

MAGYAR FRONT

Vol. XIV, No. 2

Spring 2012

OUR SPECIAL
HELMET ISSUE:

HUNGARIAN
PROTECTIVE
HEADGEAR OF THE
20TH CENTURY



CZINK COLLECTION - PHOTO COLOURED BY ORINCSAY

www.NewFront.ca

A note from the Editor

I am very proud to have worked together with Major Dr. Tamás Baczoni on this issue of the *Magyar Front*. The material featured is very useful, not only to military history enthusiasts, but specifically to those collecting and handling vintage combat helmets.

All collectors know that extensive knowledge and careful examination of every object is very important in determining its value and authenticity – mid 20th Century Hungarian military helmets are a particularly bewildering subject because older stockpiles were mixed with new parts, materiel shortages necessitated that old German helmet shells were pressed into service with the post-WWII Hungarian armed forces, and the passage of time has caused mix-ups of components and the creation of pieces of fantasy.

I recall that back in the 1970s, an American military surplus mail order company offered “genuine Hungarian army helmets” in their catalogue. I can’t imagine how a North American firm would have got their hands on Hungarian surplus during the Cold War, and I don’t recall if they advertised them as being from World War II, however, they turned up in quantity in the early days of mass interest in anything even remotely “German.” Since then, especially with today’s online auctions, these odd, repainted Hungarian helmets, fitted with all sorts of liners (including completely new German style ones), turn up quite regularly. I hope that this issue of the *Magyar Front* will be helpful to anyone trying to figure out exactly what type of helmet that has been sitting on their shelf or that they are about to bid on.

I believe that you all already know of our fellow IHMHPS society member Péter Orincsay, but I would like to take this opportunity to reintroduce him to you as our new IHMHPS Scandinavia Vice-President. Although our regular, paid membership hovers at around fifty people (it varies a little from year to year), we have a great many inquiries from around the world. The fact that we offer so much free information (our past *Magyar Front* issues and our downloads) on our website is a double-edged sword – hundreds of new visitors each month get the benefit of our work, yet they don’t join and become paying members. I’m OK with that, as our mission is one of education, however, to keep on top of all of the questions and inquiries, and to encourage others to take a more active part in the IHMHPS, we need hard-working representatives all over the world.

You have certainly seen Péter Orincsay work in our publication – his meticulously colourized and restored photographs are all gems. He, like so many of our members, is also an exemplary volunteer – always ready to lend a hand. He was born in the town of Värnamo, in Sweden, to Hungarian parents. Growing up, immersed in the stories of his grandparents’ experiences in both World Wars, and his father’s firsthand recollections of the 1956 uprising, his interest in history was forever guaranteed.

He followed the family tradition and finished his military service in the Jämtlands Fältjägar Regiment in Östersund, followed by two tours in the Balkans with the NATO peacekeeping force. Péter’s interest in photography was also something that played a significant role his life. Even as a boy, he documented his everyday life and the people around him, and this interest developed into a full-time occupation over the years. As a brigade photographer in the peacekeeping force, and as a freelance news photographer, his passion for photography took him all over the world.

Settling in Göteborg after years of traveling, Péter married, and temporarily put aside his hobbies and accepted steady governmental employment. It was at this time that he truly discovered his interest in his own historical heritage – the knowledge he gained from his years of experience working with digital photography was focused on the preservation of historical images. Over time, Péter developed many unique photographic digitalizing and colouring techniques, and is constantly restoring old photographs. Péter is a collector of Hungarian military as well.

Keep an eye on his blogs - www.orincsay.com and www.tuzkereszt.com - and feel free to contact him – this knowledgeable and helpful IHMHPS member is always ready to share his passion.

P.Cz.

Our Cover

Another superb colourization by Péter Orincsay - a highly decorated, unidentified colonel from the rapid troops wearing the M1935 aluminum officer’s parade helmet.



MAGYAR FRONT
VOLUME XIV, ISSUE 2
SPRING 2012

Published quarterly by
Peter Czink VRNT, Editor-Designer

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(International Hungarian Military
History Preservation Society)

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Membership in the
International Hungarian Military History
Preservation Society is \$40.00 annually,
and includes the *Magyar Front*.

