

## ALBANIAN 9X19mm

A few years ago, the headstamp illustrated turned up in Iraq. It was initially identified as being of Czech manufacture, by Sellier & Bellot, because of the box it came in, the label of which is illustrated below.



Although this box is clearly marked with the Sellier & Bellot logo, and is the same style as an S&B box from the 60s or 70s, the round was clearly not made by S&B. The first thing discrepancy was the primer diameter which is basically 5mm when all known Czech loads in 9x19mm use 4,5mm primers. The 5mm primer in 9x19 is not unusual, and appears regularly in Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian and Polish cartridges, but not with Czech 9x19mm loads. The second problem with the identification is that the cartridges were not made to the S&B standard. Most headstamps had extraneous marks on them like the ones visible in our picture and some had a crosshatched mark across the headstamp implying to me a relatively crude equipment setup. Other aspects of the cartridges showed a lower quality of manufacture than I'd expect from any of the countries listed above. Further, the letter style on the headstamp was not consistent with Czech production. The third problem was the box. It was made of very light cardboard, unlike that used in S&B boxes. The label was clearly a knock-off of a S&B label but it was the wrong color, lacked the names and trademarks of the legitimate S&B box, and the plastic tray was reddish brown and the details of its construction were different from any of the Czech trays in my box collection. The other interesting point was the letters "KMP" which I have never seen on any Czech box. Clearly this was a fake S&B box.



The reason for the fake box label was obvious from the 1991 date on the headstamp and the fact that the ammo showed up shortly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait in August 1990 and the last combat actions occurred in early March 1991. This ammunition dated 1991 was produced for Iraq and probably delivered shortly after the ceasefire. Czechoslovakia and Poland were members of the UN Coalition and sent troops to the theater so it is very unlikely either would be supplying ammunition to Iraq that same year.

Who in 1991 would be likely to be supplying ammunition to Iraq? Romania has been suggested since PAR is a headstamp code reported on Romanian 6.5mm Rifle ammunition in a document dated 1906. Except for this circumstance, there is nothing about the 9x19mm cartridges to link them to Romania.

The one candidate country that stands out is Albania. During the Cold War, Albania was so hostile to the West that it aligned with China rather than the Soviet Union. The Communist government in Albania fell in 1990 and the country was in chaos until 1992, when the Democratic Party of Albania took control. The formal name of the country is the Republic of Albania, a return to the name used in the 1920s. In May 1991, MEICO (Military Export Import Company) was established within the Albanian Ministry of Defense with the specific role of exporting arms and ammunition from that desperately-poor country. There is ample evidence that the control of export of arms and ammunition was extremely lax during those early years and Albania was implicated in supplying arms and ammunition to the Hutus in support of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. In early 1991 Iraq had lots of hard currency and was in the market to re-supply its military. They would have been an ideal customer for MEICO.

There is documentation from a MEICO website (no longer available) that, in 2004, pictured 9x19mm cartridges (ball, soft-point and blank) that were produced in Albania. The website stated that the ammunition was manufactured in a production plant identified as "KM POLIÇAN" which likely explains the letters "KMP" on the fake S&B box. Poliçan is a town in southern Albania near Berat. It is also likely that the "PAR" on the headstamp stands for "Poliçan, Albanian Republic". The ammunition produced by Poliçan was reported as "irregular in quality."

There is no concrete evidence that these cartridges were made in Albania, but the characteristics of the ammunition preclude most other sources and the markings on the box provide strong circumstantial evidence that the ammunition was made at KM Poliçan. There is even a rational explanation for the headstamp. Finally, supplying ammunition to Iraq in 1991 was consistent with other things going on in the Albanian munitions business at the time.

The Poliçan facility was largely abandoned by 1999, but by December 2006 KM Poliçan was operating as an ammunition demilitarization facility under the NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund. In the 2005 time-frame, the "Director of Poliçan Military Factory, Memli Kasapi, informed the research team that they continue to produce 7.62 mm blanks for military use, 9mm rounds for MOI." It is not clear from the reference what MOI refers to. However, from 2005 Albania had a Ministry of Interior, and in most European countries, it is the Ministry of Interior that controls Police forces of the country. It is not clear that any 9x19mm ammunition is being produced in Albania at this time.

Subsequently, a Poliçan document describing 9mm ammunition was found and although it does not identify the headstamp it clearly links the term "KMP" with the Poliçan facility.



Fisheku 9x19 mm qe prodhohet ne KM Poliçan ka keto specifikime teknike :

Finally, in 2011, discussions with a munitions specialist who has visited Poliçan recently indicates that this ammunition, still in the fake S&B boxes are commonly encountered, as or other boxes of ammunition in boxes indicating manufacture by other European factories.

#### References:

<http://cartridgecollectors.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=6554>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

<http://www.worldwar2.ro/forum/index.php?showtopic=5225&st=0&#entry71341>

Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity by Miranda Vickers, James Pettifer

MEICO website-extracted material in my files

<http://www.saferworld.org.uk/images/pubdocs/Albania%20ENG%20CH5.pdf>

[http://www.namsa.nato.int/Demil/docs/Albania-Employment\\_for\\_women-dec06.pdf](http://www.namsa.nato.int/Demil/docs/Albania-Employment_for_women-dec06.pdf)

[http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2008/iraq-security-stability\\_jun2008-02-1.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2008/iraq-security-stability_jun2008-02-1.htm)