

## APPENDIX VI.

### THE STEEL HELMET ASSIGNMENT

The procurement of steel helmets was in the hands of the Quartermaster Corps from January 1 to February 1, 1943, with the Chicago Quartermaster Depot acting as central procuring agent. The M-1 steel helmet designed for World War II had been a Quartermaster article of issue ever since going into production, in spring, 1942. Because of the mutual dependency of the steel helmet shell and the liner, there was presumably good reason for making the shell a procurement as well as an issue assignment of the Quartermaster Corps. At any rate, the Chicago Quartermaster Depot, as of January 1, became responsible for carrying out two Detroit Ordnance District contracts<sup>1</sup> for a total of 1,011,410 steel helmets, and two St. Louis Ordnance District contracts for 2,075,000 helmets.<sup>2</sup> Two million liners on these contracts actually represented a deficiency against requirements.<sup>3</sup>

Although the official notification of the steel helmet procurement assignment did not arrive at the Chicago Quartermaster Depot until the first days of January had passed,<sup>4</sup> considerable preliminary work had been done in anticipation of it. Five inspectors from the Depot were assigned to the McCord company in Detroit, which until approximately the time the Quartermaster Corps took over steel helmet procurement was the sole manufacturer of the steel helmet for the U. S. Army. Soon after, three of these inspectors, and an acting senior inspector together with the Depot principal inspector, were assigned to the Schluster Manufacturing Company in St. Louis, which had been taken on as a second manufacturer. These four inspectors had to be further

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<sup>1</sup>Contract W874-ORD-2280 for 1,000,000 helmets at \$0.98 each and Contract W874-ORD-3058 for 11,410 helmets at \$0.779 each. The steel helmet cost considerably less than the liner because few operations were involved in making the shell. From a one-pound sheet of flat steel, a single press operation of high carbon cobalt steel dies "drew" two seven-inch deep helmets; there was no annealing in between, which reduced time and costs. Trimming off rough edges in a smaller press, bending and shaping the visor in a "spanking" press, spot-welding the edging and metal loops for holding a chin strap, automatic painting and drying, and sewing on of chin strap completed operations, the entire series of which could be performed in 22 minutes from the first stamping to the packing.

<sup>2</sup>Contract W849-ORD-2606 for 1,575,000 helmets at \$0.8318 each, and Contract W849-ORD-2920 for 500,000 helmets at \$1.058 each.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Major Pratt.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Col. C. N. Elliott, CQMD, to OQMG, Feb. 1, 1943: Helmets, Steel, M-1.

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trained to check Ordnance specifications on the steel helmet, for at the time the Quartermaster Corps had not rewritten the specifications according to its concepts. The inspectors at the Schlueter Company plant, moreover, had to be ready to give advice on many aspects of production, for the manufacture there was in its very early stages. Thus it was necessary to give the inspectors as thorough a schooling as possible.

On the procurement side---for the Chicago Depot was soon called upon to make new contracts with the steel helmet manufacturers---difficulties arose with respect to the specifications. Prepared in less careful detail than the Quartermaster officers were used to, Ordnance blueprints showed many discrepancies with the specifications, and were not clear as to type of <sup>5</sup>metal. It was decided that the Quartermaster Corps would rewrite specifications for the steel helmet,<sup>6</sup> though before this could be accomplished, the procurement had been turned back to Ordnance. The Chicago Depot, however, did issue one contract for 5,250,000 additional steel helmets with scheduled delivery from February through September 1943,<sup>7</sup> and negotiated the Ordnance contracts whose responsibility had been transferred.

At the end of an approximately thirty-day period, when the Chicago Depot was just about getting the feel of the steel helmet operations, the procurement function was abruptly rescinded. A teletype from the Office of The Quartermaster General on January 29, 1943, directed the Chicago Depot to transfer back to Ordnance, "effective 0001 EWT February 1, 1943, formal administration of existing contracts covering Helmets, body, steel, M-1, with McCord Radiator and Manufacturing Company and Schlueter Manufacturing Company."<sup>8</sup>

Whether it was decided by Lt. Gen. Brehon Somerrell of the (then) Services of Supply that the steel helmet was more logically an Ordnance item, or whether the Ordnance Department itself asked to have the procurement reassigned could not be determined from the information on hand. Whatever the reason, however, the Chicago Quartermaster Depot, with one month's direction of the procurement, had got under way the Schlueter Manufacturing Company, which was producing 150,000 helmets a month, while the McCord company, old hands at operating, were getting helmets out at the rate of 16,000 a day. It was estimated that as a result of the

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<sup>5</sup>Phone conversation, Captain Bailey, OQMG-Major Pratt, CQMD, Dec. 23, 1942.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>W199-qm-41935, for the sum of \$4,740,225.

<sup>8</sup>Teletype, OQMG to CQMD, Jan. 29, 1943, HLS Files.

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Quartermaster action, overall acreage production of the steel combat helmet was doubled, and deliveries which were 442,000 in November 1942 increased to 828,000 in March 1943, jumping to 917,000 in May 1943.<sup>9</sup> On February 1, the five inspectors who previously had been working for the Detroit Ordnance District were transferred from the Quartermaster Corps back to the Ordnance Department, and the two Quartermaster inspectors stationed at McCord and the five inspectors at the Schlueter company were recalled to the Chicago Depot. Small arms ammunition used to test the helmets were turned over with inventory to the Detroit and St. Louis Ordnance Districts, and the old pattern resumed: Ordnance procuring and Quartermaster Corps distributing.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Fighting Quartermasters, The Quartermaster Corps (u.d. ca. 1944),

p. 89.

<sup>10</sup>Shipment of the helmet bodies to Quartermaster and ASF Depots was effected by manufacturers delivering from the Ordnance contracts in accordance with instructions from the OQMG, with the Chicago Quartermaster Depot scheduling distribution.