

Development of helmets

Head injuries are more likely than any others to be fatal and helmets have been worn in battle for thousands of years to protect the head from injury from both hand-to-hand and missile weapons. The use of traditional metal helmets declined as the use of firearms became more widespread as they provided little defence against bullets and bullet-proof helmets were very heavy. However, with the increasing use of artillery the steel helmet made a comeback in the trenches of World War I to protect against flying shell fragments (shrapnel).



1. Spangenhelm
Roman Empire – early Middle Ages
Warriors who could afford them wore a conical helmet and a mail shirt. This type of helmet was usually fitted with a nose guard. AL.102



2. Great helm
13th and 14th centuries
The great helm covered the whole head and neck. It was pierced with sights for vision and breaths for air. IV.600



3. Basinet
13th century
An open-faced helmet with a mail aventail protecting the neck and often a pivoted visor to protect the face. IV.471



4. Armet
15th century
A helmet closely fitted to the head with hinged cheekpieces and a pivoted visor. IV.498



5. Sallet
15th century
Open-faced helmet, sometimes fitted with a pivoted visor. II.168



6. Morion
16th century
Various types of brimmed helmets without face protection were worn by infantry. IV.1565



7. Burgonet
16th century
Open-faced helmet with hinged cheekpieces. Often fitted with a pivoted visor. IV.569



8. Close helmet
17th century
The most favoured cavalry helmet. It opened with upper and lower bevos (chinguard) and a visor, all pivoted at the same points. IV.1026



9. Pots
17th century
Infantry and cavalry wore open-faced helmets called pikemen's or harquebusier's pots. IV.906



10. Shrapnel helmet
Early to mid 20th century
Helmets which could deflect shrapnel were essential during both World Wars. IV.1665



11. Ballistic helmet
Late 20th century
Combat helmets made of tough ballistic plastics. IV.1830