

An M.16/17 steel helmet



As mentioned before, the July 1918 directive for camouflaging steel helmets with an applied paint finish may have been partly inspired by this practice being carried out on a small scale where paint was applied to artillery field pieces when the paint was accessible. Although this is very logical, it is hard to find supporting evidence by means of dated period black and white photographs. Paint, like many things, was often in very short supply during the war years. It was thought fit to include this helmet in this volume as the camouflage style was not applicable to the July 1918 directive. It is human nature to copy good ideas and move them forward to a higher level.

If not, we would all still be living in caves! People's nature has not changed over the last hundred years, only technology and circumstances. Improvisation was and still is a very important skill to perfect as a soldier.

The helmet pictured was made by Sachische Emailles u. Parusowitz of Oberschlesien in Saxony, and was stamped with the company mark and size: Si 66. The stamping is now hard to discern on the inner flange because the paint has deteriorated over many years of storage in damp conditions.



The post-May 1917 white chrome tanned leather lining only has two of its three pads left attached to the thin steel lining band. One of the chinstrap retaining pieces is still attached in one piece, while the other was broken and with only half remaining. Close examination of the helmet strap retaining lugs reveals they were 'hammered' over to prevent the loose fitting chinstrap from coming adrift through movement. This is also evident when examining the round headed rivets on the outside of the helmet which, likewise, show signs of flattening.

The post-factory hand applied camouflage paint consisted of three colours. The first colour applied was a yellow/ tan ochre. This was brushed in short thick angular lines at quite regular intervals over the factory field grey finish. Some of the gaps were filled, after this colour had dried, with a thicker viscosity mid-green paint; while a lighter than factory finish field grey, also

of a thick viscosity, filled some of the other gaps. Brush marks are much more evident in the green and light field grey areas than the yellow patches due to the differing paint viscosities. When originally painted, the helmet bore a more defined four colour scheme as intermittent areas were left unpainted bearing the factory field grey finish. General service grime and changing atmospheric conditions have now rendered this less visible, unless closely inspected. Because of the additional coat of camouflage paint, the exterior of this helmet has been preserved in better condition than the interior.

As wartime supply, including that of paint, was of a rather unpredictable nature it is now hard to speculate exactly when this helmet was painted. No brown or black was used for reasons unknown.



A deactivated MG08/15



The attached paper label was tied on by a previous owner about twenty years or so ago.

As the use of machine guns escalated, the British took the advantage by equipping their frontline troops with lightweight Lewis and Hotchkiss guns for ease of manoeuvre. The Germans saw the value of these weapons, capturing them where possible and training their troops to use them. Although lighter weapons were already in use by the Germans, they were not regarded viable to produce and issue en masse. In 1915 work started

on designing a suitable lighter machine gun from the standard Maxim action that troops were already familiar with. This new weapon was designated the MG08/15, which was a lightened, modern version of the older MG08 heavy machine gun. The receiver was now stepped and lightened, a butt and pistol grip trigger system was fitted; and a magazine bracket, bi-pod and shoulder strap were also added. The water-cooled barrel

jacket was retained, but reduced in size. Seven companies produced this weapon from late 1916 onwards. The first guns produced were issued to troops fighting in the Verdun sector early in 1917.

As time was needed to produce and issue these weapons, they were quite coveted by regiments receiving the first batches. Most early produced guns were regimentally marked

to prevent loss to other units in close proximity in the field. As the production and issue escalated, towards the end of 1918, it was deemed not necessary to regimentally mark them anymore. MG08 production carried on as normal but they were retained for fixed positions on the old style sled mount. The initial MG08 mobile expedient 'trench mounts' were not used as much after large numbers of the MG08/15s were issued.