

Charles William Le Gendre

26 August 1830 - 1 September 1899

By Samuel Stephenson

(Edited by Douglas Fix)

Charles William Le Gendre was born to Jean Francios and Aricie Louise Marie Gertrude (Wable) Le Gendre on 26 August 1830 in Ouillins, France. His family is said to have been well connected and important. Le Gendre was educated at the Royal College of Rheims, but he eventually graduated from the University of Paris. At the age of 21, he married Clara Victoria Mulock, daughter of William (a well known New York lawyer) and Marie Guilbert Mulock, on 31 October 1854 in Brussels, Belgium. Soon after their marriage, Le Gendre moved to the United States and became a naturalized citizen.(1)

With the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States in 1861, Le Gendre became involved in the U.S. military. Initially, he helped recruit the 51st New York Volunteer Infantry (a segment of the Union ranks attached to General Burnside's coast division), and was commissioned a major of that regiment on 29 October 1861. Le Gendre participated in the campaign of North Carolina, and was present at the capture of Roanoke Island in 1862. At the time, he was a major in Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Robert B. Potter's 51st Regiment Infantry.(2) Le Gendre received positive recognition from United States officials and generals for his actions in the latter conflict. However, he was badly wounded at the battle of New Bern, North Carolina on 14 March 1862, "a ball injuring both the corner of the jaw and the spinal process." Le Gendre was cited for displaying "most conspicuous courage until he fell wounded."(3)

Despite this grievous injury, Le Gendre continued in the service and was promoted to lieutenant colonel on 20 September 1862. In 1863, he was attached to the 9th army corps, with which he made numerous campaigns; he was promoted to colonel on 14 March 1863. At the second battle of the Wilderness in Virginia on 6 May 1864, while serving under General Grant, Le Gendre was again severely injured "by a rifle ball that carried away both his left eye and the bridge of the nose."(4) At the time of the last raid by General Lee's Confederate army of Annapolis, Maryland, Le Gendre, though still hospitalized, was detailed to organize the defense of the city.(5) At some point during 1864, Le Gendre was appointed chief of the recruiting service for the 9th army corps in New York State and served in this capacity for two months.(6) Le Gendre was finally

honorably discharged on 4 October 1864,(7) and was further given the brevet title of brigadier general for meritorious service on 13 March 1865.(8)

On 13 July 1866 Le Gendre was appointed to be American consul at Amoy, China. He left New York for Liverpool in July 1866 and took an overland route through Europe and Asia, eventually arriving in Amoy in December of 1866. As consul, Le Gendre was in control of five port cities: Amoy, Keelung, Taiwanfoo, Tamsui, and Takao.(9)

Le Gendre was quickly called upon to use his authority, which he exercised decisively, in a case of illegal coolie trade (a common practice in southern Chinese port cities) associated with the *La Vierge* in early 1867.(10)

Following the wreck of the United States ship the *Rover* on 12 March 1867 and the subsequent killing of the surviving crew by aborigines, Le Gendre quickly traveled to Foochow, arriving on 2 April 1867, to persuade the governor generals of Fukien and Chekiang to intervene and put pressure on the Chinese authorities in Formosa to resolve the issue.(11) The governor general of Fukien gave Le Gendre permission to go to Formosa himself, and wrote him a letter of introduction to take to the prefect of Formosa, asking him to cooperate with Le Gendre, but adding that "if the consul takes measures to manage the case himself, please invite him not to do so, for these savages might give him more trouble than he thinks."(12) Le Gendre commissioned the United States steamer *Ashuelot*, under the command of Captain Febriger, in order to visit the scene of the wreck and to try (unsuccessfully) to get foreign officials in Taiwanfoo (where he arrived on 18 April) to act. After a subsequent failed punitive expedition carried out by Rear Admiral Bell of the United States navy, Le Gendre again returned to Formosa -- this time without any reference to his superiors. While in Formosa, he asserted United States consular authority, selected a deputy consul in north Taiwan, visited the Keelung mines, and gathered information from United States merchants.(13)

