

Characteristics of officer pickelhauben

by Sandy Michael Heinemann

Officers and one-year volunteers had to purchase their uniforms at their own expense, unlike the enlisted men. For this reason, the helmets were usually of higher quality, since Prussian thrift was not mandatory here and the officers were also allowed to have a little more comfort built in, depending on their purse.

However, there were also different specifications, which is why an officer's pickelhaube, if you know them, can be easily recognized as such. This was important so that the soldiers could recognize their commanders in the thick of battle as easily as possible.

AN OFFICER'S PICKELHAUBE DIFFERS FROM THE HELMET FOR ENLISTED MEN BY THE FOLLOWING OBVIOUS CHARACTERISTICS:

- The **spike** was slightly higher and had a circumferential, engraved ring in the lower third of the cone (Fig. 1).
- The spike neck on the base fitting had only 2 ventilation holes and was decorated with a more elaborate **pearl ring**. On enlisted men's helmets, the pearl ring was initially teardrop-shaped (Fig. 2), but from the M1887 helmet onward, it was simply a circumferential bulge (Fig. 13).
- The spikebase for attaching the spike to the leather body was attached to the helmet with star-headed set of screws/split-pins instead of half-round-headed ones (cf. Figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1 - Spike and spikebase of an officer pickelhaube

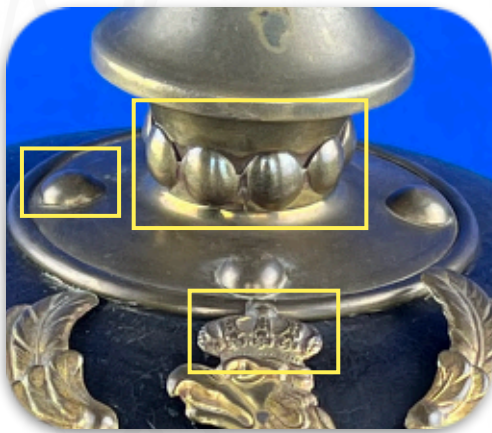


Figure 2 - Top of an enlisted men's pickelhaube teardrop-shaped pearl ring and half-round head screws for attaching the spikebase



Figure 3 - Officer cockades. On the left the old variant, until 1867, on the right the double ring variant.

- The ring on the **cockades** was not painted in color (Fig. 7), but consisted of a silver-plated or brass slip-on ring. Until about 1867, the ring had a braid decoration (Fig. 3 left), after that a decoration of 2 rings with fishbone decoration was used for officer's helmets and the cockades had a different diameter (Fig. 3 right).
- The **visor trimm** around the edge of the front visor was smaller and rounder than on the enlisted helmets, with a maximum width of 0.6 cm. For enlisted men, it was more angular and 0.7 to 1.0 cm wide (cf. Figs. 4 and 5).



Figure 4 - Visor trimm around the front visor of an officer's helmet



Figure 5 - Visor trimm around the front visor of an enlisted men's helmet

- The **plates** on the pickelhauben were more detailed and the spaces between the individual brackets of the crowns were always voided, whereas these free spaces were only indicated on enlisted men's helmets (cf. Figs. 6 and 2). The officer's plates were always fastened with threaded pins and square nuts soldered to the back. Over the years, various fastening methods were used for enlisted men's helmets.



Figure 6 - Voided crown of a Prussian helmet eagle of an officer's pickelhaube

- **After 1887 (Cavalry, Artillery and Train from 1894)** almost only the officers wore **chinscales** on their helmets. Among the enlisted men, only the Guard infantry and the Grenadier regiments still wore the chinscales for normal service. The other enlisted men wore them only on parade or garrison duty until 1915. The rosettes for infantry enlisted men's helmets were first replaced by a hook and thorn buckle attachment (Fig. 7), and from 1891 (cavalry, artillery and train from 1894) by the M91 attachment system (Fig. 8). Officers retained the split pin rosettes on their helmets until the introduction of the M15. After that, the M91 attachment for the chinscales was also introduced for officers, but the M91 buttons were covered with a cover in the design of the split-pin rosettes.



Figure 7 - Chinscale attachment M87 (here a Baden infantry helmet for enlisted men) - (Photo courtesy of James LeBrasseur)



Figure 8 - Chinscale attachment M91 for enlisted men (Photo courtesy of James LeBrasseur)

- Even **after 1895, the back spine** of officer's pickelhauben did not have ventilation slides in the upper third, as enlisted men's helmets had from that year on. However, officers were allowed to equip the rail with better ventilation, as was used on Colonial helmets. But this option was very rarely used, I have only seen one officer's helmet with this extra ventilation.
- The **helmet visors** of the officer's helmets had slightly different dimensions than those of the enlisted men's helmets, but they are more easily recognized by the fact that they were colored on the underside. The back visor was covered with red linen, the front visor with green linen (Fig. 11). The undersides of the enlisted men's helmets always showed bare leather (from this you can sometimes recognize made-up officer's helmets or property helmets of one-year volunteers, which had almost all the other characteristics of an officer's pickelhaube in some cases).
- The **liner** inside the helmet consisted of a very fine sweatband of sheep- or goatskin, about 6 cm wide, and was lined in the middle with a freely chosen fabric (often silk) (Fig. 9). Enlisted men's helmets had only a lining with 9 tongues of thicker sheepskin/goatskin (Fig. 10). Until about 1880, officer's helmets also had a leather lining with tongues, but this was finer, there were more tongues and, in contrast to the enlisted men's helmets, these were cut straight (cf. Figs. 11 and 10).



Figure 9 - Lining and colored visor undersides of an officer pickelhaube



Figure 10 - Linner of an enlisted men's pickelhaube



Figure 11 - Old-style liner of an officer pickelhaube

- Provided that the officer served in a regiment that had the honor of wearing **hair plumes**, of course, they also differed from those of ordinary soldiers. There were some other differences too, but they could be recognized from a distance by the length of the hair:
 - ❖ On officer's helmets, they ended at the level of the lower edge of the helmet visors (Fig. 12),
 - ❖ In the case of enlisted men's helmets, they ended at the level of the upper edges of the helmet visors (Fig. 13).



Figure 12 - Hair plume of an officer's helmet (Photo courtesy of www.zeige.com)



Figure 13 - Hair plume of an enlisted men's helmet (Photo courtesy of www.zeige.com)

Different from the just mentioned officers' pickelhauben, officers from Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, and Hesse wore helmets with the following additional characteristics:

• **Wuerttemberg officers' pickelhauben (Figure 14):**

- ❖ Squared front visor
- ❖ Cross fitting instead of a round spikebase

• **Bavarian officers' pickelhauben (Figure 15):**

- ❖ Squared front visor
- ❖ Cross fitting instead of a round spikebase with 5 ventilation holes
- ❖ Fluted spike

• **Hessian officers' pickelhauben (Figure 16):**

- ❖ Cross fitting instead of round spikebase
- ❖ Half-round head screws/splints instead of stars for fastening the cross fitting. Only the IR 115 with silver plated stars
- ❖ Fluted spike
- ❖ Except the Field-Artillery without pearl ring
- ❖ Back spine with 2 half-round head screws/splints visible from the outside (like old Prussian dragoon helmets)



Figure 14 - Wuerttemberg officer's pickelhaube



Figure 15 - Bavarian officer's pickelhaube (Photo courtesy of Tony Schnurr - www.kaisersbunker.com)



Figure 16 - Hessian officer's pickelhaube (Photo courtesy of www.weitze.net)