The original *Magyar Front* was the
weekly newspaper of the Frontline
Fighter’s Association, and was
published from the early 1930s until
the end of the Second World War.

Hungarian Protective Headgear of the 20th Century

by Tamás Baczoni and Peter Czink



Even though the steel helmet is considered an innovation of the First World War, several experimental helmets were tested by European armies in the first decade of the 20th Century, as part of new field-uniform projects, developed after the experiences of the Russo-Japanese War, the Boer War, Balkan Wars, etc. Trench warfare of World War I caused a very high number of head wounds (the head was the first part of the body visible over trench parapets) and artillery fire was also very dangerous, sending shrapnel flying everywhere over the battlefields.

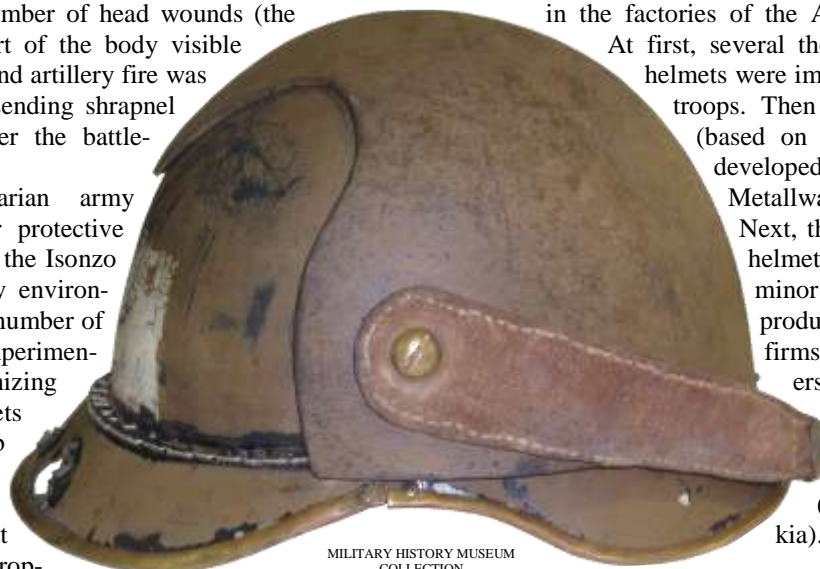
The Austro-Hungarian army saw the necessity for protective headgear first-hand on the Isonzo front, where the rocky environment exacerbated the number of head wounds. After experimentation with modernizing existing dragoon helmets (removal of the comb and installing a heavy steel frontal plate to the helmet body), it was realized that a prop-

erly made steel helmet was needed, as the modified dragoon helmets were impractical, uncomfortable and not suitable for mass distribution. An original example is pictured below.

At that time, in 1916, the German Army was introducing a steel helmet, so the simplest solution was to order helmets from their ally, and/or to produce the German type of helmet in the factories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

At first, several thousands of German M16 helmets were imported and supplied to the troops. Then a domestic helmet type (based on the German model) was developed by the Arthur Krupp Metallwarenfabrik AG Berndorf.

Next, the licence for the German helmet was purchased, and after minor modifications, it was produced by Austro-Hungarian firms. Two helmet manufacturers made them in Hungary: Manfred Weiss in Csepel (part of Budapest), and Scholtz in Mateóc (today Matejovce, Slovakia). The German helmets



MILITARY HISTORY MUSEUM
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MILITARY HISTORY MUSEUM
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Commonly known as the “Berndorfer” - the first Austro-Hungarian made helmets were of similar construction to the German ones. Because of different manufacturing methods, the visor was shaped differently, and ventilation was through the top of the helmet, rather than the sides. It received its name from the location of the factory, where 140,000 units were manufactured. This example from the Military History Museum suffered damage from either shrapnel or a projectile - the entry point can be seen on its upper right side, while the considerable exit hole is on the left side.



Above: German style liner of the helmet at left.

Below: An Austro-Hungarian style Berndorfer liner.



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were left in their original colour and with their original accessories, including the German M91 chinstrap. The German chinstrap was easily lost, however, and since there were no replacement parts, an Austro-Hungarian made canvas chinstrap was issued.

