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Documents on Prisoners of War

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DOCUMENT NO. 10

DECREE OF 16 SEPTEMBER 1792 OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONCERNING THE EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS OF WAR

SOURCE
1 DeClercq 219

NOTE

Nowhere was the egalitarianism of the French Revolution better demonstrated than in this Decree which terminated, as far as revolutionary France was concerned, the practice common to prisoner-of-war exchange agreements of evaluating officers and noncommissioned officers as equal to a specified number of enlisted men. (See, for example, Article First of the 1813 Cartel between Great Britain and the United States, DOCUMENT NO. 14.) This Decree was reenacted on 25 May 1793 in a greatly enlarged form by the successor legislative body, the National Convention (DOCUMENT NO. 11).

TEXT

The National Assembly,

Considering the necessity of being able to exchange prisoners of war as promptly as possible, and to respond with the utmost alacrity on behalf of those of our brothers-in-arms who, in fighting for the nation, have fallen into the hands of the enemy;

Considering that the basis upon which the executive power or the generals of the army enter into treaties, conventions, or agreements ought to be founded upon the principles of liberty and equality;

Decrees as the principle for the exchange of prisoners of war:

1. There shall be no monetary table for exchange, according to different grades, except in terms relative to the corresponding grades in the enemy armies.

2. There shall be no table of exchange under which an officer or non-commissioned officer, of whatever grade he may be, is to be exchanged against a greater number of individuals of lower grade.

3. The common basis for the exchange of prisoners of war, which no modification may alter, shall be to exchange man for man, grade for grade.