Upon return to south China, Le Gendre managed to persuade the governor general in Foochow to send a military force to southern Formosa. The force, significantly smaller than the 400 to 500 soldiers recommended by Le Gendre, was dispatched on 25 July 1867. Le Gendre then personally requested a gunboat from Admiral Bell, which he was denied, and eventually managed to commission the *Volunteer*. He embarked for Formosa on 4 September 1867,(14) telling his superiors that "I am going there as a mere spectator. . . . I have no jurisdiction over the Chinese forces."(15)

Le Gendre quickly assumed *de facto* command of the mission from General Liu in the course of a long and difficult march into deep aboriginal lands in southern Formosa (some of which required extensive road construction). Then, with the aid of William A. Pickering and James Horn, Le Gendre negotiated an effective treaty guaranteeing the safety of shipwrecked American and European sailors with Tauketok, the chief of 18 aboriginal tribes in the area when the *Rover* has gone ashore.(16)

On 6 September 1871 a Japanese ship wrecked off the coast of Formosa and the crew were murdered by Boutans. On 29 February 1872, Le Gendre left for Formosa to attempt to get the treaty with Tauketok extended to cover Japanese sailors as well. However, this mission was largely unsuccessful, and as a result, Le Gendre had a falling out with United States Minister to Peking, Mr. Low.(17)

Later that same year, Le Gendre stopped off in Japan *en route* to the United States from Amoy, and was asked to join the Japanese foreign service. After some debate, Le Gendre resigned from his post as United States consul on 12 December 1872 and entered the service of the Emperor of Japan at \$12,000 per year as an advisor to a planned expedition to Formosa, becoming the first foreigner employed in a Japanese government post.(18) Serving in the capacity of second-grade foreign service official, Le Gendre participated in a diplomatic mission to Peking, headed by Japanese Foreign Minister Soejima Taneomi (1828-1905), in December 1872. After meeting with only partial success in negotiations with Peking, Le Gendre was chosen to personally assist the expedition to Formosa in 1874. However, Le Gendre was unexpectedly imprisoned for a brief time at Shanghai on the orders of the United States consul-general for deserting the service, and thus never actually made it to Formosa. Although the mission was eventually more controversial than successful, Le Gendre received the decoration of the second class of merit (Order of the Rising Sun) for his service in July 1874, becoming the first among either foreigners or Japanese to be admitted into the Order after its institution by the Emperor of Japan. He retired later that same year.(19)

Le Gendre remained in Japan until 1890, working in a private capacity for Okuma, Shigenobu (1838-1922), a political party leader.(20) In March 1890 he left Japan to take up an appointment as the vice-president of the Korean Home Office. Upon Judge O.N. Denny's resignation later that year, Le Gendre became adviser to the household department of the King of Korea, holding that position until his death of apoplexy in Seoul on 1 September 1899.(21)

Selected Publications:(22)

"Amoy," "Island of Formosa: Ports of Takao and Taiwanfoo," and "Formosa." Pp. 49-71, 85-109 in *A report on the commercial relations of the United States and foreign nations, for the year ending September 30, 1869*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871. [Executive document No. 18, Executive documents printed by order of the House of Representatives, 41st Congress, Third Session, 1870-71.].

"Amoy." Pp. 430-35 in *A report on the commercial relations of the United States with foreign nations for the year ending September 30, 1870*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871. [Supplement to Executive document No. 93, Executive documents printed by order of the House of Representatives, 41st Congress, Third Session, 1870-71.]

Reports on Amoy and the island of Formosa. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871.

How to Deal with China. Amoy, 1871.

(Report prepared for Mr. Keim, special agent of the United States government, upon various questions of interest.) Pp. 110-168 of *Annual report on the commercial relations between the United States and foreign nations, made by the Secretary of State, for the year ending September 30, 1871.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872.

"Annual report on the trade of the Amoy district for the year ending 30th September, 1871." Pp. 169-204 of *Annual report on the commercial relations between the United States and foreign nations, made by the Secretary of State, for the year ending September 30, 1871.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872.

