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## Was she really a spy?

100 years ago Sunday, France executed the mysterious and beautiful Mata Hari for spying

**Q** Who was Mata Hari? A Mata Hari was born Margaretha Geertruida Zelle to a prosperous family in 1876. When Margaretha was a teenager, her father, a hat seller, lost his fortune and left the family. Then her mother died when Margaretha was 15, and she was sent away to live with relatives. She married, at 18, an officer in the East Indies Army who was almost twice her age. It was abusive, and she wrote that he "came close to murdering me with the bread knife."

Q How did she gain notoriety?

**A** She left her husband and moved to Paris, leaving her daughter with her ex-husband. She got a job, but also slept with men for pay. But she also began acting and dancing, which is when Margaretha took on the name that would outlive her: Mata Hari. Shamed in the international press as a traitor for her liaisons with German officers during the First World War, she was accused of revealing closely kept secrets about Allied tanks, leading to the deaths of thousands of soldiers.

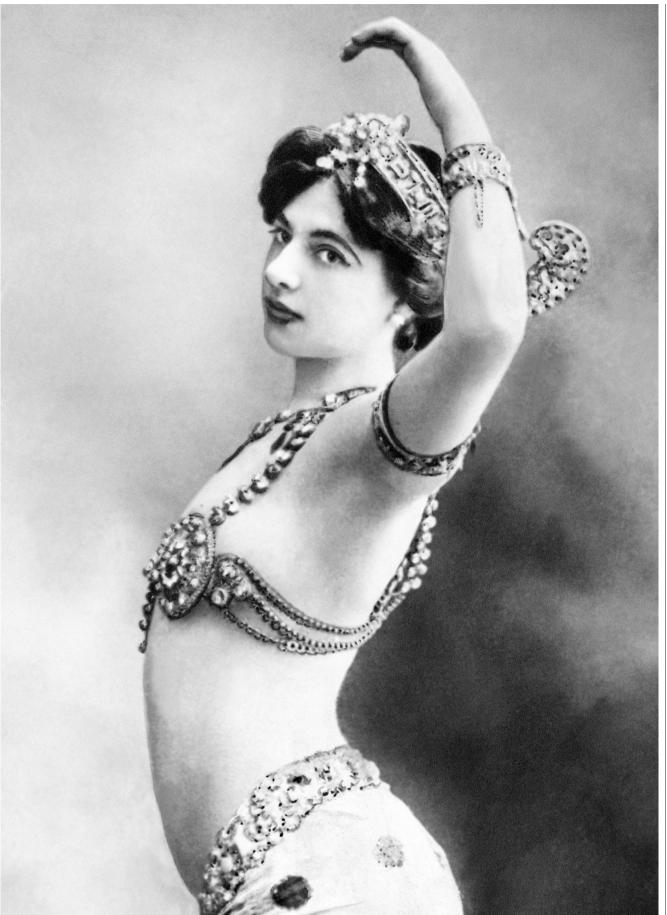
**Q** Were the accusations

justified?A Historians are now debunking many of the myths about Mata Hari that have endured for decades. Earlier this year, trial archives kept confidential by the French were released to the public. And a cache of Mata Hari's personal and family letters were recently published. Taken together, the documents recast the Great War's most notorious spy as a mother who left an abusive marriage, and as a scapegoat for war-torn France looking to distract from heavy casualties on

the front lines.

Q What was her fate? **A** In the early hours of Oct. 15, 1917, Mata Hari was shaken awake in her prison cell. She was driven from her cell in the Saint-Lazare prison to an old fort on the outskirts of Paris. It was just past 5:30 a.m. when she faced her firing squad: 12 French officers with their rifles. Offered a white cloth to wear as a blindfold, Mata Hari refused, saying: "Must I wear that?" Legend has it that as the officers drew their weapons, Mata Hari, 41, blew a kiss to her execu-

tioners. Then they fired. The Washington Post



AFP / GETTY IMAGES / FILES

Mata Hari, an exotic dancer and courtesan in Paris, was accused of spying for Germany during the First World War and was executed. Historians now say she was a scapegoat for France looking to distract from heavy casualties.

VERSUS

# THE U.S. AND YORTH KOREA

He has made it clear to me to continue my diplomatic efforts ... until the first bomb drops."

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, CNN, Oct. 15

I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man.'

Donald Trump, Twitter, Oct. 1.

#### SIGNIFICANT NUMBER

## \$1.2 million

A former Texas juvenile justice department employee acknowledged stealing \$1.2 million worth of fajitas over nine years. Investigators found Gilberto Escaramilla would intercept county-funded food

deliveries and deliver them to his own customers.



### Boyle 'clearly was interested' in combat

*HOSTAGE* Continued from A1

In that same statement, Boyle described himself as a "pilgrim."

It's not clear how they intended to help, or what they were up to when they were kidnapped.

Coleman's friend Sarah Flood suggested to USA Today that she and others had a vague notion that the couple intended to do volunteer work. Flood said she related to Coleman's travel plans because she had just come back from a service trip to

"The idea of going to a country and being helpful is something we absolutely shared," Flood told USA Today. She also said the trip had been Boyle's idea, but Coleman quickly got excited about it, even though she was ready to settle down in the United States and start a family.

Richard Cronin befriended the couple at a hostel in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. In a 2012 blog post, Cronin said Boyle's excitement about Afghanistan convinced him to go.

"I hadn't thought seriously about travelling to Afghanistan until I started talking to Josh," he wrote. "He was planning to travel there with his wife Caitlan very shortly. We started talking about Lawrence of Arabia and the explorer Richard Burton. He asked me if I admired these explorers. Of course I did. 'Wouldn't you like to be like one of them?'

"I asked Josh where he wanted to go in Afghanistan and he replied 'All over,' " Cronin continued. "He had also said it was safe provided you didn't go to a region where there were foreign troops and the Taliban, namely the

Boyle's fascination with the Middle East and Central Asia was more than a decade in the making.

After the 9/11 attacks, Boyle became consumed by questions of terrorism and Islam, studying up on the issue and learning Arabic. A few years later, he got involved in an effort to get Canadian-born Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr released. Boyle briefly married Khadr's sister Zaynab. The patriarch of the Khadr family was killed in 2003, along with al-Qaida and Taliban members, in a shootout with Pakistani security forces near the Afghanistan border.

Boyle's associations with the family led some U.S. intelligence officials to speculate that the visit to Afghanistan may have been part of a larger effort to link up with Taliban-affiliated militants.

'I can't say that (he was ever al-Qaida,)" said one former U.S. intelligence official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "He was never a fighter on the battlefield. But my belief is that he clearly was interested in getting

U.S. authorities have denied that Boyle had any ties to terror.

His "first concern in life has always been helping others," Alex Edwards, a friend of Boyle's since 2002, told Philadelphia magazine. "If things were different, and I was the one being held hostage, Josh wouldn't rest until I was free," says Alex. "He'd stage sit-ins. He'd put up posters. He'd dedicate his life to it. That's just who he is." The Washington Post, with files

from The Canadian Press