

## The Fenton Fez

By Steven A. Johnson, Trustee

At the Fenton History Center is an unusual item with a local, as well as global connection. The Fenton's accession form describes it as, "*Maroon felt wool Fez. Attached at top ... a 6 3/8 inch long, braided silk tassel in black. On front, two emblems are attached. Inside, a brown leather [sweat] band is attached to the hat by overcasting around the edge.*" The emblems referred to are, an embroidered wings-spread eagle perched on a swastika, the symbol of the German Heer (army), and the other, in traditional SS fashion, is the embroidered Totenkopf (death's head skull and crossed bones) symbol placed just below the eagle.

By mid 1943, the allied invasion of Sicily and the subsequent push up the Italian boot toward mainland Europe, along with Hitler's certain knowledge that the next logical focus of attack would be coming across the English Channel to France. Moreover, it would be massive. In an effort to enhance recruiting, the German hierarchy had begun loosening up on the Aryan ideal of tall, blonde, and blue.

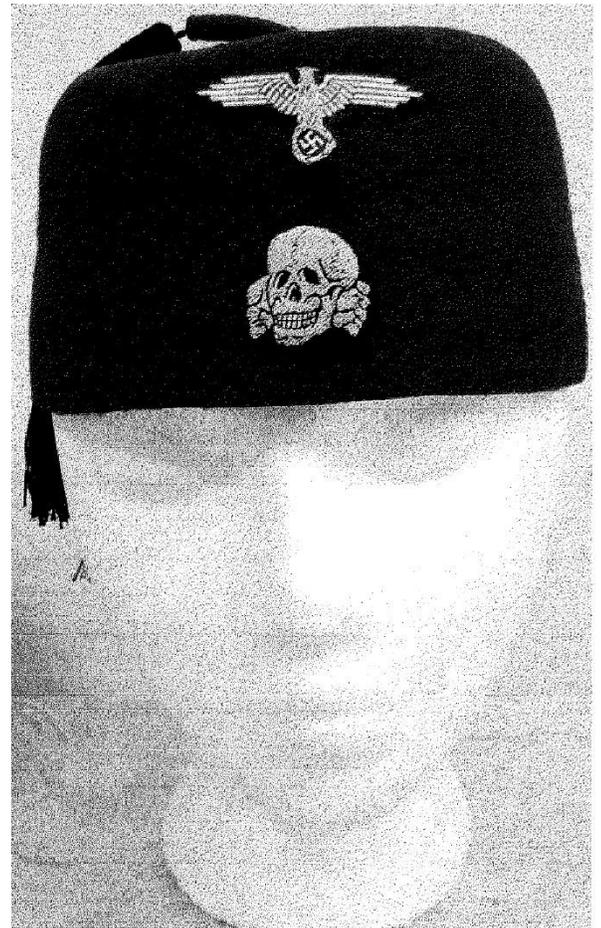
It's interesting that Hitler was none of those things í go figure.

Heinrich Himmler, the Chief of Hitler's Waffen Schutzstaffel (SS) greatly admired Islam, which he called 'Mohammedanism'. He considered it a warrior's religion. To that end, Himmler recruited the combat seasoned 13<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division of the 1<sup>st</sup> Croatian Army and designated it the Bosnian Muslim Nazi SS Mountain Division Handschar (dagger). Apparently, Himmler thought that they were good enough to be an SS unit akin to their Nazi forebears, universally feared for brutality to their enemies and civilians alike. The incorporation of Muslims into the Waffen SS required changes to Nazi ideology and propaganda, and required special privileges, which included that they were not required to eat rations of pork or drink alcoholic beverages.

As an additional nod to their religion, Himmler permitted them to continue to wear the Fez, properly called the Tarboosh, which dates back to the Ottoman Empire in Moslem history. Being visor less, it permits the wearer to assume the proper forehead to the ground posture when praying.

This brings us back to the Fez in the FHS collection. The donor of the Fez, in 1997, was none other than Mary Jackson, daughter of Robert H. Jackson, most noted as Chief of Counsel for the United States at the Nuremberg war crimes trials following WWII. The Fez appears to be in nearly unworn condition so it was not likely a battlefield souvenir. Was it a presentation item, and if so, by whom, and why?

Until further research finds this piece of the puzzle, it and other mysteries will continue to dwell in the Fenton History Center's archives.



April 24, 2015