

OBITUARY

ACHILLE CLARAC

Older Thais and long-time residents of Thailand will be sad to learn of the news of the death on 11 January 1999, in his 96th year, of Achille Clarac, former Ambassador of France to Thailand from 1959 to 1968, in his residence at Haute-Roche, Oudon.

He was born in 1903 in Nantes, and obtained his Licence-en-Droit in Paris. He entered the French Diplomatic and Consular service in 1930, and served in Washington, Teheran, Tetuan, Algiers, Lisbon, Chungking, Saigon, Baghdad, Munich, and Syria. His last posting was as Ambassador in Bangkok, and he retired from Thailand with the rank of Ministre Plenipotentiaire, hors classe. He was made Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1946 and Officier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1953.

In addition to his diplomatic functions, he was a keen supporter of the arts. An accomplished artist and photographer himself, he acquired, while in Thailand, a large collection of modern paintings, and was active in the functions of the Siam Society. After his retirement, he divided his time between a traditional Thai house he had built by the Chao Phraya at Phra Padaeng and his estate of 35 hectares of vines overlooking the Loire in France some 30 km east of his native Nantes. With increasing years, though, it became more difficult for him to reach his Thai riverside home by boat, and he settled permanently in France, where he continued to receive old friends known in Thailand, and where

he developed with loving care a magnificent rock garden beside his chateau.

In retirement, apart from continuing to read widely in French, English, and German, and sketching, he published a collection of short stories under the pseudonym Saint-Ours, and worked at a volume of poetry, but is probably best known here for the first modern guidebook to the country, *Discovering Thailand*, written with Michael Smithies, and first published in 1971 by Siam Publications. This subsequently went through many editions with different publishers and in different languages.

Achille (Claude) Clarac married in 1935 a Swiss heiress, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, born in 1908 in Zurich. She is the 'Christina' of Ella Maillart's account of a journey from Istanbul to Peshawar undertaken in a Ford car in 1939, and published as *The Cruel Way* in 1947 (recently reprinted in English and French). Annemarie-Christina was a troubled soul, who then travelled in the United States and Africa, and after returning to Switzerland died in a bicycle accident on 15 November 1942.

'Papa Clarac', as he was affectionately known in later life, was buried in Nantes on 15 January 1999 in the Misericorde cemetery, and leaves an adopted son, Henri Pageau-Clarac, well known for his leading numerous tours upcountry for the Siam Society.

M. S.