

# From Auvours Plateau to Minister of Marine: Limitations of Auguste Gougeard as an Agent of Organizational Change in the French Navy 1870- 1886

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*Following the Franco-Prussian War, the French Navy confronted the need for fundamental changes to its organization during the early years of the Third Republic. Auguste Gougeard – a naval officer, general, politician, and cabinet minister – pushed for naval reform through his published writings and advocacy, and eventually gained the opportunity to implement change when he became political head of the navy. But, the established naval leadership disliked his personal qualities, republican ideals, and non-consensus approach. This article traces Gougeard's military and political life, his role inside and outside the navy as an influencer, and relative effectiveness as minister of marine in Léon Gambetta's brief republican government. Complicated relations with the navy's top admirals impaired acceptance of proposed organizational changes in the French Navy that delayed real progress.*

*Après la guerre franco-prussienne, la marine française fait face à des changements fondamentaux de son organisation au cours des premières années de la Troisième République. Auguste Gougeard - officier de marine, général, homme politique et ministre - a fait avancer pour la réforme navale à travers ses écrits publiés et ses plaidoyers, et a finalement eu l'opportunité de mettre en œuvre des changements lorsqu'il est devenu chef politique de la marine. Mais la direction navale établie n'aimait pas ses qualités personnelles, ses idéaux républicains et son approche non consensuelle. Cet article retrace la vie militaire et politique de Gougeard, son rôle à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la marine en tant*

*qu'influenceur, et son efficacité relative en tant que ministre de la marine durant le bref mandat du gouvernement républicain de Léon Gambetta. Les relations compliquées avec les principaux amiraux de la marine ont entravé l'acceptation des changements organisationnels proposés dans la marine française, ce qui a retardé les progrès réels.*

The French Navy in the nineteenth century is relatively under-studied compared to earlier periods under French monarchs and the two world wars in the century following. Available scholarship in English is limited to a few books and articles, while a handful of French historians, mostly connected to the armed forces by employment or affiliation, have tried to integrate naval history with related fields of politics, society, and imperialism of the age that builds upon earlier work with a naval strategy and sea power focus.<sup>1</sup> Most of the century, except at the start, lacked naval battles and sea-based campaigns, while the French Navy lived in the shadow of hegemonic Great Britain's Royal Navy after losing at Trafalgar. The transition from sail to steam invoked debates about ships, budgets, armaments, and other materiel and personnel aspects.<sup>2</sup> In the *Gloire* designed by naval architect Stanislas Charles Henri Dupuy de Lôme and launched in 1859, France was the first country to develop an ironclad capable of operations in European waters and the world's oceans, beating out the Royal Navy's *Warrior* by a year. The fleet built for Napoleon III's Second Empire reflected efforts to re-establish France as a leading economic, military, and imperial power in Europe and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> That dream came crashing down during the war with Prussia when the French Army suffered major defeats and the emperor entered captivity at Sedan in early September 1870. A hastily created provisional government marshalled forces and popular will to defend Paris under siege and defy the Prussian invaders.<sup>4</sup> The French Navy, largely sidelined by the smaller Prussian Navy's refusal to come out of port, contributed men and material to the desperate fight on land.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Martin Motte and Jean de Préneuf, "L'écriture de l'histoire navale française à l'époque contemporaine: un modèle national?" *Revue historique des armées* 257 (2009): 27-43; Rémi Monaque, *Une histoire de la marine de guerre française* (Paris: Perrin, 2016), 341-352.

<sup>2</sup> C.I. Hamilton, *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry, 1840-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Michèle Battesti, *Le Marine de Napoléon III*, vol. 1 (Vincennes: Service historique de la marine, 1998), 7-9; Andrew Lambert, "Politics, Technology and Policy-Making, 1859-1865: Palmerston, Gladstone and the Management of the Ironclad Naval Race," *The Northern Mariner/La marine du nord* 8, no. 3 (July 1998): 11.

<sup>4</sup> David Wetzel, *A Duel of Nations: Germany, France, and the Diplomacy of the War of 1870-1871* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 179.

<sup>5</sup> Hans-Justus Kreker, "Die französische marine im kriege von 1870-71," *Marine Rundschau* 70 (1973): 276-286; David H. Olivier, *German Naval Strategy 1856-1888: Forerunners to*

One of those officers was Auguste Gougeard.

Lacking a fuller biography, Gougeard is an enigmatic historical figure and thwarted initiator of organizational change in the French Navy. Effecting change was particularly difficult during the early decades of the Third Republic, given the quick succession of ministers of marine whose turnover mirrored the political instability of the Belle Époque period and lack of agreement over the navy's future. France had no fewer than thirty ministers of marine in this half-century, drawn from the ranks of admirals or politicians sitting in the national assembly and senate.<sup>6</sup> Gougeard was among the more notable because he straddled the political, military, and naval spheres. The one-time minister of marine in Léon Gambetta's short-lived cabinet between November 1881 and January 1882 was a naval officer and a military war hero of the republic whose stunted active career led to suspicions about character and motivations that followed him once he chose to enter politics and authored several books.<sup>7</sup> The personal frustration that Gougeard experienced stemmed from conservatism within the navy itself, expressed not simply in the reactionary attitudes of fellow officers but also from prejudice related to social class and politics. Gougeard's brand of republicanism, like Gambetta's, was nationalistic and forceful in expression and action, garnering him the nickname "the red boatman."

This article explains why Gougeard was so singularly unsuccessful in effecting organizational change in the French Navy because of resistance from the senior naval leadership, the shortness of time available to him as minister of marine, and the complete inability on his part to garner broad support for the effort. Reactionary intransigence prevented Gougeard from achieving what he desired to move the French Navy forward. As the first of several reformist ministers of marine who tried the same with equally frustrating results, he was by far not alone in encountering obstacles to implementing organizational change. In fact, the French Navy oscillated between attempts at reform and almost inevitable rollback through the following decade and right up to the First World War and afterwards. Gougeard's immediate successor and long-time nemesis Vice Admiral Jean Bernard Jauréguiberry characteristically reflected

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*Tirpitz* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2004), 64-71.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Martinant de Préneuf, "Officers in Charge of the French Navy Department during the Third Republic, 1870-1940," In *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Fourteenth Naval History Symposium held at Annapolis, Maryland 23-25 September 1999*, eds. Randy Carol Balano and Craig L. Symonds (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Philippe Zanco, *Dictionnaire des ministres de la marine (1689-1958)* (Paris: Editions SPM, 2011), 500-502. Gougeard's private papers transferred from France's national archives to the defence historical service comprise two boxes and are uneven in nature, with mostly anecdotal value and few insights into his personality. Ministère des armées, Service historique de la défense, Vincennes (SHD), Marine GG2 5, Auguste Gougeard papers.

that reality. The memories and sacrifices of Auvours, where the journey began, remained with Gougéard throughout his life and time associated with the navy.

