died in 1921, maybe Henri could be the man we are looking for. This Henri also was on the 'Descartes' and we found his name there as **Henri Gaston** Lancelin. If we assume that he preferred to use his second name, we are speaking about the same person.

With his complete name, we were able to find more information in [Geneanet.org](#), a French genealogy site. He was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1867 and went into naval service in 1886, where he quickly made a career for himself, and in 1897 he became First Lieutenant. He was 1.82 m. tall, clean-shaven, with blond hair, a strong

<sup>1</sup>"Liu Guang-Han Teaches Go", BGJ 155, pp. 19–21

<sup>2</sup>Number 196, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1932

<sup>3</sup>28<sup>th</sup> September 1930, p. 2, and 1931, p. 303 and 379

nose, blue eyes, a normal mouth and a round chin.

Around 1892 we find him mentioned in an Icelandic book as a hydrographer and cartographer, doing research on the islands of Jan Mayen and Spitsbergen and taking lots of photographs that are still in use today<sup>4</sup>. Initially the *La Manche* was in Iceland to protect French fishermen, but the captain received instructions to travel further to the islands of Jan Mayen and Spitsbergen in the Polar region. Lancelin traversed Spitsbergen with Rabot in order to do all kinds of geographic research. This expedition is well documented, with articles in the 'Annales de Géographie' of 1893-4 and a report on the journey by [Captain Bienaimé](#), who later became Admiral<sup>5</sup>. Later, Lancelin became Aide de Camp to the Admiral and in the meantime succeeded in marrying his only daughter, Geneviève. Bienaimé made a political career and eventually became Delegate to the French Parliament for the Department of Seine.

In 1897 Lancelin was promoted to 'Lieutenant de Vaisseau'. This translates as 'First Lieutenant' but, according to the dictionary, the equivalent grade in most armies is Captain. In 1909, Lancelin left the navy, and was mentioned in the national reserve as Captain.

It is still unclear what job he took after that. In the *Navigazette*, no. 1221 of the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 1912, we find a 'Lieutenant de Vaisseau' Lancelin in command of a big steamer (paquebot), the [Paul-Lecat](#), which could carry up to 700 passengers and had a crew of

300 men. The boat was used on the postal route to Indo-China and Japan. It is most likely that he is our man.

During the First World War he took part in the French war effort, probably in his capacity as Captain or Commander. We find him as Commandant of the *Gange* in Sydney harbour, in 1916, on a trip to the South Pacific to repatriate soldiers of a mixed battalion back to Nouméa in New Caledonia. This boat played a role in the evacuation of the Dardanelles under enemy fire, and hit a mine in the region of Bizerte in 1917, where it sank. Lancelin was not present on those occasions.

We find him again in 1919 in the 'Annuaire général de l'Indochine Française' as G. Lancelin, in the capacity of Director of the Tourist Office of French Indo-China. In later years, until at least 1923 and probably longer until 1928, he was Director of the *Compagnie des Messageries Fluviales de Cochinchine*, as mentioned before. We found his name a few times in [L'Éveil économique de l'Indochine](#) (for example 26<sup>th</sup> February 1928). His name is also mentioned in some of the letters of Victor Segalen, a well known French writer, poet, naval doctor and ethnographer with a strong love for the Far East. In one occasion he calls Lancelin '[Grand Admiral des Chaloupes](#)' (Grand Admiral of the Sloops).

In between he visited France at least once, in 1920. He made a [speech](#) in Jouy-en-Josas, a village to the south of Paris, to gather money to raise a monument for fallen soldiers<sup>6</sup>. His brother lived here with his mother,

<sup>4</sup>In the bilingual Icelandic/French book "[Ísland í sjónmáli](#) (= Islande en vue) / Æsu Sigurjónsdóttur", JPV Forlag, 2000

<sup>5</sup>"[Voyage de la "Manche" à l'Île Jan-Mayen et au Spitsberg](#) (Juillet-Août 1892)" - E. Leroux, 1894

<sup>6</sup>"La voix du combattant", 12<sup>th</sup> December 1920

and in 1929 Gaston Lancelin is mentioned there as [Mayor](#).

Around 1930 Lancelin published a lot of articles. He was then in his sixties, and had probably returned to France. Being a pensioner, we presume, he had lots of time to write, and maybe had some articles on the shelf which he hadn't published before because he was too busy.

One of the last times his name is mentioned is in 1932, when he became a member of the 'Comité Technique de Navigation et de Génie'.

Further information is missing, so we don't know when he died or if he had any offspring.

It is unclear when he stayed in Japan to learn the game of Go. The literature he used in his article is from around 1910. He mentions "The ABC of Go: the national war-game of Japan" by W.A. de Havilland, published in 1910, "Home life in Tokyo" by Jukichi Inouye, which was published in 1911, and "Récréations mathématiques" by Rouse Ball, which had French editions in 1907 and 1926. As virtually no Go literature was published at all in that period, he could have learned the game anytime between 1910 and 1928.

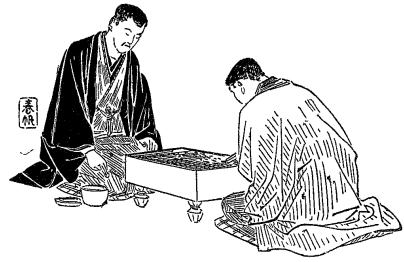


Fig. 1. — Le jeu de « Go », d'après Jukichi Inouye :  
*Home Life in Tokio.*

**From La Nature, No. 2798, 1<sup>st</sup>  
December 1928**

It is also unclear when Lancelin met Mister Ly. He writes that he met Ly only once and that Ly taught him for an hour. This looks like a chance meeting. It seems most likely to have taken place in London, where Mister Ly worked in the Chinese Embassy. Ly or Liu was stationed in London in 1927 (*ibid*). As Lancelin's article was published at the end of 1928, their meeting must have taken place in 1927 or 1928. Lancelin could have been in London then, on one of his journeys home.