Is aboriginal Formosa a part of the Chinese empire? Shanghai: Lane, Crawford, 1874.

Progressive Japan: A study of the political and social needs of the empire. New York and Yokohama: C. Levy, 1878.

Les courants humains, ou la circulation du sang de l'homme et de la civilisation a la surface de la terre [The human current, or the circulation of the blood of man and civilization on the surface of the earth]. 42 vols. Le Gendre papers, Library of Congress, Boxes 6-13.

Honors and Memberships:

The decoration of the second class of merit (Rising Sun, 1874).(23)

Notes:

1. Yen, Sophia Su-fei, *Taiwan in China's foreign relations 1836-1874* (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1965), p. 148; *The Far East* (October, 1877): 87; Shavit, David, *The United States in Asia* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 300; *Dictionary of American biography*, D. Malone, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 145. The sources used by the last source include: *War of the rebellion: Official records (U.S. Army)*; the files of the Adjutant-General's Office, the War Department, and the Pension Office; *Foreign Relations of the United States*(1873); T. Dennet, *Americans in Eastern Asia* (1922); and the *N.Y. Tribune* (3 September 1899).

2. That is most likely the very same infantry division that he initially recruited for and joined. The names of the two divisions are given by different sources: The former is to be found in *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 145; and the latter in *The Far East* (1877): 87.

3. *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 145; *The Far East* (1877): 87.
4. *The Far East* (1877): 87.
5. *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 145; *The Far East* (1877): 87.
6. *The Far East* (1877): 87.
7. *The Far East* (1877): 88 states that Le Gendre was discharged under certificate of full disability in 1865, while Yen 1965, p. 148, claims that he was honorably discharged in May 1865. Here I accept the date and reason of discharge given by *Dictionary of American Biography*, p. 145.
8. *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 145; Yen 1965, p. 148.
9. *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 145; Yen 1965, p. 148; *The Far East* (1877): 88.
10. *The Far East* (1877): 88.
11. Yen 1965, pp. 126-127; Carrington, George Williams, *Foreigners in Formosa 1841-1874* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), p. 153; *Dictionary of American Biography*, p. 146; *The Far East* (1877): 88.
12. U.S., National Archives, Record Group 59, "Consular despatches, Amoy," vol. 3 (microfilm no. 100, roll 3), enclosure, "Intendant of Circuit of Foochow to the Prefect of Formosa," translation from the USNA and USDC; as quoted in Yen 1965, p. 127.
13. Carrington 1978, pp. 154, 159; *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 146; *The Far East* (1877): 88.
14. Yen 1965, pp. 127-148; Carrington 1978, p. 160; *The Far East* 1877, pp. 88-89.
15. U.S., National Archives, Record Group 59, "Consular despatches, Amoy," vol. 3 (microfilm no. 100, roll 3), Le Gendre to Bell, 30 July 1867; as quoted in Carrington 1978, p. 160.
16. Yen 1965, pp. 149-53; Carrington 1978, pp. 133, 157-58, 161-72, 174, 176; Otness, Harold M, *One thousand westerners in Taiwan, to 1945: A biographical and bibliographical dictionary* ([Taipei]: Institute of Taiwan History, Preparatory Office, Academia Sinica, 1999), p. 97; *The Far East* (1877): 89-90; *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 146.
17. *Far East* (1877): 90.
18. Yen 1965, pp. 154, 159, 163-173; Carrington 1978, p. 277; *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 146; *Far East* (1877): 93-94.

19. Yen 1965, pp. 175-82, 184-86, 191-97, 199-202, 204, 208-212, 216, 218, 246-249; *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 146; *Far East* (1877): 96-101; Otness 1999, pp. 97-98; Carrington 1978, pp. 279-80, 283.

20. Shavit 1990, p. 300.

21. *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 146; Shavit 1990, p. 300.

22. Otness 1999, p. 98; Yen 1965, p. 248; Shavit 1990, p. 300.

23. *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 146.