### A Naval Officer's Date with Destiny at Auvours

The French naval officer corps in the latter nineteenth century exhibited both aristocratic elements defending existing arrangements as well as republican influences wanting more change and greater inclusion with opportunities for moving up the socio-economic ladder. Born and raised in Lorient, Brittany, Gougéard like most naval officers of his generation enrolled at age sixteen the Brest naval academy (*École navale*) for two years of theoretical study heavy on math, navigation, and technical subjects, followed by a year of practical instruction on a training ship in the rank of *aspirant*.<sup>8</sup> Gougéard saw some early career action along Africa's Ivory Coast, and was wounded twice with the marine artillery during French and British operations at Sebastopol in the Crimea against the Russians. Promoted to *lieutenant de vaisseau* by imperial decree on 13 October 1855, Gougéard spent time on colonial service campaigning with Admiral Léonard Charner and an expeditionary force in Chinese waters, including the landings and naval bombardments at Peïo.<sup>9</sup> Distant from France and the regular navy, such experiences cultivated initiative and resourcefulness amongst impressionable younger naval officers, and most importantly gave Gougéard opportunities for independent command of a gunboat engaged in naval and military operations in Cochinchina around Saïgon and a brutal stint ashore administering the Tan-An and Tân-Hòa districts.<sup>10</sup>

Gougéard gained the reputation of a harsh and uncompromising disciplinarian who expected high standards of obedience from subordinates. Aboard *Dragonne*, he trained the crew relentlessly and frequently tied offenders to hot boilerplates for punishment and motivation.<sup>11</sup> Gougéard's return to France in 1864 after this extended service abroad contrasted with the routine of administration normally associated with his rank level and job as officer in charge of transport and movements at the port of Lorient. Habits and a leadership style picked up in colonial service translated awkwardly back in France, when Gougéard took command of the screw frigate *Vigie*.<sup>12</sup> Metropole

<sup>8</sup> SHD, Marine CC7 1051, Auguste Gougéard personnel file.

<sup>9</sup> *Bulletin officiel de la marine – 2<sup>nd</sup> part - nominations* (1855), 299.

<sup>10</sup> Étienne Taillemite, *Dictionnaire des marins français*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Tallandier, 2002), 217; James Albert Bisling, "The Admirals' Government: A History of the Naval Colony that was the French Cochinchina, 1862-1879" (Ph.D diss., New York University, 1972), 53-67.

<sup>11</sup> Tabariès de Gransaignes, "Auguste Gougéard, marin, general et écrivain," *Bulletin de la Société historique d'Auteuil et de Passy* 74 (1911): 149.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Roberts, *French Warships in the Age of Steam 1859-1914: Design, Construction, Careers and Fates* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2021), 123-124.

sailors were aware of their rights and expected a certain standard of treatment and decorum from officers. For professional and personal reasons, Gougeard essentially peaked at this point in his naval career.

Merit factored into promotion up to the rank of *capitaine de frégate*, which Gougeard achieved on 20 December 1866, but then advancement to admiral ranks was almost wholly based on seniority and favouritism.<sup>13</sup> It was a system little changed since the days of Jean-Baptiste Colbert two centuries before. In spite of periodic increases in naval shipbuilding when budgets and political interest allowed, available warships were limited in numbers and, consequently, opportunities for command were largely apportioned based on reputation. Self-assured and opinionated, Gougeard spoke his mind and at times challenged authority. He briefly commanded the paddle aviso *Surveillante*.<sup>14</sup> The official line was that he fell gravely ill and could no longer captain, while behind the scenes the crew and subordinate officers grew restless. Gougeard went ashore to convalesce and, after recovering, filled various shore positions.

Many French naval officers like Gougeard saw little sea time after their early career years and were effectively stuck in rank and growing older. The personnel management skills and character traits that the French Navy found so unappealing in Gougeard were soon required as France faced a worsening situation in 1870 after disaster and defeat at Sedan. Gougeard was in no sense nice, but he was efficient, stubborn enough to fight, and knew how to motivate reluctant men under arms by harsh measures if necessary.

Prussian onslaughts in Fall 1870 called for extraordinary measures to avert national catastrophe. Disorganized remnants of the regular French Army not killed or captured were in no condition to offer an effective defence.<sup>15</sup> The French Navy tied up ships and landed sailors and guns for use on the frontlines. In Lorient, Rear Admiral Jean Bernard Jauréguiberry formed a division in the impressively named Army of the Loire under the direction of Léon Gambetta, the minister of war on the run one step ahead of the Prussians. This army in reality represented little more than a loose collection of naval units, untrained recruits, and semi-trained manpower.<sup>16</sup> Gambetta nonetheless intended to stand and fight. *Capitaine de vaisseau* Théophile Aube, attached to operations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Corps, described what the French political leader had to work with:

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<sup>13</sup> *Annuaire de la marine et des colonies* (1867), 66; Lawrence Sondhaus, *Navies in Modern World History* (London: Routledge, 2004), 66.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts, *French Warships in the Age of Steam*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 229-236; Douglas Fermer, *France at Bay 1870-71: The Struggle for Paris* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Léon Gambetta: la patrie de la République* (Paris: Fayard, 2008); Gambetta escaped Paris by hot-air balloon.

General Auguste Gougeard (Author's collection)

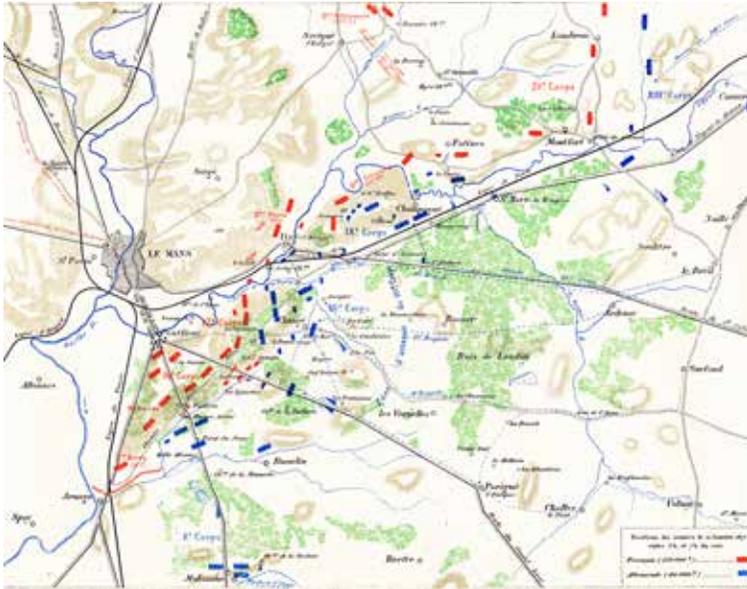


Such an army had all the qualities and also all the faults of the young, intelligent, often ardent, but inexperienced troops, which formed its essential base... Was not one general commanding a division a former non-commissioned officer, who became a general by apprenticing in command in America, in the ranks of the secessionists? Wasn't another just a captain at the start of the war, better still the day before, and in the very ranks of the army had known him as such? That these improvised generals occupied their new positions by virtue of bravery and their patriotism was unquestioned.<sup>17</sup>

Gambetta met with Gougeard and offered him a field commission in the army at a lower general rank. His main task was to raise and train an auxiliary division of volunteers from the Brittany area, to be ready as soon as possible to join the Army of the Loire. Jauréguiberry and Gougeard came under the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps commanded by General Antoine Chanzy.<sup>18</sup> Chanzy had also been in the navy before joining the artillery and regular army, having a varied career abroad campaigning in Algeria, Italy, Syria, and Morocco. Chanzy and Jauréguiberry fought several holding battles that checked the Prussians

<sup>17</sup> Translation from original French. Théophile Aube, "Le vingtième corps des l'armée de la Loire," *Revue des deux mondes* 94 (1 July 1871): 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Henri Ortholan, *L'armée de la Loire: 1870-1871* (Paris: B. Giovanangeli, 2005), 128; Gambetta personally appointed Chanzy at a higher field rank in October 1870.