The Austro-Hungarian helmet (officially known as the *Stahlhelm nach österreichischem Muster*) was of similar construction to the German helmet, but with some changes - the visor of the helmet had a different shape, and the ventilation lug was placed on the top of the helmet. This helmet was also known as "Berndorfer" - after the location of the factory, and was produced in a limited quantity of 140,000 pieces, between May and November of 1917. After that, production was ceased and the Berndorf factory changed to production of the German version.

The Austro-Hungarian made German type of helmet (officially known as *Stahlhelm nach deutschem Muster*) was produced with minor modifications - the chinstrap holder was attached differently, as those of both the M16 and M17 German helmets were found to be impractical. The chinstrap holder was riveted directly to the body of the helmet, while the Berndorf factory fixed the chinstrap directly to the helmet's liner band, sparing both rivets and labour. All Austro-Hungarian made helmets were painted field-brown, while the German import helmets were left in their original field-grey colour. It is possible that the field-brown colour was part of the planned new uniform for the army - in 1917-1918 several experiments were made, and different prototype uniforms were evaluated, but the end of the war brought these projects to an end.

After the war, the use of WWI Austro-Hungarian helmets continued in many Central European states. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) used mostly the French Adrian and Italian type helmets. The Czechoslovakians tried to modify the look of their helmets, simply to make them less Austrian in appearance, while the Austrian and Hungarian armies (in Hungary both the Red Army and the Nationalist Army) used their helmets in unaltered form. However, in the 1920s, the Berndorfer helmets were withdrawn from army use and the German type helmet became the standard, not only because the Berndorfer was scarcer, but a peacetime army needed a standard and uniform helmet. In Hungary the World War I helmets were sometimes re-lined and repainted to the new field green colour. It is possible the Manfred Weiss Company also produced World War I type helmets in the 1920s and 1930s, but so far no official records have been found.

In the mid-thirties, the World War I helmet became obsolete, as it was far too heavy and cumbersome, unsuitable

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The large ventilation “lugs” served two purposes - to allow airflow into the helmet, and for the mounting of the frontal armour plate.



CZINK COLLECTION
WEIDEMAN PHOTO

The most obvious differences between the Austro-Hungarian M1917 steel helmet and those produced in Germany was the field brown paint and the linen chin strap.

Also, the rivets holding the fixed chinstrap hardware are located higher than the German versions.

Three strong leather pads, mounted on a metal inner helmet band were backed by linen pillows, stuffed with horse hair or wool.

A cord passes through the painted metal eyelets in each pad to allow for more personal adjustment.



CZINK COLLECTION
WEIDEMAN PHOTO

The only markings found on this example is a handwritten number “37” - ink stamps and other markings can also be found on these helmets.



CZINK COLLECTION
WEIDEMAN PHOTO



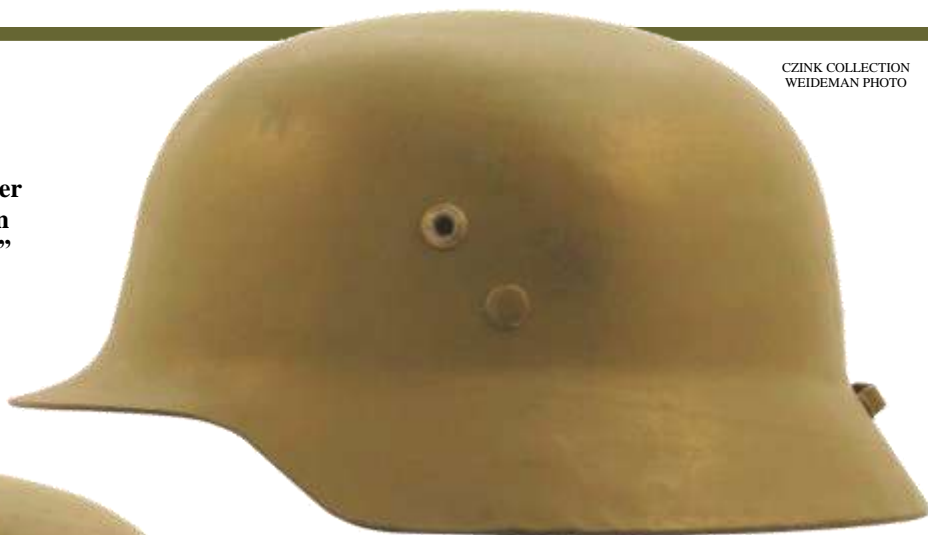
Drawings (originally black and white) from an inter-war Hungarian uniform manual.

