

International Law Studies—Volume 60

Documents on Prisoners of War

Howard S. Levie (Editor)

The thoughts and opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of the U.S. Government,
the U.S. Department of the Navy or the Naval War College.

DOCUMENT NO. 28

**1899 HAGUE CONVENTION II WITH RESPECT TO THE LAWS AND
CUSTOMS OF WAR ON LAND (With Annexed Regulations)
(29 July 1899)**

SOURCES

32 Stat. 1803
1 Bevans 247
91 BFSP 988
1 AJIL Supp. 129

NOTE

On 21 August 1898 the Foreign Minister of Russia surprised the members of the diplomatic corps in St. Petersburg by handing each of them an Imperial Rescript proposing an international conference to consider ways for ending the armament competition. While the conference which met at The Hague on 18 May 1899 as a result of this proposal failed completely to accomplish the major purpose which had been specified by Tsar Nicholas II in convening it, it did succeed in drafting several conventions, including the present one, a revision of the 1874 Declaration of Brussels (DOCUMENT NO. 27), which were acceptable to and were ratified by most of the governments of the then world community. All of the conventions drafted by this conference were signed on 29 July 1899.

EXTRACTS

PREAMBLE:

Until a more complete code of the laws of war is issued, the High Contracting Parties think it right to declare that in cases not included in the Regulations adopted by them, populations and belligerents remain under the protection and empire of the principles of international law, as they result from the usages established between civilized nations, from the laws of humanity, and the requirements of the public conscience;

CONVENTION:

ARTICLE I.

The High Contracting Parties shall issue instructions to their armed land forces, which shall be in conformity with the "Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land" annexed to the present Convention.

REGULATIONS:

REGULATIONS RESPECTING THE LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF WAR ON LAND.

SECTION I. — ON BELLIGERENTS.

CHAPTER I. — *On the Qualifications of Belligerents.*

ARTICLE I.

The laws, rights, and duties of war apply not only to armies, but also to militia and volunteer corps, fulfilling the following conditions:

1. To be commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates;
2. To have a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance;
3. To carry arms openly; and
4. To conduct their operations in accordance with the laws of war.

In countries where militia or volunteer corps constitute the army, or form part of it, they are included under the denomination "army."

ARTICLE II.

The population of a territory which has not been occupied who, on the enemy's approach, spontaneously take up arms to resist the invading troops without having time to organize themselves in accordance with Article I, shall be regarded a belligerent, if they respect the laws and customs of war.

ARTICLE III.

The armed forces of the belligerent parties may consist of combatants and non-combatants. In case of capture by the enemy both have a right to be treated as prisoners of war.

CHAPTER II. — *On Prisoners of War.*

ARTICLE IV.

Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not in that of the individuals or corps who captured them.

They must be humanely treated.

All their personal belongings, except arms, horses, and military papers remain their property.

ARTICLE V.

Prisoners of war may be interned in a town, fortress, camp, or any other locality, and bound not to go beyond certain fixed limits; but they can only be confined as an indispensable measure of safety.

ARTICLE VI.

The State may utilize the labor of prisoners of war according to their rank and aptitude. Their tasks shall not be excessive, and shall have nothing to do with the military operations.

Prisoners may be authorized to work for the Public Service, for private persons, or on their own account.

Work done for the State shall be paid according to the tariffs in force for soldiers of the national army employed on similar tasks.

When the work is for other branches of the Public Service or for private persons, the conditions shall be settled in agreement with the military authorities.

The wages of the prisoners shall go towards improving their position, and the balance shall be paid them at the time of their release, after deducting the cost of their maintenance.

ARTICLE VII.

The Government into whose hands prisoners of war have fallen is bound to maintain them.

Failing a special agreement between the belligerents, prisoners of war shall be treated as regards food, quarters, and clothing, on the same footing as the troops of the Government which has captured them.

ARTICLE VIII.

Prisoners of war shall be subject to the laws, regulations, and orders in force in the army of the State into whose hands they have fallen.

Any act of insubordination warrants the adoption, as regards them, of such measures of severity as may be necessary.