Map of French and Prussian battle dispositions around Le Mans, January 1871. (Author's collection)

on several occasions, though they could not prevent the enemy advance from splitting the Army of the Loire into two geographically separated elements. Promoted to vice admiral in December 1870, Jauréguiberry took over the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps while Chanzy now commanded the 2nd Army of the Loire, made up of surviving line formations and support troops.<sup>19</sup> Only the onset of cold weather bought time for further reinforcements to be readied and brought forward. Gougard, the novice general with no direct experience with higher command of a division and almost complete authority granted by Gambetta, whipped his press-ganged volunteers into shape through rigorous training and discipline.

Chanzy concentrated the 2nd Army of the Loire around the city of Le Mans to regroup, reinforce, and take in any stragglers showing up from previous battles. Although the temptation to stay lost was great, hunger, companionship, and freezing temperatures usually drove soldiers back to the lines. The two opposing forces deployed either side of the Sarthe and L'Huisne rivers, which formed natural obstacles anchoring the defence. The French needed to hold these positions if they entertained any hope of stopping or delaying the Prussians.

The battle-hardened Prussians were professional and well-trained enough to know that the general advance had to resume quickly to keep the initiative.

<sup>19</sup> Antoine Eugène Chanzy, *La deuxième armée de la Loire*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1885).

They started three coordinated attacks using corps-sized columns to break the French lines. The plan was to encircle the 2nd Army of the Loire, draw in French forces, and destroy them wholesale. On the morning of 11 January 1871, the Prussians pummelled French positions with field artillery supporting infantry at selected points. Some of the heaviest fighting occurred on higher ground at Auvours, on the L’Huisne River’s south bank.

The engagement at Auvours, in which Gougéard participated, was part of the larger Battle of Le Mans and arguably not the most significant. In fact, Jauréguiberry and his 16<sup>th</sup> Corps protected the main approaches to the city and offered the strongest resistance.<sup>20</sup> The drive by the Prussians at Auvours attempted to exploit a weaker spot and bypass the bulk of French forces for a flanking attack from behind. When Gougéard arrived on the scene with his auxiliary division, French soldiers were retreating and running away with no semblance of order.<sup>21</sup> The volunteers did not dare break ranks being more scared of Gougéard than the Prussians, told they would be shot on the spot if



Collector card distributed by chocolatier d’Aiguebelle depicting the Battle of Le Mans and the French attack at Auvours on 11 January 1871 with General Gougéard leading the charge. (Author’s collection)

<sup>20</sup> Lieutenant V. Alwrod, *La Bataille du Mans: 10, 11 et 12 Janvier 1871* (Angers: G. Grassin, 1912), 208.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Mengin, *La Bataille du Mans: Les mobilisés de la Loire-inférieure à Champagné* (Nantes: Nantaise Étienne et Plédran, 1872), 42.

they ran. Gougeard joined his soldiers and officers on foot after his horse was killed. More out of morale than effective tactics, he ordered a frontal charge on two nearby Prussian gun positions.

Showing great courage, Gougeard personally led 2,000 volunteers across the field under intense fire and captured the high ground unscathed. The surprised Prussians, expecting a fleeing rabble, were suddenly faced with French soldiers attacking in force with intent to do them great harm. Gougeard and the volunteers held the plateau for eight long hours against Prussian rifle fire and counterattacks.<sup>22</sup> After extremely heavy losses on both sides, the auxiliary division only left the fought-over plateau once Chanzy gave the order for all units to withdraw due to Prussian pressure on Le Mans.

Gougeard's rush at Auvours was a small, glorious success in an otherwise general rout. It was entirely amateur rather than professional but made Gougeard an instant hero of the republic. Gambetta and Chanzy praised the feat and elan of the volunteers. That left bad feelings between Gougeard and Jauréguiberry, whose troops did much of the actual fighting against the main advancing Prussian column and only fell back when the situation became untenable. Jauréguiberry, according to Gougeard, had broken and run like a coward because the 16th Corps had not held the line against Prussian attacks. Gambetta looked to the French Navy to continue fighting, even if Paris fell, so he needed the support of the admirals and stayed quiet in the argument.<sup>23</sup> Chanzy's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army of the Lorient avoided any more battles or major engagements against the Prussians and husbanded available resources until an armistice was signed in Versailles on 28 January 1871. In the interim, Gougeard happily executed deserters he found missing from the volunteers.<sup>24</sup> For him, the war ended on a high note when everything else was so bleak. Gougeard should probably have been more understanding of the challenges Jauréguiberry faced in the field. But playing nice was not among his character traits, an attitude formed from his colonial service and reinforced by the battlefield experience at Auvours.

### **Chauvinism of the Admirals**

The French Navy in the immediate years after the Franco-Prussian War sought solace in institutional continuity and scientific progress. French naval officers shared in the national humiliation of defeat and loss of territories to the German Empire, which Chancellor Otto Bismarck and new Emperor Wilhelm declared into being in the hall of mirrors at France's Versailles palace. As

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<sup>22</sup> Dominique Mallet, *La bataille du Mans* (Le Mans: E. Champion, 1873), 140.

<sup>23</sup> "Crisis at Paris – Expected Great Sortie – Reorganisation of the French Fleet," *Dundee Courier*, 7 January 1871.

<sup>24</sup> Gransaignes, "Auguste Gougeard, marin, general et écrivain," 150.

an operational force, the French Navy had been untested at sea and largely ineffectual in the war except on land. They abhorred the radicalism of the Paris Commune, when senior military officers were dragged into the streets and shot, General Chanzy barely escaping with his life in one encounter.<sup>25</sup> The navy's higher leadership came to terms with moderate republicans assuming power in the Third Republic. Vice Admiral Louis Pothuau, defender of the south Paris forts, superseded Vice Admiral Martin Fourichon as minister of marine on 18 February 1871, under chief executive and soon president Adolphe Thiers.<sup>26</sup> Thiers liked obedient ministers and chose Pothuau for compliance instead of effectiveness. The naval officer corps, still considered a royalist bastion of monarchist and Bonapartist sympathisers, demonstrated day-to-day loyalty to the republic by deeds and words.

A succession of admirals over the coming decade served as ministers of marine, including Fourichon and Pothuau for repeat performances. Politicians distracted by other concerns let the admirals run the navy, so long as they stayed within allotted yearly budgets and out of political debates because rebuilding the French Army assumed higher importance in the nation's defence preparations.<sup>27</sup> A warship construction programme proposed by Pothuau in 1872 only received backing due its austerity. Ship design accommodated changes in naval warfare and tactics with introduction of the automotive torpedo and other advances in guns and armour.<sup>28</sup> The French Navy led the



Vice Admiral Louis Pothuau (Author's collection)

<sup>25</sup> Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870-71* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 273.

<sup>26</sup> *Journal officiel de la République française* 52 (21 February 1871), 107; Henri Darrieus and Jean Quéguiner, *Historique de la Marine française (1815-1918)* (Saint-Malo: Éditions l'ancre de marine, 1997), 71.

<sup>27</sup> Hugues Canuel, "From a Prestige Fleet to the Jeune École: French Naval Policy and Strategy under the Second Empire and the Early Third Republic (1852-1914)," *Naval War College Review* 71 (Winter 2018): 102-103.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Halpern, "The French Navy, 1880-1914," In *Technology and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, ed. Philips Payson O'Brien (London and New York: Routledge,

way in many scientific and technical fields compared to its peer competitor navies. Innovation combined with social conservatism because French naval officers compartmentalized politics from professional duties.