The M1917 helmet is shown with its accessories: the frontal armour plate, used primarily by personnel of observation posts, and the linen helmet cover (for softening the lines of the helmet, making it less conspicuous).

This type of helmet was produced in four sizes - 62, 64, 66 and 68. Sometimes these numbers can be found stamped into the inside left of the helmet's neck guard.

Two versions of the linen chinstrap were also pictured - at left with a friction buckle, and at right with a simplified, standard buckle and leather reinforced end.

The M1935 steel helmet.
This example is stamped on the inner
side-guard with a small Hungarian
coat-of-arms and the code "GY66."



**M1935 helmets had a bushing in each
side vent hole, and well-made domed
rivets to hold the liner band in place.**



CZINK COLLECTION / WEIDEMAN PHOTO

**The quality of the M1935 helmet is very
high - note the leather liner (which is backed
by pads) and the strong leather chin strap
with brass buckle. The inner pads could
be adjusted by adding or removing
the stuffing, and the drawstring helped
to make a more personal fit.**

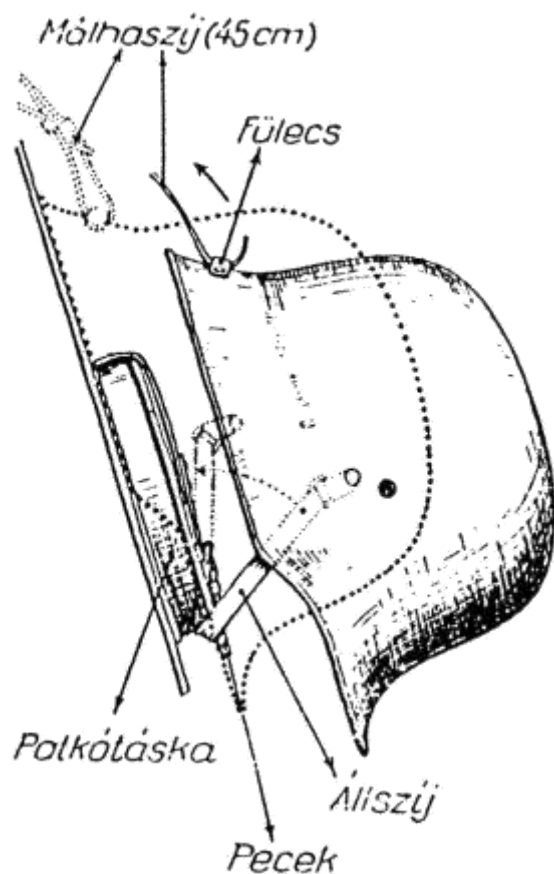
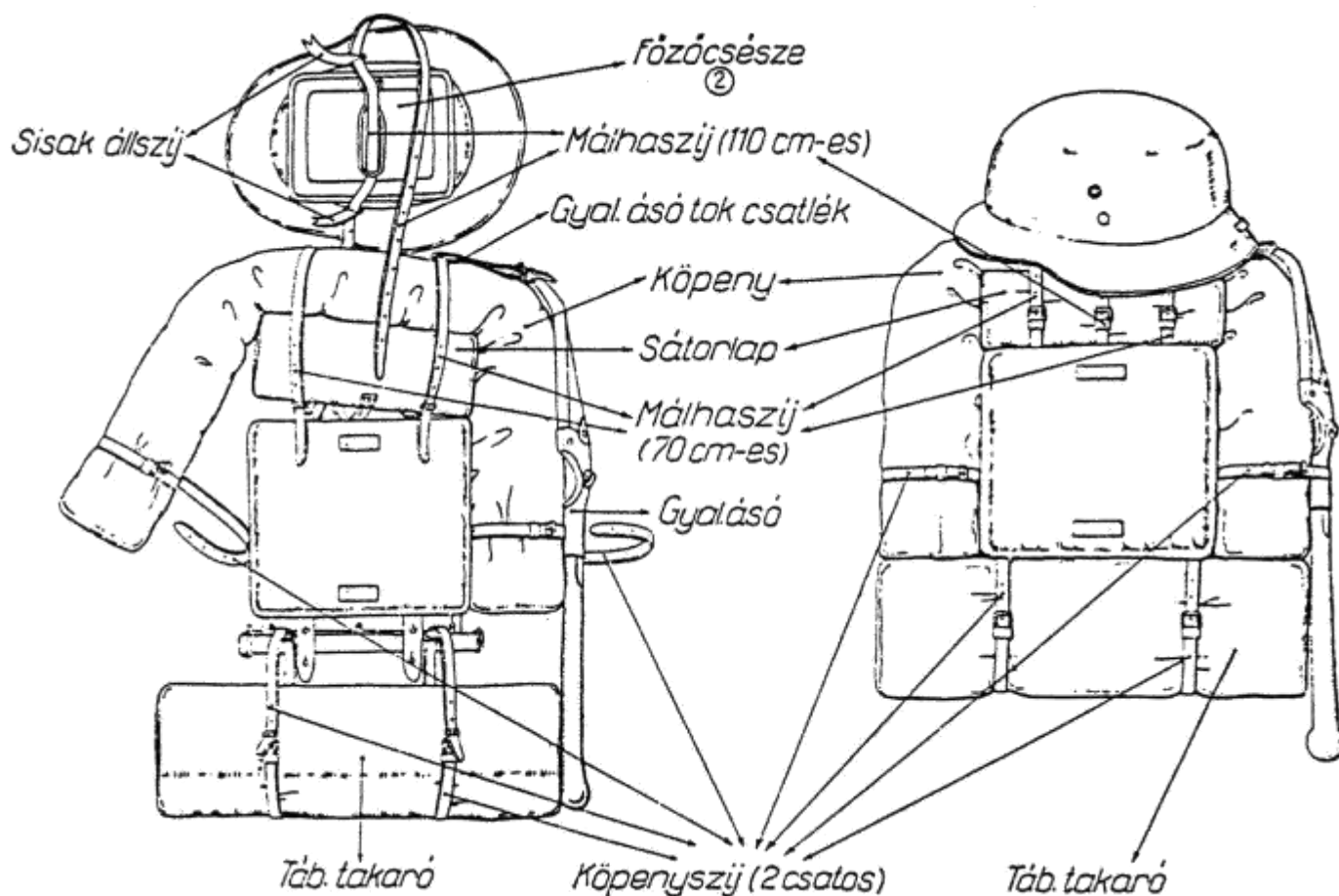


CZINK COLLECTION
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**At left, the ubiquitous bracket,
attached by two rivets to the rear
of the neck guard.**



