

GUNS & AMMO

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# GUNS & AMMO

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MAY 1984



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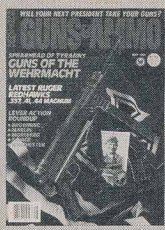
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ON THE COVER: During World War II the German Army employed a wide variety of novel, efficient firearms. For a rundown of this fascinating weaponry turn to page 50. Cover photography by Pat Brollier.



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**GUNS & AMMO Magazine (ISSN0017-5684).**  
**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to GUNS & AMMO, P.O. Box 3205, Los Angeles, CA 90078.



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MAY 1984 • VOLUME 28, NUMBER 5 • PUBLISHED MONTHLY

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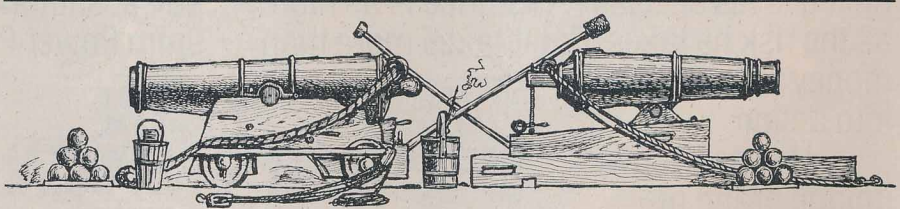
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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** The Brass Rail, Los Angeles, CA; Pachmayr Gun Works, Los Angeles, CA; Bob's Military Antiques, Santa Monica, CA; Pony Express Sport Shop, Encino, CA; Martin B. Retting, Culver City, CA; London Guns, Santa Monica, CA; The Eagle's Nest Militaria, Los Angeles, CA; The Old West Gun Room, El Cerrito, CA; Reloading Bench, Panorama City, CA.



# Guns of the Wehrmacht

*Germany used a variety of arms during WWII. Those shown here were considered the spearhead of the "Third Reich."*





■ By the beginning of the third decade of the 20th century, international depression had caused the countries of the world to become increasingly introspective. To states threatened with severe famine, civil disobedience, and even revolution, the activities in Germany of a few brown-shirted bully-boys seemed very small potatoes, indeed.

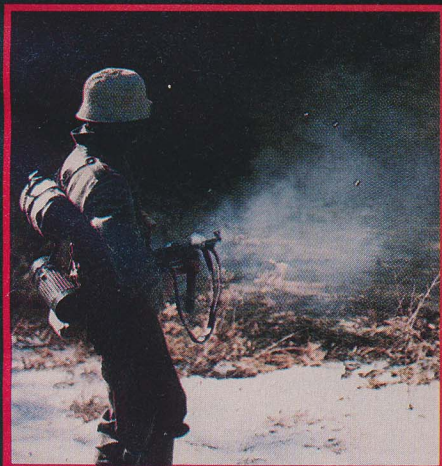
As well, the strict military sanctions imposed upon Germany by the Treaty of Versailles following World War I, were being indifferently monitored; and even after Charles

A. Lindbergh extolled the frightening efficiency of the newly formed *Luftwaffe* (air force), governments on both sides of the Atlantic remained impassive.

Despite Adolph Hitler's virtual repudiation of the Versailles treaty in 1937, it took the annexation of the Sudetenland, the occupation of the Rhineland and Czechoslovakia, and the invasion of Poland to cause world leaders to recognize Naziism's pernicious nature. By then the *Wehrmacht* (army), *Kriegsmarine* (navy), and *Luftwaffe* had



The MP38 was the original "Burp Gun" of WWII, so named because of its high cyclic rate of fire.