The decade also provided a peaceable intermission. Relations with Great Britain were reasonably cordial and the stronger Royal Navy not a real threat. France still maintained an edge over the navies of Austria-Hungary and Italy in the Mediterranean, and Germany was just a whole different problem not easily solved by application of sea power.<sup>29</sup> In a predominantly care-taking role, the admirals deferred making decisions until technological trends became clearer and the political climate improved for increased spending. Dupuy de Lôme's earlier batch-built ironclads were still serviceable but they were aging quickly due to wooden construction with no replacement on the foreseeable horizon and little impetus to consider one.<sup>30</sup> The variable nature of French politics caused uncertainty and lack of stability as governments came and went. Given the situation, the admirals found a workable relationship to maintain their standing and navigate the internal and external challenges facing the French Navy. That is until republicans like Gougeard asked questions and proposed sweeping changes in organization and ways of operating.

Bringing Gougeard back into the navy in some capacity was far from easy despite his celebrity republican hero status. The French Army had little place for him as regular army officers returning from German captivity used their seniority and pre-war career advancement to claim high-ranking positions.<sup>31</sup> Still, Gougeard liked the title of general and used it throughout the rest of his life.

Few at the top of the French Navy viewed him as a viable candidate for admiral ranks because of his personal qualities, outspokenness, and impolite character. Other senior officers who had distinguished themselves in land operations such as vice admirals Jauréguiberry and Jérôme Penhoat retained the higher rank of field promotions and gained important maritime prefect positions in charge of the fleet's main Atlantic and Mediterranean naval

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2001), 37-39.

<sup>29</sup> John F. Beeler, *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era, 1866-1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Andrew Lambert, "Economic Power, Technological Advantage, and Imperial Strength: Britain as a Unique Global Power, 1860-1890," *International Journal of Naval History* 5 (August 2006); Lawrence Sondhaus, *Naval Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1867-1918: Navalism, Industrial Development and the Politics of Dualism* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1994); Jean de Préneuf, "Du rival méprisé à adversaire préféré: L'Italie dans la stratégie navale française de 1870 à 1899," *Revue historique des armées* 250 (2008): 35-38.

<sup>30</sup> Philippe Masson, "La politique navale française de 1850 à 1914," *Revue maritime* 251 (February 1968): 183-203.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-François Chanet, *Vers l'armée nouvelle: république conservatrice et réforme militaire, 1871-1879* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006).

bases.<sup>32</sup> A jump from *capitaine de frégate* to even a lower admiral rank was a big move in an institution governed by seniority, hierarchy, and unwritten social conventions. The “red boatman” was too closely associated with Gambetta and parroted republican oratory. By a decision rendered on 14 July 1871, Gougeard was reinstated in the French Navy in the provisional rank of *capitaine de vaisseau*.<sup>33</sup>

Though higher than his previous naval rank, Gougeard felt slighted that service in the field was not rewarded with comparable rear admiral rank. As further sign of growing animosities, Gougeard’s published book on the 2nd Army of the Loire sullied Jauréguiberry and inflated his own exploits as a battlefield general.<sup>34</sup> Friends amongst the admirals were quick to defend Jauréguiberry’s reputation as sentiment within the French Navy’s higher ranks turned decidedly against Gougeard, who steadfastly held to his opinions. His *capitaine de vaisseau* rank was only confirmed by decree on 19 April 1873 annotated for war services, a month before Vice Admiral Charles Dompierre de Hornoy replaced Pothuau as minister of marine.<sup>35</sup>

Grudges associated with the re-engagement dogged much of Gougeard’s subsequent service in the navy. The admirals made sure that Gougeard was given neither a sea-going command nor any shore appointment of significance, as other officers advanced up the rank list. The French naval establishment treated Gougeard badly and found his character, humble social background, and republican ideals uninviting enough to block his path upward.

### **Accidental Historian and Advocate of Naval Reform**

Given the prejudice shown by senior leadership within the navy toward him, Gougeard channelled his energies into other directions focused on politics and published writing that advocated for organizational change. Employment on several commissions, including a central commission for examination of officer work during 1876-77, brought new perspectives on underlying problems.<sup>36</sup> It also left Gougeard with ample time for reading and archival research to produce a weighty book on the history of the French Navy under

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<sup>32</sup> *Journal officiel de la République française* 150 (30 May 1871), 1154; Penhoat recorded the experience of fighting and commanding on land in his own book. Jérôme Hyacinthe Penhoat, *Armée de l’est – Journal des marches de la 2e division d’infanterie du 18e corps* (Cherbourg: Bedelfontaine et Syffert, 1873).

<sup>33</sup> *Annuaire de la marine et des colonies* (1871), 157.

<sup>34</sup> Auguste Gougeard, *Deuxième armée de la Loire: Division de l’armée de Bretagne* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1871), 53.

<sup>35</sup> *Journal officiel de la République française* 109 (21 April 1873), 2705; Zanco, *Dictionnaire des ministres de la marine*, 253.

<sup>36</sup> “Travaux des officiers de la marine,” *Revue maritime et coloniale* 55 (1877): 5-19.

Cardinal Richelieu and Colbert, *The War Navy*, which he dedicated to Pothuau in November 1876:

Admiral,

Immediately following the end of this disastrous war [Franco-Prussian War], in which the Navy rendered services with which you are eminently familiar, I thought there was interest to ensure its present, improve its future, by going back to the very sources of its history to draw from robust and salutary teachings. It is in this goal that this book, of which I beg you to accept respectfully, has been written. I hope you will welcome the work of one who, for a long time has been guided by your example, has been taught by your school to love his homeland, to serve and defend it.

Please accept the assurance of my respectful and devoted feelings, Gougéard.<sup>37</sup>

Through history, Gougéard sought to show French naval leaders and decision-makers the benefits of sound organization and administration. Richelieu and Colbert skillfully harnessed the resources of the French state and used the navy to achieve military and diplomatic ends.<sup>38</sup> That took planning, finances, and clear policy backed by strategic thinking. The contrast with the contemporary situation in France was implicit, wherein the under-invested navy struggled to find a meaningful role alongside a dominant French Army focused on the land-threat from Imperial Germany. Outlining the problem's fundamentals and a possible alternative from the past, Gougéard sketched out the needed organizational change in a more strident manner to draw out relevant lessons, inform fellow naval officers, and finally pursue political roles for more advocacy.

Gougéard's decision to enter politics arose from realization that he was stagnant career-wise in the navy and a genuine desire to advocate for meaningful change from an entirely different direction. Some French naval officers by tradition sat in elected offices during active service and in

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<sup>37</sup> Translation from original French. Auguste Gougéard, *La Marine de guerre: ses institutions militaires: Depuis son origin jus qu'à nos jours - Richelieu et Colbert* (Paris: Gedalge Jeune, 1877), dedication.

<sup>38</sup> Alan M. James, "Cardinal Richelieu and the Birth of the French Navy," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 19 (1991): 46-47; Alan James, "The Development of French Naval Policy in the Seventeenth Century: Richelieu's Early Aims and Ambitions," *French History* 12 (1998): 384-402, DOI: 10.1093/fh/12/4/384; Glen Joseph Ames, "Colbert's Indian Ocean Strategy of 1664-1674: A Reappraisal," *French Historical Studies* 16 (Spring 1990): 538-539; David Plouviez, "The French navy and war entrepreneurs: Identity, business relations, conflicts, and cooperation in the eighteenth century," *Business History* 60, no. 1 (2018): 42, DOI: 10.1080/00076791.2017.1366986.