CZINK COLLECTION / WEIDEMAN PHOTO



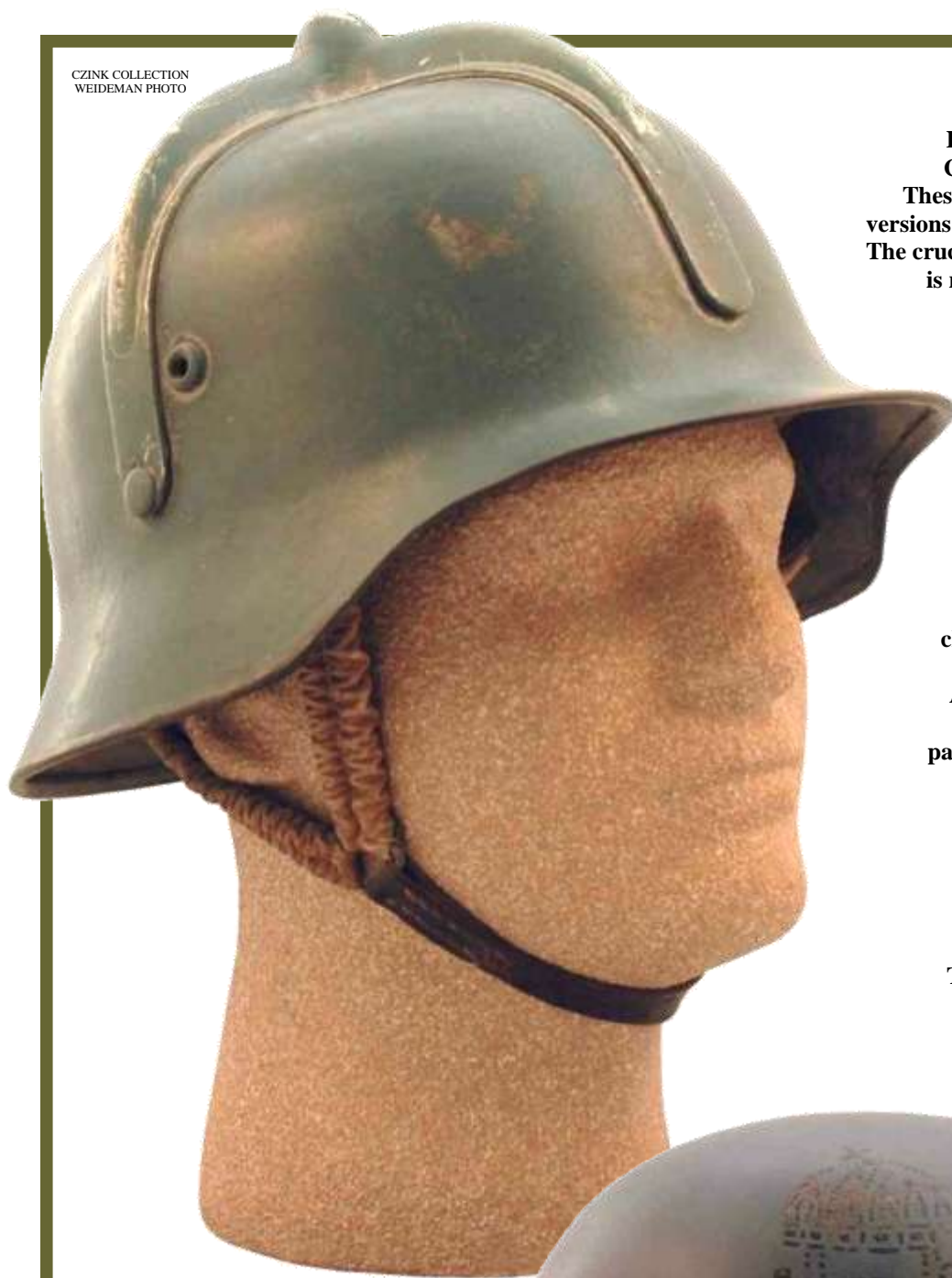
THE HUNGARIAN HELMET BRACKET

The most well-known and recognized aspect of the Hungarian World War II era helmet is the bracket on the outside of the rear neck-guard.

Although universally known to be made for the purpose of hanging or carrying, pictures of the bracket in use don't seem to exist. Even period Hungarian military equipment regulations, like the one shown above, give clear instructions (under all sorts of circumstances), to use one of the issue universal leather straps, threaded through the D-rings of the chinstrap, to attach the helmet to other pieces of kit.

The detail at left, however, does illustrate what may have been the original intended use for the bracket. It is from the regulations for hanging the helmet from the M1935, M1927 and M1906 cavalry saddles.

A universal leather strap is threaded through the helmet's bracket and secured. Next, the helmet's chinstrap is fastened around the leather horseshoe case, which is also secured to the saddle.



Left: The M1935 Type B Civil Air Defence helmet.
These helmets were strengthened versions of the standard Type A models. The cruciform aluminum reinforcement is riveted to the helmet shell.

The way the heavy-duty chin strap assembly was worn can be seen clearly at left. Although a standard leather chinstrap with brass buckle passed under the chin, V-shaped straps, incorporating steel springs covered in cloth, connected the chin strap to the helmet liner. This example is stamped on the inner side-guard with the code "GY68." The liner is also ink-stamped with the number "34" in several places.

