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Documents on Prisoners of War

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DOCUMENT NO. 20

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROCLAMATION OF GENERAL
GUILLAUME H. DUFOUR DURING THE SWISS CIVIL WAR OF 1847,
THE WAR OF THE SONDERBUND
(Berne, 4 and 5 November 1847)**

SOURCE

DuFour, Campagne du Sonderbund 183 (1876)

NOTE

A festering dispute between the so-called "liberal" cantons of Switzerland and those which were strongly Catholic over the problem of freedom of religion culminated in the establishment by a number of Catholic cantons, in December 1845, of a separatist confederation, titled the Sonderbund. In July 1847, after it was certain that 12 of the 22 cantons were controlled by the liberals, the Swiss Diet met and declared the Sonderbund unlawful and ordered it dissolved. The cantons composing the Sonderbund decided to oppose this action with force and a civil war resulted. General Guillaume H. Dufour was elected commander-in-chief of the army of the central government (the first of four times that he was so elected) and in that capacity he issued the recommendations to his division commanders (4 November 1847) and the proclamation to his troops (5 November 1847) which appear below. Hostilities ended shortly thereafter with the complete defeat of the Sonderbund armed forces. Subsequently, General Dufour joined Henri Dunant in the work which resulted in the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the trail-breaking 1864 Geneva Convention (DOCUMENT NO. 24).

EXTRACTS

Recommendations to the division commanders with respect to the conduct to adopt toward the inhabitants and soldiers of the Sonderbund (4 November 1847):

Disarm the prisoners of war, but do them no harm and do not insult them. On the contrary, treat them as well as possible so as to set them right. Allow them to return home if they promise, on their honor, to put aside their uniforms and not to take up arms again.

Proclamation to the troops (5 November 1847):

Soldiers! It is essential to come out of this struggle not only victorious, but also without shame. It must be possible to say of you: They fought valiantly when they had to do so, but they have shown themselves to be humane and generous.

I place under your protection the children, the women, the elderly, and the priests. Anyone who strikes a noncombattant dishonors and soils our flag. The prisoners of war, and above all the wounded, deserve your respect and your compassion, all the more because you have often been in the same camps with them.