Vice Admiral Jean Bernard Jauréguiberry  
(Author's collection)

retirement. This did not necessarily mean that they were political in a conventional sense. The majority were typically drawn to conservative or royalist parties, which drew votes away from republicans, radicals, and socialists in the mid-1870s sufficient to form governments. Many of those governments were tumultuous and lasted only a few months at a time. In 1877 alone, four admirals served as ministers of marine and one general on an interim basis for five days during a constitutional crisis staged by the conservatives and General Patrice de MacMahon. When moderate republican politician Jules Dufaure restored some stability for a time, Admiral Pothuaux returned as minister of marine on 13 December 1877. Though democratic ideals of liberty and equality underpinned

Third Republic governments, political affiliations were often interchangeable in French politics depending upon the current situation and any given issue. A republican stood somewhere in the middle but could be cast as either radical or conservative at any time. Gougeard was decidedly drawn to parties and coalitions of a republican and nationalist bent with some sort of position on naval, maritime, and colonial affairs while he still remained in naval uniform.

Gougeard's political activities eventually led to his clean break with the French Navy as a serving officer. When the electors of the Sarthe department put forward his candidacy for the senate, Gougeard received a warning, or rather an implied threat, from then minister of marine Rear Admiral Louis de Montaignac "in the interest of his professional career."<sup>39</sup> Although unsuccessful in gaining a seat, Gougeard refused the admiral's entreaty to withdraw from the political campaign. Camille Pelletan, a radical delegate (and future minister of marine, 1902-05) in the chamber of deputies, endorsed the right of any military and naval officer to stand for elected office no matter their rank or position. Gougeard therefore found some support to defy the admirals.

In February 1879, Vice Admiral Jauréguiberry became minister of marine in the republican government of Charles de Freycinet.<sup>40</sup> Tidings were bad for

<sup>39</sup> "France," *Evening Mail*, 20 March 1876.

<sup>40</sup> Letter, Paul Dislère, 4 February 1879, in author's possession; Kim Munholland, "Admiral Jauréguiberry and the French Scramble for Tonkin, 1879-83," *French Historical Studies* 11

Gougéard. The simmering feud between the two since Le Mans continued, neither officer willing to concede and give ground to the other. Gougéard's chances of promotion and interesting employment bottomed out. In fact, he expected Jauréguiberry to take revenge on him, a fear not entirely without justification. Consequently, in March 1879, Gougéard sought political protection by becoming a state councillor, replacing Marquis de Châteaurenard.<sup>41</sup> That position broadened his contacts and allies outside the navy and took up an increasing amount of his time.

Gougéard endured Jauréguiberry's tenure long enough to see installation of Vice Admiral Georges Cloué as minister of marine in September 1880. However, a republican deputy from Cherbourg soon demanded Cloué's resignation or removal in relation to his administration as maritime prefect there, and a radical deputy raised criticism of the admiral's previous governorship over the French-mandated island Martinique.<sup>42</sup> Cloué professed to be republican, but he exhibited aristocratic airs and looked the part of a nobleman. Prime Minister Jules Ferry resolutely stood by the embattled minister of marine.<sup>43</sup> Gougéard was sympathetic to the complaints and knew Cloué was unlikely to take up his cause. Therefore, Gougéard retired from naval service in late 1880 still in the rank of *capitaine de vaisseau*.

Due to his published writings and zeal for naval reform, Gougéard has indirectly been identified with the *Jeune École* movement within the French Navy that sought a radical rethinking of fleet composition, strategy, and tactics to fight the weak against the strong. Those ideas built upon writing by serving and retired French naval officers prior to this time.<sup>44</sup> Théophile Aube (minister of marine 1886-87), another individual with extensive colonial service like Gougéard, was the *Jeune École*'s most vocal proponent and populizer. Republican in politics and judged unorthodox by the naval establishment, Aube wrote several leading articles on international law in the maritime context, commerce warfare, and torpedo boats, with which Gougéard was familiar.<sup>45</sup> A

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(Spring 1979): 87, DOI: 10.2307/28640; Pothuau became the French ambassador in London. *Journal officiel de la République française* 53 (23 February 1879), 1337; Geneviève Salkin-Laparra, *Marins et diplomates: Les attachés navals 1860-1914* (Vincennes: Service historique de la marine, 1990), 41; *Evening Mail*, 9 October 1882.

<sup>41</sup> *Journal officiel de la République française* 74 (16 March 1879), 2097.

<sup>42</sup> "The French Chambers," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 November 1880.

<sup>43</sup> Zanco, *Dictionnaire des ministres de la marine*, 217.

<sup>44</sup> C.I. Hamilton, "The Royal Navy, *la Royale*, and the Militarisation of Naval Warfare, 1840-1870," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 6 (April 1983): 203-204.

<sup>45</sup> Théophile Aube, "Un nouveau droit maritime international," *Revue maritime et coloniale* 44 (1873): 60-81; Théophile Aube, "L'avenir de la Marine française: le décuirassement, la guerre de course, la réduction du personnel," *Revue des deux mondes* 4 (1 July 1874): 175-196; Théophile Aube, "La guerre maritime et les ports militaires de la France," *Revue des deux mondes* 50 (15

critic of Aube and *Jeune École* precepts was Vice Admiral Siméon Bourgois, an officer with impressive scientific credentials who examined the impact of new technology on naval combat and maneuvering in several serialized articles.<sup>46</sup> Replete with lots of diagrams and equations, the work applied mathematical principles to naval warfare. Bourgois argued that operational and legal constraints undermined *Jeune École* assumptions and instead a balanced fleet was preferred. Admiral Jérôme Penhoat's *Elements of Naval Tactics* took a similar approach with greater emphasis on the skill and knowledge of the commander to execute squadron movements to gain advantage over an opposing naval force.<sup>47</sup> Gougéard therefore was exposed to arguments on both sides but never really firmly drawn into *Jeune École* circles. Significantly, the *Jeune École* always represented a minority among officers in the French Navy and its actual influence was exaggerated in public discourse. In writing, Gougéard concentrated on personnel matters and the navy's establishment, organizational basis ashore, and higher administration.

Gougéard's published writings reflected this outpouring of original thought from others and some of his own ideas, set to professional problems. The content drew from his earlier commission work in the navy and participation as state councillor on a legislative mixed commission formed after delegate Étienne Lamy's controversial and critical report on the navy's 1879 budget.<sup>48</sup> Republican politicians, to whom Gougéard felt affinity, finally displayed more interest in naval organization and policy beyond simple allocation of funds. A small booklet written by Gougéard on the naval invalid's fund that provided pensions and disability grants for sailors leaving the navy addressed some deficiencies and problems identified by the commission.<sup>49</sup> He recommended improvements to benefit personnel and making the system more sustainable and affordable. Far more substantive was the two-volume *Arsenals of the Navy*, which examined one of the most intractable problems within the French Navy: material and personnel organization in the five major ports and maritime prefectures.<sup>50</sup> French naval ships took long times to build and repair,

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March 1882): 314-346; the first and last reappeared as individual printed pamphlets and also in Théophile Aube, *A terre et a bord: notes d'un marine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1884); Douglas Peifer, "Maritime Commerce Warfare: The Coercive Response of the Weak," *Naval War College Review* 66 (Spring 2013): 103-104.