Right: M1935 Type A helmet with M.[agyar] KIR.[ályi] POSTA (Royal Hungarian Post), along with the Hungarian crown and postal horn, stencilled on the front. These helmets would have been issued to postal employees who would have been vulnerable during air raids.



**Right: Another M1935 Type B
State Fire Service helmet.**

These helmets were usually painted the standard Civil Air Defence blue, however, some are known to be painted black - or like this example, a very dark brown

Below:

The heavy-duty liner, unique to the Type B helmet. Very thick wool-felt padding behind the leather liner components provides extra protection.

The inner side-guard is stamped "GY66" and a Hungarian coat-of-arms is on the inner back.



A separate, one-piece stamped-metal badge was fixed to the front of Fire Service helmets, Consisting of a stylized cockade with a crowned Hungarian coat-of-arms within a wreath, topped by a representation of flames.

These helmets remained in use after the war, however, the badge was replaced with one that had only the shield in the centre of the cockade.



The M1935 Officer's Aluminum Parade Helmet



CZINK COLLECTION

The colonel pictured above (also the subject of our cover), wears the M1935 aluminum parade helmet. The earlier M1933 model was a much closer representation of the World War I steel helmet, and although this new one sports the old-fashioned lugs for decoration, its shape is more like that of the M1935 steel helmet.



CZINK COLLECTION
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The elegant lining of the parade helmet consists of a moulded felt dome with a fine leather sweatband, held closed with a white silk bow. The special leather chin strap easily slides open and closed.

The only marking on this example is a hand-written "57" inside the band.



MILITARY HISTORY MUSEUM COLLECTION
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The “1947-type” steel helmet, above, is actually a German M35/40 helmet with a new Hungarian liner.



MILITARY HISTORY MUSEUM COLLECTION
FERENC BÁLINT PHOTOS

The “1949-type” steel helmet, above - a crudely repainted and re-lined M1935; no longer with vent hole bushings.

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for modern warfare. Hungary looked to their experience from the First World War and asked for German help – and introduced the new German helmet type (the Stahlhelm 1935). The German licence was bought, and with minor changes, Hungarian factories (primarily MÁVAG and the Győri Vagon és Gépgyár) started production of the helmet in January of 1936. The obsolete helmets were re-designated as M1915 helmets, and it was ordered that the rectangular bracket attachment (like the one on the M1935 helmet) should be added. Instead of the outmoded M1924 officer's parade dress helmet (the “Lohengrin”), an aluminium parade helmet, in the form of the steel helmet, was introduced for officers in 1933, and then in 1935, a new form was introduced to match the M1935 steel helmet.

Another unusual aspect of the history of Hungarian helmets is that (despite the usual international custom to issue outdated army helmets to civil defence units), the Hungarian Civil Air Defence was issued with new blue-painted M1935 helmets in 1938 (while the WWI type helmets were still used on the Eastern Front by Hungarian soldiers even in 1941-1942). Civil Defence firemen received strengthened M1935s in blue. These are known as “Type B” (while the standard Civil Defence helmet was designated “Type A”).

Interestingly, after the First World War, different countries issued ex-Austro-Hungarian helmets - Poland and

Afghanistan for example. In Poland, both the army and the police used such helmets.

Following the devastation of World War II, the new Hungarian Democratic Army had to make use of whatever material they could find. There was such a shortage of uniforms that many soldiers wore their own civilian clothing, with only a simple armband to denote their military status.

Regarding helmets, practically anything was pressed into service. Along with leftover M1935s, surplus M35, M35/40 and M42 German helmets were also repainted and reissued with Hungarian liners. M1933 and M1935 officer's aluminium helmets continued their service as parade helmets for troops on special occasions.

The first standard post-war liner was made of four pads of dark-brown poor-quality artificial leather. It seems the M1935 shells were also produced post-war, in a lower-quality version. The inner edges of the rim were crude, brackets were incorrectly positioned and the acceptance stamp with the royal coat-of-arms was no longer used. Sometimes the bushings in the ventilation openings were left unfinished - simply a hole drilled through each side of the helmet (see photos on this page).

