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## Dreyfus: How He Was Redeemed

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# **DREYFUS: HOW HE WAS REDEEMED**

Published in The Athens Observer, p. 6 (January 5, 1995).

Author: Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., Professor of Law, University of Georgia School of Law.

In a misguided effort to prevent embarrassment to the army, and to keep Dreyfus in prison, a conspiracy of high-ranking government officials and important army officers, abetted by antisemitic journals, orchestrated for years an enormous coverup to conceal the true facts of the Dreyfus case. The coverup featured perjuries, forgeries, obstructions of justice, dishonest invocations of reasons of state, demagogic appeals to exaggerated patriotism, and odious incitements of religious hatred.

At Dreyfus's 1899 retrial--a proceeding viewed throughout the world as more a farce or sham than a trial--there was no trustworthy evidence that Dreyfus was guilty of anything, and the prosecution openly relied on testimony and documents known or suspected to be false or fraudulent.

There are many famous documents associated with the Dreyfus case. The two most famous were both stolen by French counterintelligence agents from the German embassy: the celebrated bordereau, a handwritten treasonable memorandum obtained in September 1894, and the equally famous petit bleu, a pneumatic letter-telegram procured in March 1896.

The discovery of the bordereau set in motion frantic investigative activities that led to Dreyfus's hasty and erroneous arrest. French military officials mistakenly attributed the document to Dreyfus, and at both of Dreyfus's trials the prosecution vainly endeavored to prove that he was the author of the bordereau.

The bordereau actually had been written by a disreputable French army officer named Esterhazy, who was the real traitor. That Esterhazy, not Dreyfus, was the author of the traitorous bordereau was discovered by Lt.-Col. Georges Picquart, who became director of French army counterintelligence on July 1, 1895. At 41 Picquart was the most brilliant and promising young officer in the army. Picquart became alerted to Esterhazy after examining the petit bleu, which had been written in behalf of the German military attache and actually contained Esterhazy's name and home address.

Like the bordereau, the petit bleu was clear proof of a French military officer's treasonable activities.

Picquart presented his discoveries to the general staff, urging that Esterhazy be arrested, Dreyfus released, and the truth told. His proposals were received with great coldness. When ordered to forget that Dreyfus was innocent, his immortal reply was: *Je n'emporterai pas dans ce secret dans la tombe* ("I will not carry this secret to the grave"). When he refused to join the coverup, and instead spoke out in favor of and even testified for Dreyfus, Picquart was persecuted, imprisoned, and expelled from the army for "grave misdeeds while in service."

In the United States, where the Dreyfus case was a matter of great public interest all across the land, Picquart was hailed as "no ordinary hero," and as a man "marked ... for admiration from the first."

In reward for the courage, honor, and devotion to duty he displayed during the Dreyfus case, Picquart was reinstated in the army in 1906 and made a general.

Although they knew Esterhazy was a traitor, the coverup conspirators (including French army generals and intelligence officers) protected him and arranged for him to slip out of the country. Esterhazy died in exile in England in 1923, never having been convicted of the treason he committed but another man was punished for.

Alfred Dreyfus died at the age of 75 on July 12, 1935, the 29th anniversary of the date the judiciary had conclusively pronounced him innocent.

Last July I was fortunate enough to be able to stay for three weeks in Paris, where I visited and photographed various buildings and places connected to the Dreyfus case.

I found four apartment buildings Dreyfus resided in prior to or after his imprisonment. Several times I took the same walk that Dreyfus took that memorable Monday, Oct. 15, 1894, when (never dreaming he would be unable to return home to his family for the next 5 years) he emerged from his apartment at 6 Avenue du Trocadero (now Avenue du President Wilson), passed through the Place d'Alma, crossed the River Seine over Alma Bridge, and strolled to army headquarters located on Rue Saint-Dominique, where he suddenly found himself placed under arrest.

I received special permission to enter the Ecole Militaire, and I walked through both the Cour Morland, site of Dreyfus's degradation ceremony in 1894, and the Cour Jardin, where the rehabilitation ceremony took place in 1906.

Alfred Dreyfus and his wife, son and daughter are buried in a vault underneath the family's tomb in Montparnasse Cemetery. From inscriptions on the tomb we learn, incredibly, that Alfred Dreyfus's daughter, Jeanne, lived until Apr. 30, 1981!

