

M 1916 "ShLS" Steel Helmet, 1917 issue.

Measures approximately 28.5 cm from brim to brim, 21 cm from side to side, 15.5 cm tall. Cloth "sack" liner, corrugated zinc bumper, leather chin strap.

The helmet is in excellent condition, extraordinary for an item of its vintage and rarity. The shell is completely free of dents, bumps or significant rust. The olive-green coat of paint is undoubtedly original and exceptionally well-preserved, having only a couple of relatively minor scuffs and some small spots of surface oxidation throughout that add character. The original cloth liner is completely intact and overall, very clean showing only a couple of minor rust stains. The canvas backing of the liner is completely intact and sound; the original adjustment cord is included. The rivets are tight and have not been repaired or replaced. The leather chin strap is likewise original and includes the original buckle; although stained, the leather remains very supple and "healthy", not dry and brittle as is often the case with 100-year-old items.

With its very distinctive vent comb and ballistic shape, this helmet was the first model designed in Russia, and after testing, was deemed superior to either the French Adrian or British Brodie helmets. Its unofficial name "ShLS" stands for shlem lopatochnoi stali ("shovel-grade steel helmet" i.e., made of hardened steel providing better protection). Although there were ambitious plans to manufacture millions of them during 1917 and as many as 19 factories throughout the Russian Empire received massive production orders from the state, the fall of the monarchy in February 1917 made major corrections to the plans. Under the Provisional Government, political instability continued to grow, railroad transportation became increasingly unreliable, and massive bottlenecks occurred in the industry. Out of the original 19, only three factories were able to start production of the M-16 which then proceeded at snail's pace. Only 16,071 examples had been made by the summer of 1917, so unlike the "Adrian" helmet made in France for the Russian Army, few of these helmets saw service on the battlefields of WW1.

The M-16 helmets were however extensively employed by both sides in the subsequent Russian Civil War. According to the very thorough reference book *The History of the Russian Steel Helmet, 1916 -1945* by Ivan Karabanov (C. 2016, Moscow), just under 400,000 had been made in total before the production stopped in late 1917 following the Bolshevik Revolution - a mere drop in the bucket considering the sheer size of the conflict and number of troops involved, and a tiny number compared with many other WWI helmet models. The remaining stock of M-16 helmets was used up by the Red Army in the interwar period and even in the initial months of the Patriotic War.

Given the above, it is not surprising that the original M-16 Russian helmet is exceedingly rare, especially with all the original parts included and intact coat of paint. There were a number of similar helmets made in Finland during the years immediately following the Russian Revolution (the so-called M-17 "Sohlberg"). The Finnish version however differs from the Russian prototype in several ways, including the flat top of the comb, location of the rivets, and construction of the liner. /The differences are described and illustrated in *Russian Helmets: from Kaska to Stalshlyem, 1916-2001* by Robert Clawson (C. 2002), pp. 8-15/. The original Russian M-16 helmet is truly an exceptional find - not to be missed by the serious collector of Russian WW1 and Soviet militaria.

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\$2,300.00

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