Today, these helmets are commonly known as “Tildy helmets” (after Zoltán Tildy, the President of Hungary between 1946 and 1948), although it would more correct to

Continued on page 15...



M1935

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“1947-type”

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“1949-type”

MILITARY HISTORY MUSEUM
COLLECTION
FERENC BÁLINT PHOTO



LABORC COLLECTION / PHOTO



LABORC COLLECTION / PHOTO



LABORC COLLECTION / PHOTO

Left: Helmet liners for comparison - a wartime M1935, the “1947-type” and “1949-type.”

Above: Three interesting examples of “1947-type” helmets (re-issued M1935s) used post-war.

Top: A fireman’s helmet stenciled with “XIX” on the front from Budapest’s XIXth District (post-1950).

Middle: The Soproni Textilgyár (Sopron Textile factory) logo “SOTEX” stenciled with a red star.

Bottom: An unidentified fire-fighting unit’s helmet.

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refer to them as “Rákosi helmets” (after his successor, Mátyás Rákosi), because they were fabricated from 1949-50, and issued until the new Soviet type of helmet was adopted in 1952-53.

In 1950, the Hungarian People’s Army introduced a new helmet type - nothing other than the Soviet Ssh41, as it was part of the “Sovietization” of the uniform, gear and spirit of the Hungarian armed forces. The new helmet was produced in the Budafoki Zománcárugyár, and the first mass supply was seen during the 1951 May Day Parade. The first helmets, an example of which is pictured at right, were made with a frontal decal (red star in red-white-green circle), however, it was realized that such an insignia was too dangerous for combat use, and therefore the decal helmets were only used as parade helmets, while plain helmets were then supplied to the troops without the decal. There was a scarce variation (only 1000 produced) of the M1950 helmet made of lightweight aluminium and issued to military bands – today this is one of the rarest helmet types in the world, as no examples are known to exist today. Another variation, with modified liner and silver paint, was used by the Fire Department. These helmets also had ventilation lugs on the side of the shell. The M1950 helmet was used unaltered until the 1970s, by the Army, Police, Worker's Militia, and all other uniformed organizations. Millions were produced during the Cold War, and it is thought that they were continually manufactured until the 1960s.

The three-pad liner and simple leather chinstrap of the M1950 helmet was found to be uncomfortable, and outdated by the late 1960s, and a modernization program was started. The shape of the shell remained unchanged (although the developers neglected to consider that the new Soviet Ssh66 helmet had a modified shell). Instead of painting the helmet, the shell received plastic coating, which was problematic - it was very shiny (meant to be used with a helmet net or cover, however, soldiers rarely saw such accessories). The liner was heavily modified, the very simple three-pad construction was replaced by a complex four-pad and liner construction, supported with an “Y” chinstrap which featured a hook and ring quick opening mechanism. The M1970 helmet was quite a step forward, but really too late, as by the 1970s, some armies were already developing composite helmets.

The last development of the Soviet-type helmet was in the late 1980s, when the plastic-coating of the shell was eliminated and a more traditional and practical matte paint finish was applied – as well as the shell itself being made stronger and more durable. The liner of the M1970/90 (not an official designation) was left unchanged. Despite all of this, there were experiments with the modernization of the M1970 helmet (the “Trial 1” helmet was issued with a German Schubert liner, and the “Trial 2” helmet was issued with the liner of the Fire Department). Also, different types of composite helmets were imported (mostly for special operations troops) – the Israeli made Orlite and Rabintex helmets, for example.

The current, standard helmet type of the Hungarian Defence Forces is still the M1970/90 helmet.



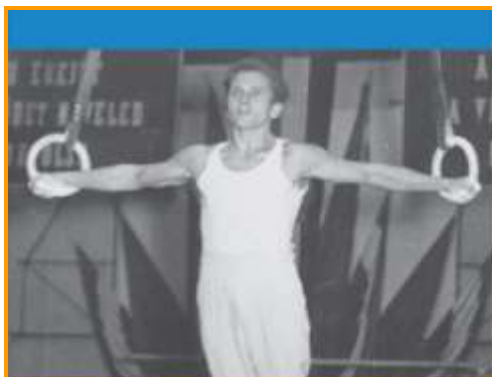
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