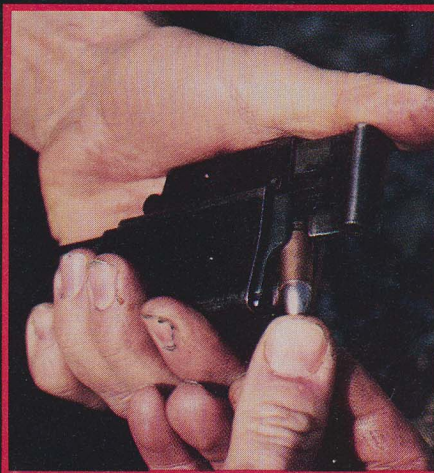


The primary difference between the MP38 and MP40 was that the latter was cheaper and easier to build.

The color photos on these pages are recreations of WWII scenes taken by Robert Bruce that feature contemporary "actors" authentically outfitted in original equipment and using live action arms of both semi and full automatic capabilities that date to this time frame. These scenes are meant to illustrate this historic period and not to romanticize the Nazi regime.



The MG34, which traced its beginning to Solothurn of Sweden, could be fed either by a belt or self-contained 75-round drum magazine. In many instances the MG34 was used as a squad light machine gun.



The MP38/40 utilized a 32-round magazine, shown here being loaded (L). Most MP-equipped soldiers (T) wore webbed gear carrying spares.





*Originally used by the Afrika Korps, the MG42 was highly reliable and had a cyclic rate of 1,200 rpm.*



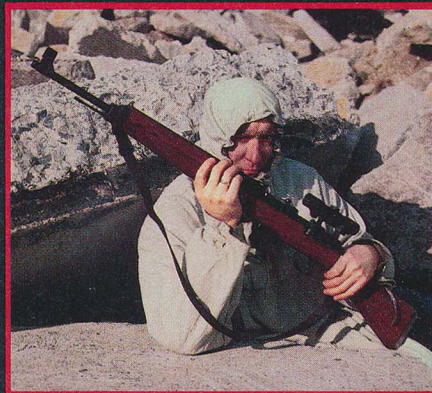
*The MG42 used a roller locking bolt not unlike the Heckler and Koch assault rifles of today.*

# Guns of the Wehrmacht

been furnished with some of the most deadly arms extant. In fact, throughout the second world war, Germany would constantly strive to develop, streamline, and ultimately improvise, effective weaponry. From a small arms standpoint, that is what this story deals with.

Curiously enough, the gun most associated with the German soldier, the P-08, "Luger," had been relegated to the status of substitute standard in 1938. Actually, P-08s had been assembled from parts up until about 1939, when manufacture was again resumed

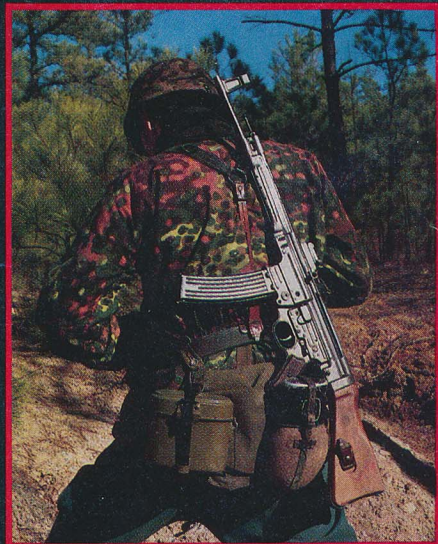
*Though the P-08 was pictured as Germany's main handgun, the P-38 was their front-line battle pistol.*



*The G43 semi-auto rifle saw much of its use during battles on the Eastern front against the Russians.*



*Undoubtedly the most famous bolt-action rifle used in WWII was the reliable and accurate KAR98k.*



*Just about every modern-day assault rifle can trace its heritage to the "Sturmgewehr" StG44.*



*The ZB26, although made in Czechoslovakia, was pressed into use after Germany captured the Brno factory.*



