



The Ordnance Tan Helmet Debate

One of the more interesting debates among helmet collectors is one which centers on the discussion of "ordnance tan" colored German helmets. These helmets are different in almost all respects from the typical field-repainted or camouflaged German helmet of World War II. The debate regarding these helmets centers on whether or not they were wartime produced, or if they are in reality surplus helmets repainted by Czechoslovakia in the late 1940's or early 1950's. While these "ordnance tan" helmets can be found in the usual M1935, M1940, and M1942 varieties, they are most often encountered in the M1940 and M1942 models. It has also been stated by some collectors that World War I model M1917 and M1918 helmets also exist in this tan colored paint.

The configuration of these helmets is unique in several respects from other German helmets of World War II. These tan helmets feature a smooth finished paint inside and out and are fitted with mid- to late-war dated M1931 liner bands and chinstraps. Not one found in original condition bears a dome stamp in the crown or decal insignia on the sides. The color of the paint finish has been described as "ordnance tan" as it is similar, yet not exactly identical, to German wartime paint used on field equipment and armored vehicles. In virtually every case, these helmets are found in unissued condition giving the impression that they were never used in

combat. All of the parts, from liner rivets to chinstraps, are German manufactured wartime originals that have never been used.

Helmets of this type first began appearing on the collecting market in the 1980's. Many gun and military shows featured these unissued helmets as "newly discovered" camouflage helmets straight from a foreign warehouse. The premise was that they had been found in a long lost shipment of late-war factory produced camouflage helmets destined for the beleaguered troops of the Wehrmacht. The assumption has always been that these helmets were intended for either Army or Luftwaffe troops fighting on the South-Eastern part of the Russian front in 1944-45 (Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia). Other collectors claimed that these helmets were intended for German troops fighting in Italy in 1944, while some also suggested that they were manufactured for men fighting in Rommel's Afrika Korps in 1943. Others speculated that they were German produced helmets intended for Axis allies such as Romania. Hundreds of these "ordnance tan" helmets flooded the market to the point that some well known military auction houses even featured these helmets for direct sale at a price around \$250 each.

Because hundreds of these helmets simply appeared overnight in the militaria market place, some collectors began to wonder about their true origin.

So many different hypotheses had been proposed that some collectors began to question the origin of these helmets. Where these in fact late-war camouflaged helmets that never made it to their intended destination? Or were they part of some elaborate reproduction scheme hatched somewhere in the US or Europe? Why had helmets of this kind never been encountered prior to the 1980's? Could there really be warehouses filled with unissued World War II German equipment somewhere in Europe? Questions such as these gave way to increased debate about the origin of these helmets. The debate continues today more than 20 years since these helmets first appeared.

This article summarizes the comments regarding these helmets as submitted to German-Helmets.com by email over the last three years. The information presented here is designed to help collectors make up their own minds regarding these oddly configured helmets. Regardless of where one might collect, there tends to be continued debate about the true origins of these helmets. No doubt the debate will continue for many more years.

Opposing Opinions: Reasons Against Wartime Origin

Individual collectors who oppose the notion that these "ordnance tan" helmets are wartime produced originals often cite their evidence based on the physical characteristics of these helmets. In addition the absence



of a thorough discussion of these helmets in reference books deemed authoritative and accurate (such as Ludwig Baer's *History of the German Steel Helmet*) often gives rise to speculation that these helmets are not wartime originals. If they were original, why have they not been identified and discussed in detail just like other original helmets written about and documented in well respected literature? Before we discuss this further, let us first examine the physical characteristics of these helmets from the perspective of those who oppose the wartime origin theory.