<sup>46</sup> Siméon Bourgois, "Études sur les manoeuvres des combats sur mer," *Revue maritime et coloniale* 49 (1876): 325-400; 776-832; republished in *Études sur les manoeuvres des combats sur mer* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1876).

<sup>47</sup> Jérôme Hyacinthe Penhoat, *Éléments de tactique navale* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1879).

<sup>48</sup> Theodore Ropp, ed. Stephen S. Roberts, *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy 1871-1904* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 119-122.

<sup>49</sup> Auguste Gougéard, *La caisse de invalides de la marine* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1882).

<sup>50</sup> Auguste Gougéard, *Les arsenaux de la marine I. Organisation administrative II. Organisation*

workers handed down jobs from one generation to the next, and warehousing of ordnance, stores, and other material items was antiquated. The system, a product of centuries-old practice, was inefficient, wasteful, and arguably not working very well for the requirements of a modern steam navy.<sup>51</sup> To start, Gougéard wanted the maritime prefectures along the Atlantic consolidated into a fewer number. Construction and maintenance of ships was to be streamlined with arsenal restructuring to remove unnecessary layers of management and improve provision of services. Greater focus on personnel training and motivation was also identified as important.

Overall, Gougéard called for a total reorganization of contemporary administration in the French Navy made possible by consolidation and rationalization of functions. Even some admirals like Cloué acknowledged improvements were needed but lacked the will to take on entrenched groups and political backers. The two books, written close to Gougéard's appointment as minister of marine, provide insights about his general ideas and commitment to organizational change.

### **Stymied Minister of Marine**

When support for Jules Ferry's government collapsed in the French general elections of summer 1881, Léon Gambetta was a prime candidate for forming the next government in waiting. He enjoyed widespread support amongst newly elected delegates, many of whom subscribed to his style of republicanism and held him in high regard.<sup>52</sup> Since the Franco-Prussian War, Gambetta had kept up a public profile while selectively joining and leaving the political fray as opportunities arose. In fact, he became the absolute master of opportunism.<sup>53</sup> President Jules Grévy, returning an old favour, invited Gambetta to put together a new government.

Who exactly would fill the post of minister of marine following Cloué was still undecided. As late as 12 November 1881, Vice Admiral Alexandre Peyron (minister of marine 1883-1885) was identified as the most likely appointee.<sup>54</sup> Negotiations likely did not go well, personal chemistry was lacking, or the admiral simply refused the offer. Consequently, Gambetta turned to his old

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*économique, industrielle et militaire* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1882).

<sup>51</sup> Alan James, "Les arsenaux de marine en France avant Colbert," *Dix-Septième Siècle* 253 (2011): 657-669; Jean de Préneuf and Philippe Vial, *La marine française sur les mers du monde 1860-1939* (Paris: Gallimard DMPA, 2012), 19.

<sup>52</sup> John Patrick Tuer Bury, *Gambetta and the Making of the Third Republic* (London: Longman, 1973).

<sup>53</sup> Jérôme Grévy, *La république des opportunistes, 1870-1885* (Paris: Perrin, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> "Ministerial Crisis in France," *Portsmouth Evening News*, 12 November 1881; Zanco, *Dictionnaire des ministres de la marine*, 417-419.

friend and war comrade Gougéard, whom he trusted most importantly for his undivided loyalty. The two were of same minds on many matters, particularly the need for organizational change.

When the ministry was formally announced two days later, the foreign press professed not to know much about the new minister of marine and called him vice admiral as usual practice.

Gougéard preferred general but was struck by the irony. French newspapers generally dwelled on the heroism at Auvours plateau (one column even declared that Gougéard had single-handedly won the Battle of Le Mans) and his good service abroad. In terms of policy, Gambetta and his government were committed to inaugurating reforms in the judicial system, education, and armed forces, extending commercial relations through diplomacy and signed treaties, and maintaining peace domestically and abroad.<sup>55</sup> Under Gambetta, France took a favourable view toward Great Britain and kept up guarded vigilance against Imperial



Vice Admiral Alexandre Peyron (*Le Journal illustré* 42, 14 October 1883)

Germany. Military and naval planning begun under the previous government for an expedition to Tunis that involved raising a corps continued apace. Given his interests and proclivities, Gougéard eagerly embraced Gambetta's policy priorities and was "expected to introduce important reforms into the French Navy."<sup>56</sup> However, just like a novice general thrown onto the battlefield, running and changing a navy while in government presented a daunting task that required tact and time. Gougéard possessed little of either.

For better or worse, Gougéard was identified wholeheartedly with Gambetta. So long as Gambetta remained popular, the lesser-known politician with no experience in higher politics was as well. And yet, just a few weeks into the parliamentary session, the French press described both men as dictatorial in tendencies and approach.<sup>57</sup> They did not seek consensus and were impatient for results. Under the navy's purview, Gougéard quickly proposed numerous far-reaching and ambitious initiatives that sought to transform the fleet and

<sup>55</sup> "The New French Ministry: Gambetta's Policy," *South Wales Daily News*, 16 November 1881.

<sup>56</sup> "M. Gambetta's Cabinet," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 15 November 1881.

<sup>57</sup> John Patrick Tuer Bury, *Gambetta's Final Years: 'The Era of Difficulties,' 1877-1882* (London: Longman, 1982).

its establishments. Those included the expected project of reorganizing the arsenals, construction of armoured cruisers, overhaul of senior leadership and promotion, renovating the naval staff, as well as improved education and training to match modern demands and technological developments.<sup>58</sup> Gougeard intended to start at the top and work his way down.

On 6 December 1881, Gougeard appeared before the estimates committee of the chamber of deputies to request an additional 35 million francs over and above the existing annual budget for the purpose of renewing the French Navy. The ask was big and of course invited lots of debate prior to closer study, report, and any final funding decision. The overriding imperative for spending more on the navy as opposed to the army was somewhat spurious, though Gougeard believed the need was obvious and answered questions about details and further explanation in a surprisingly forthright manner. Convincing at least some legislators to lend support on the funding side, Gougeard faced a much harder struggle with the navy's senior leadership over the soundness of the proposals.

For the most part, Gougeard merely ignored advice from a superior naval council comprising leading admirals and Peyron as chief of the naval staff. This body was meant to reflect the collective wisdom of higher ranks in the French Navy. Jauréguiberry, now sitting in the senate, was definitely uncooperative and obstructive behind the scenes. Gougeard felt he knew better and cut off deliberation and discussion. Change was needed immediately, and he was there to deliver for Gambetta. This rashness only created further resistance on the part of senior naval officers toward Gougeard and his proposals.<sup>59</sup> In private, naval officers joked that the "red boatman" believed and acted like he was emperor. The working relationship was tense and he counted few allies among the admirals to implement and champion change, Gougeard confided during a visit to a friend in Brest.<sup>60</sup> The bureau directors and admirals were at best indifferent or worse intransigent to the point of dismissing proposed changes outright. Alarmed by the pace of the minister of marine's schedule and the effect on the institution, many just waited and did nothing. Given the lack of trust and respect, moving organizational change beyond simple proclamation proved an enormous challenge, especially as the days counted down on Gambetta's government.

In concrete terms, two of Gougeard's proposals actually reached the level of presidential approval to attain the effect of law. The first modified

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<sup>58</sup> Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy*, 122-131.

<sup>59</sup> Henry Durassier, *La réforme maritime: Souvenirs du ministère de M. Gougeard (14 novembre 1881-30 janvier 1882)* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1884).

