D’Ormescheville’s preliminary investigation

Nov 7  D’Ormescheville opens his preliminary investigation. Guided by Du Paty, he hears evidence both from the graphologists and 20 fellow-officers of Dreyfus, but who are unsympathetic towards him. None of them is confronted with the accused.92

Nov 14–29  D’Ormescheville interrogates Dreyfus 12 times, repeating questions that Du Paty had already put to him, but does not uncover any fresh information.93

Nov 19  Guénée’s second report on the private life of Dreyfus is handed to d’Ormescheville. It contradicts the police report.94 (v. 9 Nov 1894)

Dec 3  D’Ormescheville submits his report, written in collaboration with Du Paty, to Saussier. It recommends that Dreyfus should be court-martialled on the following grounds: the bordereau, ‘an unsigned and undated letter’ which indicates that confidential military documents were delivered to a foreign agent; the negative evidence of Dreyfus’ fellow officers; his knowledge of several languages, especially German.

D’Ormescheville ignores the reports of graphologists Gobert and Pelletier, which are favourable to Dreyfus, and insists on using Bertillon’s unfavourable report.95

The Secret Dossier (November–December 1894)

Since d’Ormescheville’s investigation is proceeding slowly, Sandherr instructs his officers at the Section de Statistique to collect any espionage-related documents from their archives that could be used against Dreyfus. He eventually selects four:

(a) Schwartzkoppen’s fragmented memorandum to the General Staff in Berlin, ‘Doubt … Proof’ (v. 22 July 1894), about a French officer offering his services as an agent.

(b) Schwartzkoppen’s letter to Panizzardi, Ce canaille de D. (v. 16 Apr 1894)

(c) The Davignon letter, known also as la lettre des appels, sent to Schwartzkoppen by Panizzardi. (v. 16 Feb 1894)

(d) Two reports fabricated by Guénée: in October 1894 Guénée inserted two falsified passages into his existing reports on information received from Val Carlos regarding the German, Italian and Spanish military attachés. (v. 28 & 30 March 1894) These interpolations are fabricated statements attributed to Val Carlos. They relate to the existence of a treacherous officer at the Ministry of War. They read:

Be sure to tell Major Henry on my behalf (and be may repeat it to the Colonel [Sandherr]) that there is reason to intensify surveillance at the Ministry of War, since it emerges from my last conversation with Captain von Süßkind96 that the German attachés have an officer on the General Staff who is keeping them admirably well informed. Find him, Guénée; if I knew his name, I would tell you …
... And yet someone in the Ministry of War, quite certainly an attaché, has warned the German military attachés ... So that is further proof that you have one or several wolves in your sheep pen ... Find him, I cannot repeat it often enough for I am certain of the fact ...  

Du Paty's commentary

In early December Sandherr gives three of the Secret Dossier documents (a, b and c above) to Du Paty. He replaces Guénée's fabricated material (d) with a note that Val Carlos has recently confirmed to an officer [Henry] in the Section de Statistique – repeating his warnings of spring 1894 concerning a French officer who is Schwartzkoppen's agent. Sandherr asks Du Paty to prepare a commentary on the Secret Dossier to demonstrate its connection to Dreyfus. Sandherr submits the commentary to Mercier. (v. 17 Jan 1895)

Early Dec

Esterhazy tells Weil that he believes Dreyfus to be innocent but that his innocence will not prevent him from being convicted. He adds that the reason for his view is France's antisemitism.

Dec 4

Saussier issues the order for Dreyfus to be court-martialled.

Dreyfus is permitted to contact his family for the first time since his arrest.

Dec 5

Dreyfus is given permission to write to his wife, also for the first time:

I will not describe for you all that I have suffered ... But I place my hope in God and in justice. The truth is bound to come to light in the end. My conscience is quiet and at peace; without reproach ...

I have been devasted, totally crushed in my dark prison, alone with my thoughts. I have bad moments of utter madness, even raving, but my conscience guided me, saying 'Hold your head high and look the world in the face ...' I embrace you a thousand times ... my darling Lucie. A thousand kisses to the children. I dare not say more: tears come to my eyes when I think of them.

Demange familiarizes himself with the Dreyfus file. Surprised by the weakness of the charges, he tells Mathieu: 'If Captain Dreyfus were not a Jew, he would not be in Cherche-Midi ... It is an abomination. Never have I seen such a file ... If justice is done, your brother will be acquitted.' Demange visits the prisoner and agrees to defend him.

Dec 11–19

The national press is impatient with the manner in which Mercier is handling the Dreyfus case. On 13 December Cassagnac writes in L'Autorité: 'If Dreyfus is acquitted, the Minister falls ... But if Dreyfus is convicted ... Mercier will benefit from the trial, a great man and the saviour of the country.' On 19 December, the opening day of the court martial, an article in Le Figaro claims: 'If through some extraordinary circumstances he [Mercier] has been deceived, he will forthwith become a wretch, a traitor, a man of infamy deserving of prison.'