Paint:

The paint on these helmets is very different from that found on wartime produced German helmets. German helmets produced in 1943 and 1944 were factory painted in field-gray or blue-gray colors based on the branch of service for which they were intended. Wartime paint finishes included a textured outer surface designed to reduce glare and improve concealment. These aspects are fully documented in wartime production records and are clearly evident from the hundreds of original German helmets sold or collected today. The tan helmets in question defy these universal paint characteristics by the fact that they have no texture whatsoever on the paint surface. The helmets are smooth finished inside and out. In addition, no records exist that prove that factory produced camouflaged helmets

were ever manufactured by German companies. Most collectors know that camouflaged helmets were done in the field or in rear area supply depots.

Liner Systems:

The liner systems used in these "ordnance tan" helmets consist of the second model zinc plated M1931 liner band. These liners are almost always in mint, unissued condition. The liner bands are consistently dated 1943 or 1944. The makers of the liner bands vary and are not consistent from one helmet to the next. Those who support the fact that these helmets were produced after the war site evidence that large numbers of surplus and unissued liner bands (and other helmet components) were found throughout Europe including countries that fell under German occupation.

Chinstraps:

The chinstraps used on these helmets are typically late-war produced German chinstraps. Many of the chinstraps are RB numbered as one would expect. Like the helmet liners, the chinstraps are unissued.

With these physical characteristics now understood, let us examine why the condition and quality of these "ordnance tan" helmets brings doubt to the fact that they are wartime produced. Because so many of these helmets surfaced in the 1980's, it would seem that some would bear the signs of field combat or general wear. However, this is

not the case. In fact, prior to 1980 no collectors in North America had ever encountered helmets of this type or configuration. No collectors or vendors have ever reported that a veteran acquired example of these helmets has ever been purchased. In addition, vendors claim that these helmets simply were not available prior to the 1980's. This gives rise to speculation that if they were wartime produced, then at least a few examples would have come home in a GI's footlocker. However, once again, this is not the case.

If these helmets are not wartime produced, then what is their origin? Over the last three years German-Helmets.com has received numerous emails from individuals who have shared their perspectives on these helmets. Many of the emails received have stated that all of these helmets originated in Czechoslovakia in the 1980's. Emails from non-collectors have also been received that state that in the 1980's and 1990's helmets of this kind were seen in antique stores and military surplus stores in Prague, Czechoslovakia. At least one email from a Czech citizen stated that the man's father was issued tan painted German helmets as part of his duties in the postwar Czech Army. Are these helmets therefore Czech repainted helmets? Possibly, but one additional hypothesis has been presented by a well-known and established helmet collector. With permission to publish his comments as written below, William Maertz speculates that these helmets are in fact Czech repainted helmets, but ones origi-



nally destined for export to the Egyptian government. The follow statements were supplied to German-Helmets.com in 2002:

Greetings. My name is Bill Maertz. I am writing to you in regard to the postwar repainted tan German helmets. Here is the "real" story behind these helmets. In the very early 1950's, King Faruk of Egypt, after gaining independence from England, wanted to rid his country of all things left-over from colonial rule. This included the military uniforms and the "Tommy tin pots" that his country's troops had been equipped with during WWII. Since the Egyptian economy was at near rock bottom when the British left, Faruk's options were limited, as he could not afford to buy "new" military gear. Thus he turned to Czechoslovakia, where the current government had vast stockpiles of unused German equipment, including helmets. As part of Egypt's order with Czechoslovakia, the WWII German helmets that were to be acquired were to be stripped of the German issue lacquer based paints and repainted in the "new" Egyptian army "sand yellow/brown tan", which used a new flat enamel based paint (like an "epoxy" and virtually impossible to remove with any of today's over-the-counter strippers!). All liners were to be in "unissued" condition, and the slotted washers were to be retained (unlike the Norwegian reissues, where the washers were discarded).