<sup>60</sup> Letter, Auguste Gougeard, nd, in author's possession.

administration and organization in the arsenals along the lines set out by Gougéard by creating the position of chief of staff in place of the major general to “re-establish between the various port authorities the essential balance and harmony to prompt and successful maritime operations.”<sup>61</sup> The second involved training the cadre of a general naval staff to facilitate sound administration and planning. Assigned officers too often held loyalties to individual superiors rather than the navy universally. The French Army’s general staff had been modernized and the *École supérieure de guerre* opened in Paris to educate officers in higher command and strategic functions.<sup>62</sup> Since the navy lacked similar arrangements, Gougéard proposed a professional school of higher studies for selected naval officers to attend and study:

Improvements demanded by the navy, in the transformation it has undergone, have only been obtained by asking modern science for the means to achieve them. Navigation has borrowed its finest methods from astronomy to achieve the precision and speed now required in its movements. The warship employs steam, hydraulic power, compressed air, and electricity, which are most complicated tools. The cannon has become a precise weapon. The torpedo, in its diverse forms, was introduced into the arsenal. And the future holds no less important transformations in naval art owing to the relentless progress of science.

The navy, without giving up anything on its practical and essential marine sides, has therefore taken on a scientific character, which can only be completely satisfied by teaching given by a naval school. On the other hand, such teaching conceived from a purely technical point of view, will always present gaps in political, commercial, and military matters because they require in order to be understood a certain intellectual maturity. These questions, indifferent to the officer in the beginning of his career, become indispensable to him when, by his age and rank, he is called upon to exercise command, whether an individual warship, naval division, or squadron. These gaps will be filled by creation of a higher naval school, whose teaching at the same time covers all subjects touching upon the navy, will have for an

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<sup>61</sup> Translation from original French. *Journal officiel de la République française* 24 (25 January 1882), 438.

<sup>62</sup> Douglas Porch, *The March to the Marne: The French Army 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 36-41; James Russell Soley, *Report on Foreign Systems of Naval Education* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880), 153; Martin Motte, *Une éducation géostratégique: La pensée navale française de la Jeune École à 1914* (Paris: Economica, 2004), 33.

objective, not to form specialties, but to raise the intellectual level of ship officers to be encyclopedic rather than technical.

Recruited among officers who have shown measures of intelligence and ability by previous service, the personnel admitted to this school will meet conditions necessary to understand and appreciate the scope of subjects that will be brought before them. Scientific education will take on a more elevated character because the elementary principles can be taken for granted. While political, commercial, and military education, although reduced to broad outline, will suffice to open up entirely new horizons for these young officers and give them additional training required by the situations in which they will find themselves.

The final program requires more in-depth study, as the limited duration of stay in this school does not allow one to deviate from the desired result. Seen in broad outline, it will include: a scientific part; a political and military part. Attached to the scientific part is navigation, that is to say the problem of passage; naval materiel and armament, that is the ship, its engines and its means of attack and defence. The political and military part includes study of political and commercial interests and all questions connected with it by any linkage; the use of maritime forces for the defence of these interests. From one perspective, all navigation questions can return to the teaching of higher astronomy and its applications to determine longitudes and physics of the globe, reduced to exposition of the laws of magnetism and the movements of the atmosphere and of the sea. While higher questions involving the art of construction and artillery can be summed up in mechanics and applied physics.

Political and commercial education should address the various issues in which the naval officer is called to take part, as squadron or division commander, as maritime prefect, or member of the boards or committees which he is destined to be part of. The diversity of functions he fulfills does not allow him to specialize in the technical part of the profession; he cannot be satisfied with possessing, in all its details, the war machine at his disposal and knowing how to operate it. If he is a sailor above all, he is also the representative of the greatest interests of the State in the far seas and he must know these interests to be able to watch over and defend them. The purpose of naval stations is not only to protect commerce and the merchant navy in their regular operation. It also consists of following the military and commercial

development of various States in all countries of the globe; to study and prepare new outlets for trade; and, to foresee the military role which the navy may be called upon to fulfill in all seas. It is therefore necessary that a political and commercial education, conceived from the highest point of view, initiates the officer in all questions and interests which can arise from relations of the State with other nations or with its colonies, emphasizes the importance of trade routes as well as telegraph and postal communications, and deals with maritime and commercial law.

The use of the warship to protect these great interests forms an important part for the teaching of military art or naval strategy. Tactics regulate evolutions; but it supposes a plan of campaign which varies with the forces to be fought, with the conditions peculiar to the seas and coasts where one must operate, and with the support that fixed defences or armoured coastal defence ships can offer. Comparative study of maritime forces of various peoples and coastal resources, from a military point of view, will therefore be essential prerequisites for teaching naval strategy. Preparation of campaign plans is the responsibility of the General Staff for the armament, mobilization, and concentration of maritime forces; but the execution and modifications, of which contingency is so large a part, rests exclusively with the commander-in-chief. He will be able to take advantage of the resources at his disposal if he has thought through in advance the great questions which the higher naval school aims to foster.

If you approve of the considerations that I have had the honor to present to you, please bless the following decree with your signature.

The President of the French Republic, on the report of minister of marine, decreed:

Art. 1. – There will be a higher naval school in Paris.

Art. 2. – The organization of this school and the program of studies shall be done by ministerial orders.

Art. 3. – The minister of marine is responsible for execution of this decree.

Done in Paris, 25 January 1882.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Translation from original French. *Journal officiel de la République française* 25 (26 January 1882), 457; Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF) Gallica, *Lieutenant de vaisseau Fénard*, “Evolution de l’enseignement à école supérieure de marine de 1895 à 1921,” 4.

This last approved decree accorded with Gougeard's change agenda and represented the best chance for implementation. It sought to equip senior officers with necessary knowledge to tackle modern challenges and problems. Educated and uniformly trained officers were essential to achieving the navy's better organization, conduct of operations, and formulation of strategy. On the question of having a higher school ashore or afloat, some admirals preferred another location outside Paris near the sea, like the existing torpedo school at Boyardville on the Isle of Oléron or in Toulon. No matter, the Gambetta government lost power the very next week over the issue of electoral reform.<sup>64</sup> Gougeard left the minister's office after a mere eleven weeks on the job and returned to being a state councillor, his ambitious agenda of organizational change left unfinished.

Following Gougeard's departure, momentum behind changing the navy ground to a halt. On 30 January 1882, Vice Admiral Jauréguiberry assumed the post of minister of marine for a second turn.<sup>65</sup> Of all persons, the appointment was particularly disheartening for Gougeard. On 1 February, Jauréguiberry gathered together the naval ministry's directors and staff and announced that radical reform in the navy was unnecessary, the navy as currently operating was up to the task, and the real challenge was keeping abreast with scientific and technical advances.<sup>66</sup> It was a complete rebuke to Gougeard and what he represented. Delegate Georges Clemenceau later lamented:

Gougeard found himself suddenly at the head of the Admirals who, in fear of his independent temper and of his desire for reform, had broken his career. All who knew the energy, we may say almost rudeness – of the new Secretary of the Navy [American equivalent of minister of marine], did not doubt that, from the very day of his commission he would apply himself to laying the basis for the future organization. In this assurance, they were not deceived. He undertook all the reforms, reforms of the staffs and the material; the creation of a high[er] school for naval war; plans for the construction of fast modern ships and for placing the harbours and coasts in a condition of defence. And then his successor, Admiral Jauréguiberry, by a few strokes of the pen, reduced his patriotic labor to nothing.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> S.A. Ashley, "The Failure of Gambetta's Grand Ministère," *French Historical Studies* 9 (Spring 1975): 117, DOI: 10.2307/286007; Susan K. Foley and Charles Sowerwine, *A Political Romance: Léon Gambetta, Léonie Léon and the Making of the French Republic, 1872-82* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>65</sup> *Journal officiel de la République française* 30 (31 January 1882), 546.

