

**Picquart, Marie-George**  
**September 6, 1854 – January 19, 1914**

He was considered a young and brilliant officer, of Alsatian origin, known as a hard worker with a clear intellect. Picquart studied in Colmar for the French Army at Saint-Cyr in Alsace after the Germans annexation in 1871. He was bilingual in French and German and proficient in several other languages. In 1878, before entering the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre he fought with the Papal Zouaves in Algeria. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel as an Intelligence officer in April 1896, and was the youngest officer of that grade in the army.

During the Dreyfus trial, Picquart, then a Major, was ordered to send an account of the proceedings, in the press and the court martial to the War Minister and to the Chief of Staff. On July 1, 1895, not long after the conviction of Dreyfus, Picquart was appointed to succeed Colonel Sandherr as head of the Section of Statistics.

After taking over at the Section of Statistics, Picquart reorganized the workings of the intelligence service. He required in particular that the paper bags acquired via the ordinary track should pass through his hands before being pieced together and filed. These bags continued to show that the leakage of secret information had not ceased since the condemnation of Dreyfus.

When Picquart took over, Boisdeffre, whose opinion about the Dreyfus case was clearly not settled, told Picquart to follow up the case. They had not been able to discover a motive for the treason; there was therefore every reason for continuing the research to "strengthen the dossier." Boisdeffre's uneasiness was derived from his recognition that, even with the secret documents, the case against Dreyfus was inconclusive and they must be on the lookout for a counter-attack from the Jews.

With the discovery of the petit bleu, in March of 1896, Picquart's investigations took a fresh turn. At first he did not establish any connection in his own mind between the petit bleu and the bordereau; he simply thought he was on the track of a fresh traitor, and hoped to catch him in the act. The addressee of the petit bleu, Major Esterhazy, would be a difficult suspect, not only due to his treacherous and deceptive nature, but also because he had warning to be cautious, most likely from Major Henry.

However, a fresh incident occurred which strengthened Picquart's suspicions. The French military attaché at Berlin, informed Picquart of a curious conversation he had had with a spy who wavered between France and Germany. The fact was that Germany had never employed Dreyfus; the only French officer who was in Germany's pay was a major of the infantry who had furnished some sheets from lectures held at the Ecole de Tir at Châlons. Coincidentally, Esterhazy had recently been at Châlons, apparently 'copying' papers.

Picquart duly reported his concerns and further investigations to Boisdeffre as well as his other military superiors, who commended him on his discoveries and his discretion, but refused to authorize a taking of Esterhazy's handwriting. Picquart did eventually acquire two of Esterhazy's letters, written in an effort to gain an appointment to the War Office. Upon comparing the handwriting of the letters to that of the bordereau, Picquart discovered that the memorandum that had been used to convict Captain Dreyfus had most likely been the work of Esterhazy. Picquart again reported his suspicions to his superiors, and was again left with his hands tied and an admonition not to pursue any line of inquiry which might reveal the innocence of Dreyfus – to which he replied to Gonse: "It's abominable, General. I will not carry this secret to my grave."

Following that confrontation, and some additional investigations by Picquart, Generals Billot, Gonse and Boisdeffre met with and reprimanded him for his handling of the Esterhazy case. He was not exactly being punished, they said, but he would have to leave the Intelligence service and be reassigned to duty in Tunisia. Picquart, being a loyal and disciplined soldier, had no choice but to obey, despite realizing that he was in fact being punished without any opportunity to defend himself. Before Picquart took up permanent residence in Tunisia, he added a codicil to his will – detailing his investigation of Esterhazy, the existence of secret evidence, and the influence of Generals Boisdeffre and Mercier in the case against the innocent Dreyfus.

During Picquart's absence, Major Hubert Henry immediately took over at the Section of Statistics and began to solidify his and Esterhazy's positions, specifically by starting a file in the Section on Picquart and proceeding to forge new documents that would show him as untrustworthy and even a possible traitor. This 'evidence' along with the allegations of some questionable communication with Leblois, revealed at the first Esterhazy

trial, led to Picquart's arrest. The fact was that Picquart had sought the assistance of his friend and Lawyer Louis Leblois, giving him some details of the secret file, which eventually came to light through the intervention of Scheurer-Kestner. Following his arrest, a Court of Enquiry was held where all the charges against Picquart were presented, the result was a verdict in favor of dismissing him from the Army.

General Billot delayed confirming the findings, keeping Picquart under military control and imprisoned, hoping that Picquart would show some temperance at the trial of Émile Zola. While he was imprisoned at Mont-Valerien, Picquart was told that his military career would not be ruined if he held his tongue, to which he replied that he would try to reconcile his duties as both a soldier and as a witness. Initially, he succeeded in that goal; his testimony was without passion and offered only a limited view of the events that had transpired. At first, he spoke about his early suspicions of Esterhazy and the way in which his superiors had maneuvered him away from investigating him. He spoke little about his examination of the Dreyfus file, its serious lack of direct evidence and of his discovery of the petit bleu. After his testimony, Major Henry accused Picquart of lying regarding his communications with the lawyer Leblois. Picquart responded with an outburst in open court, stating that he would likely be expelled from the army the next day but that he had acted only to 'pursue truth and justice'.

After the trial of Zola, Billot had no choice but to confirm the dismissal of Picquart from the service for grave professional faults. Picquart then challenged Henry to a duel for his insults during the Zola trial. Henry initially refused, claiming he was a dishonorable person, but on March 4<sup>th</sup> he accepted the challenge and was wounded by Picquart.

Soon, Picquart became an ally of sorts to the Dreyfus family and a thorn in the side of the French Army command. Finally they had had enough and by the order of the War Minister Cavaignac, Picquart was again arrested and eventually would be convicted for communicating security matters along with his lawyer Leblois.

Picquart and Leblois finally got their day in the criminal court in June of 1899. In light of other events that effectively removed the case against him, Picquart, who had spent 384 days in prison, was released, the court finding that there was no case against him. The French government exonerated Picquart in 1906 by a special law that promoted him to the rank

of Brigadier General effective from 1903. Some months later, when Clemenceau succeeded Sarrien as Prime Minister, he appointed Picquart as his Minister of War. Picquart served as best he could but was unable to live down his association with the Affair. In 1914 he was thrown from his horse and later died from his injuries. His obituary in the New York Times described him as "The Famous Defender of Dreyfus".