The reasons for this purchase were price, availability, the style of the helmets and their construction, and, one last (and little known) reason, as a "rebuff" of the British. By equipping with German helmets in a color somewhat similar to the WWII German DAK orange/tan, this showed Faruk's resentment of the way the British had governed Egypt and also, of the vast "underground" support the Egyptians felt towards the Germans in WWII. Before this transaction was completed, King Faruk was overthrown in a military coup led by General Nassar of the Egyptian army. He cancelled the deal with Czechoslovakia when Russia (in an attempt to extend it's influence into Egypt and the Suez Canal) offered to equip the Egyptian army for "free" with "new" (left-over WWII Russian helmets and armor) painted in a similar "sand yellow/brown tan". Therefore, the German helmets were "all painted-up and had no place to go"!! They became available on the military collector's market after the fall of the communist "empire" when every former Soviet bloc country was "scrambling" for U.S. dollars. These tan helmets came out first, since they were mostly all in "MINT" condition and "looked military", while the black painted WWII German helmets of the various Czech fire departments went on to serve a few more years fighting fires, before they too became available for collectors. In the past 27 years, I have performed over 36,000 "museum quality" German helmet restorations and I can tell you from experi-

*ence that these tan helmets were not painted by, or for, the Germans during WWII. The type of paint on these helmets did not become available until 1948 in the U.S., nor was it made, or used, in Eastern Europe until the early 1950's. I hope that this has been of some help on the question of these helmets. Feel free to quote from this letter (please credit me as being the source of the information, if you do so) or you may reprint the entire letter and sign my name to it. Thanks!
Bill Maertz*

In a follow-up letter to Mr. Maertz, the webmaster of German-Helmets.com asked several questions regarding the origin of this information. Particular emphasis was placed on obtaining factual information that would support Mr. Maertz's hypothesis. Prior emails from individuals who claimed that the helmets were in fact wartime produced helmets had stated that they were indeed found in a warehouse near Prague, along with numerous items of tropical Luftwaffe clothing and headgear. Some long time collectors claimed that George Peterson, well known collector and dealer, had discovered these helmets and imported them to the US. Some emails received also claimed that SS tropical clothing including hats and uniforms were also found in the Prague warehouse. Can this really be true? From prior conversations it would indeed appear that the "ordnance tan" helmets come from Czechoslovakia. Those that stated the helmets were of German origin claimed that the warehouse was a long-



lost supply depot that had stored material that never made it to the front lines. In addition, several individuals commented that many of the items found in the warehouse also included Czech movie theater stamps and owner's marks. However, no evidence could support the notion that George Peterson had in fact imported the helmets as previously presented.

From the perspective of those who oppose the notion that these helmets are wartime originals, the mere fact that items were found with movie studio marks clearly indicates that the material found in the warehouse had not been "untouched" since the end of the war. This fact supports Mr. Maertz's contention that the items were not wartime manufactured, but rather placed in storage once the contract with Egypt fell through. Perhaps the helmets and the other military items had been stored collectively in this warehouse and taken out from time to time for television and movie studio productions.

As a follow-up to these ideas the webmaster of German-Helmets.com wanted to hear more about what Mr. Maertz had to say about these issues. A second email was written and included a reference to an unnamed individual in Minnesota who claimed that he believed the items were in fact original German issue. Another reference was made of a collector who also claimed he had photographs of these tan helmets in use by Czechs fight-

ing the Soviets during the uprising against the communists following the end of the war. Another question centered on perspectives once shared by Kelly Hicks regarding what he knew of the helmets. Mr. Maertz's polite responses are shown below:

Greetings. Thanks for your reply. As for your questions, here goes:

1. I first met George Peterson in April, 1981 at a show in Michigan. At that time all the "repainted" helmets he was selling at the show, and thru his "Collector's Armory", were 100% Norwegian reissues. I never saw him with any of these Czech repaints in the early 80's (not that he didn't have them, but I never saw any).

2. I have no knowledge of "who" first found the helmets or arranged for the purchases that resulted. The first time I came into contact with these helmets was in the summer of 1989, at the Hillside Military Show, when an airline pilot (and militaria dealer) brought ten (10) into the show that he had picked-up in Prague. His was the first telling of the story that these were WWII German issue. I inspected all ten helmets and reached the opposite opinion that they were NOT WWII German issue. Virtually no one agreed with me and the pilot sold all ten for \$225.00 each!! Ah, a fool and his money are soon parted!!