<sup>66</sup> "The French Navy," *Portsmouth Evening News*, 2 February 1882.

<sup>67</sup> M. Georges Clemenceau, "French Navy. – II.," *North American Review* 164, no. 484 (March 1897): 305.

French naval officers were to focus on professional duties and leave running the navy to the judgment of admirals at the top. Jauréguiberry referred the higher naval school question to the superior naval council for consideration, which found in favour of educating naval officers at a dedicated school in Paris generally but could not see fit to support Gougeard's president-signed decree as worded.<sup>68</sup> In practical terms, that meant no higher naval school for officers because Jauréguiberry did nothing in that direction.

For Gougeard, Jauréguiberry's retreat from advancing organizational change just replayed the admiral's conduct and failings earlier at Le Mans. Gougeard always harboured resentment toward Jauréguiberry and that grew. The question of what Gougeard might have achieved with a little more time remains speculative because someone else always could reverse course once back in a position of authority under the French system. This pattern repeated later with another reform-minded civilian, Édouard Lockroy (minister of marine 1895-96, 1898-99), when he tried to improve higher naval education.<sup>69</sup>

After settling into a quiet life away from politics, Gougeard resumed writing and stayed engaged with naval issues. Debates revisited *Jeune École* arguments for entirely different approaches on the part of France to strategy and fleet composition. In 1884, Gougeard published *The Navy*, a small book that opined on unrealized Gambetta-era reforms, illustrated application of naval and military power with historical examples, and argued for an industrial base able to construct cruisers and torpedo boats rapidly, as opposed to battleships which took longer.<sup>70</sup> It emphasized that speed was a factor in naval warfare and pointed out the need for a global network of refuelling stations from which cruisers could operate. In that, Gougeard was supportive of journalist Gabriel Charmes, whose writings shared similar views and moreover promoted independent action by large numbers of torpedo boats organized into flotillas.<sup>71</sup> According to them, the battleship and its ironclad predecessors were effectively obsolete and should no longer be built. In Great Britain, Gougeard was lumped together with Charmes and other *Jeune École* supporters as being anti-English, though the bias is not immediately evident

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<sup>68</sup> Rémi Monaque, *L'école de guerre navale* (Vincennes: Service historique de la marine, 1995), 4-7. Un ancien officier de Marine, "La Marine française: Le corps des officiers de vaisseau," *La Nouvelle revue* 19 (November-December 1882): 549.

<sup>69</sup> Chris Madsen, "Enrolment at the French Navy's School of Advanced Studies in Paris from 1896 to 1899," *Journal for Maritime Research* 23, no. 2 (2021): 161-182, DOI: 10.1080/21533369.2022.2094617.

<sup>70</sup> Auguste Gougeard, *La Marine de guerre – son passé et son avenir – cuirasses et torpilleurs* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1884).

<sup>71</sup> Gabriel Charmes, *Les torpilleurs autonomes et l'avenir de la marine* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1885); Arne Røksund, *The Jeune École: The Strategy of the Weak* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 21-22.

in the writing.<sup>72</sup> Gougeard frequently went back to past wars between Great Britain and France to frame his analysis. That did not necessarily mean that the Royal Navy was the natural or future enemy as some *Jeune École* adherents claimed.

Gougeard remained, however, supportive of France's superior lead in the naval technical race and overseas colonial ambitions. In September 1884, he was appointed president of the *Conseil des prises maritimes*, France's highest prize court, a move said to be preliminary to Admiral Amédée Courbet's active operations against China.<sup>73</sup> Gougeard easily reconciled his republicanism with colonial adventures and acquisitions by force that served the navy. In January 1886, Charles de Freycinet considered Gougeard for minister of marine again in another Gambetta-like government espousing internal reform and colonial expansion.<sup>74</sup> By that time, Gougeard's deteriorating health and lack of energy precluded re-entering the political arena. On 9 March 1886, Gougeard died at age sixty at his home in Auteuil.<sup>75</sup> His last wish was to be buried in Auvours at a battle monument on the plateau where his volunteers had fallen in January 1871, a focal point for the republican general and minister of marine.<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

Naval officers in the French Navy between 1870 and mid 1880s experienced defeat, political turmoil, and the first serious attempts to consider organizational and administrative reforms for a very long time. France maintained a navy that simultaneously kept up with scientific technological advances and met government expectations of national defence and loyalty to the republican state at reasonable cost. Auguste Gougeard, a complex and arguably flawed personality, emerged as a divisive figure in efforts to effect organizational change in the navy. The backstory behind his accession to minister of marine between November 1881 and January 1882 in Léon Gambetta's short-lived republican government puts into context the challenges of achieving naval reform.

Gougeard's character exhibited both strengths and weaknesses that equally empowered and impeded his ability to carry forward successfully a change agenda. On one level, his published writing and developed interest

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<sup>72</sup> "French Press on England: An Advocate of Privateering," *Daily News* (London), 8 September 1884; "French Antipathy to England," *St. James's Gazette*, 8 September 1884.

<sup>73</sup> "France and China," *Navy and Military Gazette*, 17 September 1884.

<sup>74</sup> "Ministerial Crisis in France," *London Evening Standard*, 6 January 1886.

<sup>75</sup> Deaths ledger entry 261 Auguste Gougeard, V4E 07324, Paris Archives, Paris; "Auguste Gougeard," *Gil Blas* (10 March 1886).

<sup>76</sup> Letter, Rear Admiral Alphonse de Courmoulier-Lucinière, Nantes townhall, 27 March 1874, in author's possession.

in organizational change demonstrated knowledgeable competency to understand the nature of the problem, while his commitment and stubborn resolve to seeing through something to the end rated highly. But Gougeard's leadership in pushing through change and motivating others to join in the effort was problematic. A stunted career and completely unproductive quarrel with top admirals occupying important positions within the navy undermined his effectiveness as a true manager of organizational change.

Gougeard never appreciated that he needed support from the admirals to achieve organizational change. The human dimension in relations cannot be discounted in explaining why Gougeard was so singularly unsuccessful in accomplishing necessary reforms in the French Navy. Petty jealousies and personal feuds that started at Auvours and stayed unresolved built up into animosity that limited Gougeard's message and effectiveness as minister of marine. By that point, the admirals serving as institutional gatekeepers had already made up their minds and decided to out-wait Gougeard and his change proposals. Naval reform under Gougeard turned into failure as time ran out to achieve meaningful progress because organizational change was too tied to one individual and never made lasting. A total inability to convince others was the greatest part of that failure.

Gougeard held that he had performed ably on the plateau at Auvours, just as he earnestly believed in the mission of changing the navy as political head. In both battles, Gougeard put up a strong fight through valiant effort, but he could not overcome the odds to avert defeat in the end. It was just easier to blame Jauréguiberry, given the complicated relationship between the two individuals. If the French Navy was still unready to embrace organizational change wholeheartedly, Gougeard proved the wrong person to spur on naval reform.

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