Escaped prisoners, recaptured before they have succeeded in rejoining their army, or before quitting the territory occupied by the army that captured them, are liable to disciplinary punishment.

Prisoners who, after succeeding in escaping are again taken prisoners, are not liable to any punishment for the previous flight.

ARTICLE IX.

Every prisoner of war, if questioned, is bound to declare his true name and rank, and if he disregards this rule, he is liable to a curtailment of the advantages accorded to the prisoners of war of his class.

ARTICLE X.

Prisoners of war may be set at liberty on parole if the laws of their country authorize it, and, in such a case, they are bound, on their personal honour, scrupulously to fulfill, both as regards their own Government and the Government by whom they were made prisoners, the engagements they have contracted.

In such cases, their own Government shall not require of nor accept from them any service incompatible with the parole given.

ARTICLE XI.

A prisoner of war can not be forced to accept his liberty on parole; similarly the hostile Government is not obliged to assent to the prisoner's request to be set at liberty on parole.

ARTICLE XII.

Any prisoner of war, who is liberated on parole and recaptured, bearing arms against the Government to whom he had pledged his honor, or against the allies of that Government, forfeits his right to be treated as a prisoner of war, and can be brought before the Courts.

ARTICLE XIII.

Individuals who follow an army without directly belonging to it, such as newspaper correspondents and reporters, sutlers, contractors, who fall into the enemy's hands, and whom the latter think fit to detain, have a right to be treated as prisoners of war, provided they can produce a certificate from the military authorities of the army they were accompanying.

ARTICLE XIV.

A Bureau for information relative to prisoners of war is instituted, on the commencement of hostilities, in each of the belligerent States, and, when necessary, in the neutral countries on whose territory belligerents have been received. This Bureau is intended to answer all inquiries about prisoners of war, and is furnished by the various services concerned with all the necessary information to enable it to keep an individual return for each prisoner of war. It is kept informed of internments and changes, as well as of admissions into hospital and deaths.

It is the duty of the Information Bureau to receive and collect all objects of personal use, valuables, letters, &c., found on the battlefields or left by prisoners who have died in hospital or ambulance, and to transmit them to those interested.

ARTICLE XV.

Relief Societies for prisoners of war, which are regularly constituted in accordance with the law of the country with the object of serving as the intermediary for charity, shall receive from the belligerents for themselves and their duly accredited agents every facility, within the bounds of military requirements and Administrative Regulations, for the effective accomplishment of their humane task. Delegates of these Societies may be admitted to the places of internment for the distribution of relief, as also to the halting places of repatriated prisoners, if furnished with a personal permit by the military authorities, and on giving an engagement in writing to comply with all their Regulations for order and police.

ARTICLE XVI.

The Information Bureau shall have the privilege of free postage. Letters, money orders, and valuables, as well as postal parcels destined for the prisoners of war or dispatched by them, shall be free of all postal duties both in the countries of origin and destination, as well as in those they pass through.

Gifts and relief in kind for prisoners of war shall be admitted free of all duties of entry and others, as well as of payment for carriage by the Government railways.

ARTICLE XVII.

Officers taken prisoners may receive, if necessary, the full pay allowed them in this position by their country's regulations, the amount to be repaid by their Government.

ARTICLE XVIII.

Prisoners of war shall enjoy every latitude in the exercise of their religion, including attendance at their own church services, provided only they comply with the regulations for order and police issued by the military authorities.

ARTICLE XIX.

The wills of prisoners of war are received or drawn up on the same conditions as for soldiers of the National Army.

The same rules shall be observed regarding death certificates, as well as for the burial of prisoners of war, due regard being paid to their grade and rank.

ARTICLE XX.

After the conclusion of peace, the repatriation of prisoners of war shall take place as speedily as possible.

CHAPTER III. — *On the Sick and Wounded.*

ARTICLE XXI.

The obligations of belligerents with regard to the sick and wounded are governed by the Geneva Convention of the 22nd August, 1864, subject to any modifications which may be introduced into it.