3. Who is the Minnesota collector? I know Bob Johnson (a dealer in the twin cities) has al-

ways expressed an opinion that these were German issue, but he is the only one in Minnesota that I know who still believes this. As for the "period" photos of these helmets being worn in the spring of 1945, when the Czechs rebelled and slaughtered tens of thousands of German civilians living in the country, I have never seen any such photos. Unlike the Warsaw uprising in Poland where the Poles wore captured German helmets, the Czechs wore the tan/brown bowl-domed (M-38?) Czech helmets with the "double white cross" painted on the front (as shown in period photos). Also, unless the photos were in COLOR, how would this collector know if what he was looking at is tan, or, just field green?!!

4. Since the Egyptian repaints were put back into storage after the deal fell thru, it would not surprise me in the slightest that they were stored right next to untampered-with WWII German issued helmets and clothing. As far as the tropical kit that Hicks says may or may not have been with the helmets, he might be right. Remember, all helmets were kept at Wehrmacht clothing depots, so summer and winter gear would have been there too. The Germans, when they fled from Czechoslovakia in the spring of '45, took what weapons, ammo, armor, vehicles that they could, but they left behind food, clothing, helmets and medicines.

You are right that the color of these helmets are similar to the standard mix of camo and equip-



ment paint (lacquers), but the helmets are painted in an "epoxy" type enamel, something the Germans never used (since it is a postwar product). Also, almost all of the leather liners and steel bands are LATE war, with 1943 and 1944 dates. There was really no need for a large scale repainting (inside and out) for a tropical tan that late in the war, as the Germans were finished in north Africa, and, those stationed in the Med. theatre of operations had already painted their own helmets the color of the locale they were in. In fact, more and more Germans were being transferred to the Eastern Front, where the need of "mass painted" tan helmets was nil! Note too, the total lack of an "Abgenommen" ink stamp in any of these helmets. Had these been done "en mass" by, or for, the Germans, the various clothing depots would have restamped them when they were returned in their "new" color for eventual issue to the troops. Lastly, by 1940, the Germans had learned that they needed to add aluminum oxide or fine silica (sand) to the exterior of all the reissued M-35 and all the issued M-40 and M-42 helmets so they didn't "shine-up" in the field. None of these postwar repaints have any "roughening agent" mixed in with the exterior paint, something that the Germans would NEVER have OMITTED in a mass repainting!

There ya have it. That's my "take" on these helmets. The

Egyptian helmet deal was part of a show on the history of warfare in the Middle East a few years ago on "The History Channel". There was a short movie clip of some Egyptian soldiers wearing German helmets, but you could tell that they were hand-painted and not the ones that were still in "Czechland".

Thanks for your interest!

Bill

In summary, Mr. Maertz's conclusions have been the most plausible to date in summarizing why these helmets may not be wartime produced. With this said, let us now examine the opinions of those who claim the helmets are in fact original and from the period.

Supporting Opinions: Reasons In Favor of Wartime Origin

Several emails have been received over the years from individuals who insist that "ordnance tan" helmets are in fact wartime manufactured German helmets. Their premise is based on several factors which deal specifically with the physical characteristics of the helmets as well as reported photographs of the helmets being worn. Let us first examine the physical characteristics used as counter-points by these collectors.

Paint:

It is interesting to note that both those who support the notion that the helmets are wartime pro-

duced, as well as those who do not, all use the paint characteristics as one of the many facts that support their hypotheses. Those who think the helmets are wartime produced state that the paint is identical to that found on "ordnance tan" painted field equipment common to all German armed forces material produced beginning about 1943.

