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## Mata Hari Was Framed, Files Show

**T**he cynical betrayal of spies by their governments, so vividly depicted in the fiction of John Le Carre, is not the product of the Cold War. Sixty-eight years ago, the archetypal temptress, Mata Hari, was framed and executed by the only country for which she spied.

Mata Hari, the woman whose name became a synonym for the spy who worms military secrets out of unwary sex partners, innocent?

That's right. French military files, supposedly sealed in 1917 for 100 years, reveal that Mata Hari was not a German spy but a free-lance agent who committed espionage only once—for the French. The files of her secret trial were opened last year to American journalist Russell Warren Howe.

Historians have accepted for years the French government's charge that Mata Hari (a Dutch woman born Margaretha Geertruida Zelle) cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers in World War I by selling the Germans information she had wheedled out of French and British officers. The investigative and judicial file—497 items, mostly handwritten notes—was sealed after her execution in 1917. Here's what Howe learned from the dossier:

- Mata Hari's only espionage effort was in Madrid, and she was working for the French. She seduced a German military attache there and spent three afternoons in bed with him. But the only information she got was stale or inaccurate.
- She did accept money from German intelligence. But all she ever gave in return were newspaper re-

ports and gossip intended to get the military attache to talk during their dalliance in Madrid. This pump-priming was hardly worthy of eight criminal charges of espionage, for which she was shot.

- At her secret trial, the French refused to let Mata Hari call two witnesses who could have proved her not guilty. Why? France was rife with antiforeign sentiment and had recently suffered appalling losses due to inept generals. A scapegoat was needed, and a foreigner was the perfect setup.

- Mata Hari's frame-up was deliberately abetted by the Germans, who thought she had cheated them. (She considered the payment her just due as compensation for property the Germans had seized early in the war.) So they sent messages—in a code they knew the French had broken—suggesting that Mata Hari was one of their spies. French intelligence doctored the intercepts to make her appear even guiltier.

- The French lured Mata Hari into espionage with promises of high pay if she could seduce the German general commanding occupation forces in Belgium. She needed money for her lover, a 21-year-old Russian captain threatened with blindness from a mustard gas attack.

Howe was shown the Mata Hari files at the Chateau de Vincennes, the very place where the 41-year-old "spy" was executed by firing squad. He was allowed to take notes on the material in the file, he told our associate Les Whitten, but was permitted to photocopy only some letters written by Mata Hari and some photographs. Howe's book, "Mata Hari—The True Story," will be published next year.