

M 1915 Adrian Helmet as worn by Russian Troops on the Western Front.

Standard French-manufactured M15 Adrian Helmet with Russian eagle badge in excellent condition as issued to soldiers in the Russian Expeditionary Force circa 1916. Measures approximately 29.5 cm from brim to brim, 21 cm from side to side, 16.5cm tall. The inside shell is marked "58" (possibly referring to size although the liner will fit about size 56-57 head) and Latin "D". Leather liner and chin strap.

The helmet is in excellent condition, impossible to upgrade! Other than wear from storage, the shell shows no damage. The coat of paint is undoubtedly original, without repairs. The leather lining is still quite supple considering its age; all the leather tabs are present and still have what appears to be the original string which "binds" them together. The chin strap is likewise original and extremely well preserved, having only modest wear and stains. No significant rust to the buckle.

The presence of Russian soldiers in the trenches in France is attributable to a deal struck between the Republic of France and the Russian Empire: Russian soldiers in exchange for French military supplies. As background, there was an incredible friendship between the two nations that went back at least to the early 1890's when the French fleet arrived at the Kronstadt naval base near St. Petersburg and was graciously received by Tsar Alexander III. The first trip abroad for the newly-married Tsar Nicholas II and his wife, Alexandra, was to Paris for the dedication of the Alexander Bridge, named for his recently deceased father. The relationship between the two states was such that it made sense in the early years of the Great War for the Tsar to ship Russian infantrymen off to the Western Front in return for various shiploads of armaments and military equipment from France. French President Raymond Poincaré obviously hoped for hundreds of thousands of Russian infantrymen to arrive in France to become a "Russian Steamroller" but only two brigades finally arrived.

With Snow on Their Boots: The Tragic Odyssey of the Russian Expeditionary Force in France During World War I by Jamie H. Cockfield chronicles the bizarre story of what happened to the Russian soldiers sent to France. Needless to say, the news of the revolution back home caused fighting to break out between them (in what one writer has described as the first bloodshed of the Russian Civil War). Eventually the fighting ceased, many mutineers were jailed, and the remaining Russian force, finally called the "Russian Legion of Honor", would loyally continue to fight the Germans for France until the Armistice. The French government supplied the Russian brigades with M15 Adrian helmets, painted olive and with the imperial Russian eagle fastened to the front. Not designed to stop bullets but simply to afford minimal protection from shrapnel falling from shells bursting overhead, they were not very effective but, as the saying goes, better than no protection at all. Using two split pins for attachment that fit through two pre-drilled holes on the front, the eagle badge replaced the insignia that was fastened on all of the helmets issued to French soldiers.

Photographic evidence shows some Russians wearing Adrian helmets identical to this one as well as Adrian helmets without any badge at all.

If Russian tempers ran so hot that when word of the revolution reached the west, they started shooting at each other instead of at the Germans, it is probable that the soldiers who supported the revolution took their bayonets and pried the "Romanov" eagles off of their helmets. When you consider that the force sent to France was small to begin with, that many of the M15 helmets were undoubtedly destroyed or damaged in combat, and that mutinying soldiers undoubtedly defaced many of them, it is not surprising that the only place where one can see one of these helmets today (in anything approaching the condition of this example) might be in either a French or a Russian museum!

Truth be told, in addition to the M 1915 Adrians supplied to the Russian troops on the Western Front, a large number of such helmets - some 2 million according to the estimate provided by Ivan Karabanov in his History of the Russian Steel Helmet (C. 2006, Moscow) - were manufactured by French factories on contract from the Russian government and successfully delivered to the beleaguered Russia via the northern maritime route. Their number may appear impressive but in fact was grossly insufficient considering the size of the Russian Army. Being a scarce luxury, the helmets were typically distributed among the elite Guards and "Shock" units and were rarely seen by the ordinary Russian troops. Nevertheless, the "Russian Adrians" did see action on the Eastern Front in the last two years of the Great War and later, in the Russian Civil War; some of them survived to be reused by the new regime following the Bolshevik victory. Those helmets, however, invariably had their Imperial eagle insignia removed and replaced with the Soviet red star. It was in fact unthinkable for anyone in Soviet Russia to dare and keep the highly incriminating symbol of the Tsarist rule in their possession - a sure ticket to the Gulag or worse if discovered. Therefore, the unaltered helmet offered here is undoubtedly one of those that were used by the Russian troops in France.

Whether one pursues Imperial Russian militaria or Twentieth Century Russian and Soviet helmets, this M 1915 Adrian represents a unique chance to acquire an item that is missing from most private collections today.

Item# 41622

\$2,450.00

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