These collectors claim that the paint is in fact, no different than any other paint used during wartime. The point that the paint is "epoxy" rather than "lacquer" is generally dismissed as non-factual or irrelevant. If accepted as truthful, most collectors tend to suggest that the German's were probably in the process of upgrading their paint formulas in 1943 or 1944. As a result, it would be entirely possible that these helmets would have had "epoxy" paint to begin with. However, these collectors do not address why other helmets, such as those in field-gray or blue-gray, did not receive "epoxy" paints. One would tend to think that if wartime paint was being upgraded to "epoxy," then all helmets manufactured from 1943-1945, regardless of their color, would have been painted with this paint. However, this is not the case.

Liner Systems:

Those that favor the wartime produced hypothesis contest that the liners are standard mid-to late-war examples that fit the typical pattern of those found in other late-war helmets. The fact that the liners are dated 1943 or 1944 does not make much of an



impact on these collectors. They contend that surplus stocks of helmet liners were probably used to manufacture the helmets which is why there is no consistent sense of "sameness" with all of the dates found.

Chinstraps:

The use of late-war marked chinstraps are felt to be consistent with the concept that the helmets were assembled in 1943 or 1944.

Differences in Helmets Shell Models:

The fact that both World War I and World War II helmets exist in this color is described as proof that surplus helmets were collected and painted for rapid deployment to the Southern Front where German forces needed camouflaged helmets. However, by 1943 the standard helmet produced by German factories was the M1942. One would tend to think that if helmets were factory painted and assembled in 1943 or 1944 that they would be M1942 helmets newly manufactured for this purpose. Even so, most collectors tend to dismiss this observation as not being that relevant.

One of the best email series received from a fellow collector supporting these concepts were those sent in June 2002 by fellow collector and friend Paul Masterson. Paul was able to summarize some excellent comments that supported his opinion as to why these hel-

metals are wartime produced. His comments perhaps best represent those of other collectors who maintain that these tan helmets were manufactured prior to May 1945. Paul's comments have many similarities with the stories regarding the initial discovery of these helmets near Prague. His emails are shown below:

12 June 2002

I acquired many of these helmets personally in Prague, Czechoslovakia over 10 years ago as they were coming out of the Czech film studio, "Statni Film", located in the Prague area, along with bags of original SS camo, and other uniforms including Imperial generals etc, insignia, headgear of all types, flags including "Deutschland Erwache" standards, etc etc all of which were original pre-May 45 manufacture, some insignia items and equipment still factory wrapped.

Interestingly, I also acquired some typical Soviet army pull-over shirts from the studio collection as well. These, however, were copies without completed pockets (flaps only on the outside), etc. with rather crudely constructed shoulder boards. Obviously, original Soviet uniforms were not available since they were in use and under restriction so the studio had to make theatrical copies. These copies reflected any other theatrical property made to look like the real thing from a distance but essentially just a cheap and simple costume.

The helmets, which also included

a few M-16's, were all uniformly complete with late war dated liners, largely pigskin, and RB#d chinstraps (with some exceptions), some still had their factory paper wrapping.

If you have ever seen war films made by this Czech studio you will be amazed to see that all equipment, weapons, vehicles, etc are original. The studio collected a huge stockpile of every imaginable uniform and type of equipment from the captured stores and local factory supplies available at the time.

The theory that the helmets were reconditioned after the war rather than during it was a great debate among collectors when these appeared in the late 80's. However, there is plenty of logical thinking to allay any serious argument that these were intended for use by local East Block military or civil organizations. Although German helmets, among others, were briefly used in Poland and elsewhere for fire helmets (friends of mine there found a cache of black painted paratrooper helmets in a fire house there), they are generally crudely refitted and painted with all manner of liners according to available resources.

I have also seen photos of a sort of Czech militia or police right after the war wearing German helmets and Luftwaffe tropical uniforms. The helmets were as-and not repainted.

The use of German equipment after the war was an expedient and only temporary. The neces-



sity of getting society back up and running precluded the costly and complicated reissue of helmets that is reflected in that batch of tan helmets. Why go through all the stages of stripping, refinishing, refitting with all the German washers and rivets, etc? Particularly the East Block countries were economically ravaged and surely other needs would have taken precedence over helmets. Besides, these helmets reflect a sophistication of production which is just too "German" to be assigned to East Block post-war workmanship.

The color is also correct for late war German equipment and vehicles. It is not typical of any East Block forces.

There are other points to support the wartime reworking of these helmets.

Finally, though, one more argument against post-war use would be the very fact that they are unmistakably German.

The Soviets essentially occupied the area where these helmets were found, and since their policy was a Sovietization of the area and its uniformed forces, that included a redesign of the otherwise nationally influenced local uniforms to reflect Soviet ones, including the introduction of the Soviet M40 helmet for Czech, Hungarian, and other East block forces, it would be an extreme political contradiction to have fascist style German helmets

being reworked and issued to anyone in their sphere of influence.

Just as the Germans banned the wearing of the four-cornered Polish hat during their occupation of Poland, the Soviets too had a low tolerance of those typical symbols of German militarism in the areas they occupied.

I suppose this debate will continue with believers on either side but I am convinced these helmets were refurbished prior to May 45 and intended for use in the Southern areas for which Czechoslovakia, where they were discovered, was a transit and supply point.

Personally, I have yet to hear a truly compelling argument or see other evidence to support the idea that these were post war production. The lack of an undercoat that has been cited could be a result of material shortages and under the wartime conditions an acceptable and perhaps necessary short cut in the process.

In any case, it certainly makes the hobby interesting to approach these dilemmas in the manner of archeology.

Paul Masterson

Following Paul's email the editor of German-Helmets.com wrote back to present some of the counter points generally supported by collectors who think these helmets are post-war assembled. Paul shares some additional information regarding

George Peterson's involvement in the location and purchase of these helmets. Paul's response is shown below:

Thanks for your reply.

I, and anyone else who made the trip to Prague flea markets was getting these helmets before Peterson was in contact with the film studio. I got mine through a contact I made through a US embassy worker who had stumbled onto this source and had no clue what a gold mine he had found. The Czechs too had no clue and would simply up the price of an item with each visit so that the first time an SS flag bearer's bullion bandolier cost \$40. The next time \$60. etc. I acquired 6 altogether, the last cost maybe \$250 as I recall. I got a camo SS panzer wrap around for \$22. And as I mentioned, the only items I acquired that was not original WW2 era production were Soviet style shirts that were poorly made, not perfect mint copies made to regulations. The helmets and other items were coming out in ever larger lots as demand grew with the market becoming aware that this source had been discovered. George came in at the end, after the change of governments and the chain of supply was breaking down as the old communist management in the studio was being replaced. In fact, George had arranged a major deal but when he went to collect his items most had already been stolen and dispersed among the rabid collectors who swarmed into Prague in the aftermath. I don't want to agonize over



this particularly. However, the fact that these are all identically made with all proper fittings, dated, RB#d, of a typical WH color, etc etc implies to me that they were done under the Germans. I still have at least one of these packed away but not really accessible otherwise I would check the date on the liner.

I simply don't accept the argument that Czechs in a post-war situation would spent the time, cost, and effort to make or refurbish helmets precisely in the anal German manner, even if all the parts were there (which given the realities of a post-war East Block country they probably wouldn't have been), particularly if they were only intended to be for second line fire department or civil defense use or as theatrical requisites, and especially if they are attributed to the 1950's and therefore produced under the communists.

I've collected German militaria all my life from my first helmet acquisition in grade school. I lived in Germany for 20 years and have an MA in German and one in History and spent a fair amount of time travelling and collecting in the late 80's and early 90's in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the former GDR so my impression has some foundation in experience and exposure to the systems at play here. I may be wrong of course but, despite the lack of documentation I stand by a historian's adage "the absence of evidence is not

the evidence of absence." I suppose this could apply to either side of the argument but to me the evidence here is more than circumstantial and is not disproved by examples of poor reworks or German helmets heaped up in fire houses in Denmark or elsewhere.

The Romanian order theory sounds plausible enough. At least it would argue the pre-May 45 production side of the debate.

Anyway, it's always fun to split hairs but that leads me to another historian's assessment of debates such as these... "we're learning more and more about less and less".

Best regards, Paul

In addition to Paul's comments on these helmets, one final email from David White captures the general feeling of many collectors who agree with Paul on this subject. David references "enamel" paint in his email, however the premise presented from William Maertz in fact suggested that the paint was "epoxy" in nature. Even so, David's comments are shown below:

I would like to make some comments on your article regarding the Tan painted helmets. I am not arguing the authenticity of these helmets, although I believe the article on your site does not produce enough proof against their authenticity. A number of things are debatable about the article.

Namely the statement that Germans never used a single coat of

enamel paint on there helmets. In my experience and in conversations with experienced collectors all German helmets were painted with single coats of paint without use of primers. As for Enamel paints, they were invented in the early to mid 1930's not post war as suggested by the article.

Nitrocellulose Lacquer paints seem to be found on pre 1940 helmets as can be seen from the subtle satiny finish on most double decal helmets. It appears that most German wartime helmets were painted with enamels. As for their lack of field grey paint under the helmets tan, people who believe these to be original war time helmets say these helmets were factory not field painted for use in tropical theaters of war, not to be issued as the DAK were defeated in 43. Also one experienced collector also state that these tan helmets are to be seen in photographs of Czechoslovakian uprising of 1945, a good 7 or 8 years before these helmets were to have been repainted for Egypt.

I own one of these helmets and purchased it knowing full well of the controversy. Either way I felt the helmet had an interesting history.

Sincerely, David White

Summary

Let us now attempt to assemble a concise summary of the main points presented by both sides of this issue. It is clear, as already stated, that the debate regarding these helmets is likely



to continue. However there are some interesting observations that can be drawn from the discussion regarding these helmets.

The fact that these helmets do not appear in any standard reference texts on German military items is an indication that they are not necessarily thought of as being "original to the period." While many collectors suggest that they are original, it is interesting that none of the older reference books on German helmets comments on them. In addition, many collectors believe that Ludwig Baer is one of the most authoritative researchers on the German helmet.

If so, one has to ask why Baer has not commented on, referenced, or published any information on these helmets.

One would naturally assume that if these tan helmets were used during World War II, then some examples would have surfaced through purchases made directly from US or British veterans. But they have not. One might also speculate that if the helmets were intended for Wehrmacht use in Italy in 1943 or 1944, that some examples would have surfaced prior to the 1980's.

Why then have Italian collectors not encountered them prior to the 1980's?

A third element relates to the much debated chemical make-up of the tan paint. People who have attempted to restore these helmets by modifying or paint stripping them contend that the paint is almost non-removable.



Some collectors claim this photo provides proof that the tan helmets were factory manufactured and worn. This photo (taken in 1943 in Russia) unfortunately does not show the interior of the M1935 and M1940 helmets shown. Others contend that these helmets have simply been field repainted using tan paint. (Courtesy of the Brian L. Davis Collection)

By comparison, these helmet restorers claim that regular German helmet paint is removable and not that difficult to take off a steel shell. If the tan paint was in fact wartime and experimental in nature, then why was it only placed on tan helmets shipped to the Southern Sector? Why was "epoxy" paint not used on all German helmets regardless of color?

A final point has to do with the suggestion that one or more collectors possess photographs that prove these helmets were used during World War II, or at the

very least right at the end during the Czechoslovakian uprising against German troops in 1945.

Unfortunately it seems that these rumors are not able to be substantiated. One collector who claimed that he had these photographs later stated that he no longer could produce them, but swears that he had seen them at

some point in time in his collecting history. If true, it is unfortunate that he can not produce the photos. Many collectors have assumed his claim is real despite the fact that no photographs can be produced. Do they really exist? At this point in time it would appear not.

Photographs that have been produced are generally those that show tan paint on Luftwaffe helmets. Some collectors

claim that these photographs are clearly showing the tan helmets in wear. However, the photographs referred to do not show enough detail to be certain. In addition, they do not show the interior of the helmet which would clearly verify if the paint surface was applied by the factory or not. Time will tell if additional photographs can assist in the dilemma.

The chart on the next page summarizes the main points presented by both sides of the issue. No doubt the debate is likely to continue for many reasons. **GH**



| Summary of Main Points Between Those For and Against Wartime Production Theory | Points in Support of Post-War Production | Counter Points in Favor of Wartime Production |
|--|--|--|
| Paint | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Epoxy in nature unlike any other helmet paint used during the war¹ Lacking in texture as would have been standard in wartime produced helmets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enamel in nature and acceptable for wartime produced helmets No comment on lack of texture |
| Lack of Primer | Inconsistent with wartime standards | Consistent with wartime standards ² |
| Photographs | Seen in post-war Egyptian film footage | Wartime photos prove their use ³ |
| Liner Markings and Dates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proof that they were assembled using surplus parts commonly found in postwar Czechoslovakia⁴ If assembled together during wartime, they would likely have had the same dates or makers (but apparently do not) | Various liner dates simply a fact of late-war production using odds and ends in a rapid production process |
| Helmet Models | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> M1917/18, M1935, M1940, and M1942 models proof that surplus helmets gathered after the war were refurbished If wartime factory produced, the helmets would have been M1942 helmets by 1943 or 1944 | Various helmet models simply a factor of a rushed manufacturing process that pulled from unfinished helmets that could be painted and supplied to Southern Sector troops |
| Dome Stamps | Lack of dome stamps proof that they were not inspected or received | Lack of dome stamps simply a fact of a rushed, late-war assembly process |
| Overall Theory | Produced by Czechoslovakia for supply to Egypt. Contract cancelled in the 1950's and helmets were stored away with other war-time produced items eventually tapped for theater and movie use. | Factory produced by the Germans in a rushed state for deployment to Italy and the Balkans. Helmets lost in shipment or never distributed. Eventually discovered with other original items and used for movie use. Also, possibly produced for the Romanians but never distributed ⁵ . |

¹ Epoxy paint was invented after 1945 and was not used during World War II.

² The concept that German helmets never used primer is actually incorrect based on documented evidence that it was used. Various makers produced primers as researched by Ludwig Baer. However, it is also true that many late-war produced helmets (especially M1942 helmets) never received a primer base as did helmets that were manufactured earlier.

³ Despite claims that photos exist none showing these exact helmets have ever surfaced. The collector who claimed that he had them can no longer substantiate the claim or produce the photos. A few wartime photos do show tan helmets in use, but these are believed to be field repainted helmets and different from those in debate.

⁴ It has been well established that hundreds of original unissued German helmet liners were used in postwar assembled Czechoslovakian fireman's helmets. The fact that M1917/18 helmets could be found in an unpainted, unfinished state in 1943 or 1944 is not addressed by the Counter Point theorists. In fact, Maertz (and others) contend that helmets of this sort would not have been readily available for painting. If so, then they would simply have been shipped to the front lines and painted tan over their field-gray finishes rather than paint stripped and then painted "ordnance tan" in a factory. Especially if "haste" was an issue in getting the helmets to the front.

⁵ A third theory has been presented that suggests that the Romanian Government (under Axis influence) ordered several hundred of these helmets for use with Axis volunteers serving with the Wehrmacht. The theory states that the helmets were shipped through Czechoslovakia but never made their way to Romania in 1944 due to heavy fighting on the Eastern Front. No additional information on this theory has ever surfaced despite this claim.