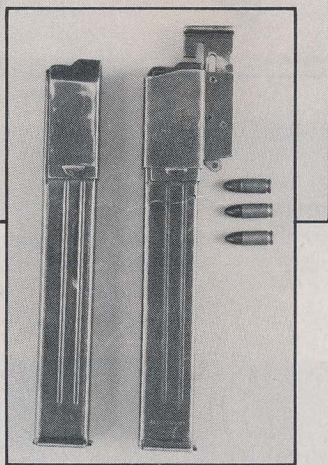
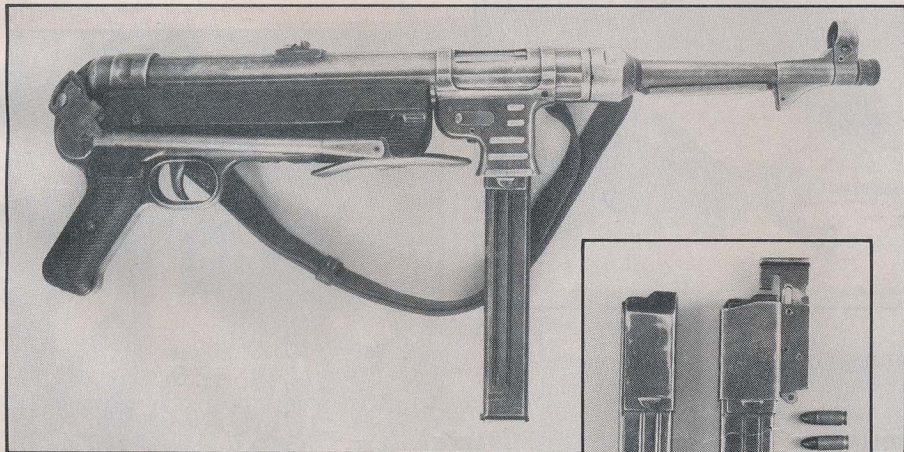
The Bergmann MP-18 was Germany's first submachine gun, introduced at the end of WWI.



The MP-38/40 was a supremely reliable submachine gun. It was used by all of the German services, as exemplified by these paratroopers in winter dress. Thousands of MP-38/40s were made up to the war's end.



The Krummer Lauf barrel attachment allowed the MP-43 to be fired around corners, or at an angle through an armored vehicle ball mount. Prism sights were used.



The MP-38/40 was one of WWII's best submachine guns. The "stick" magazine held 32 9 mm rounds and employed a special loading tool. Buttstock was folded forward.



MP-38/40 cyclic rate of fire was 500 rounds per minute. This reliable blowback had no selector switch and could be shot only fully automatic.

by Krieghoff in Suhl. By 1942, however, production on Lugers had ceased altogether in favor of the more efficient Walther P-38.

The P-08 most used during WWII had a four-inch barrel and held eight 9 mm Parabellum rounds in its magazine. As the gun was designed prior to the turn of the century, its recoil operated toggle-joint mechanism was somewhat archaic. Ammunition and dirt sensitive, the P-08 was rapidly eclipsed by more efficient designs.

Still, Lugers were popular with officers and specialized troops, and many were "captured" by GIs and brought back home in barracks bags to be tangible proof that the entire war had not been spent in a Soho cabaret.

While Mauserwerke, AG, Oberndorf; Heinrich Krieghoff Waffenwerke, Suhl; and Simson & Cie, Suhl, actually made or assembled Lugers during the Nazi era, the Wehrmacht also used World War I vintage P-08s manufactured by Deutsche Waffen und Munitionsfabrik (DWM), Berlin, and the Erfurt Royal Arsenal.

Though Carl Walther of Zella-Mehlis had almost exclusively devoted his efforts toward the production of pocket pistols, in



# Guns of the Wehrmacht

1937 the firm introduced a double-action 9 mm military auto, the Modell AP (*Armee Pistole*) which featured an internal striker.

The army, while sincerely interested in the pistol, preferred an outside hammer, so Walther obligingly modified the design and presented ordnance officials with a modified version which could be manually thumb-cocked, and also allowed the user to see, at a glance, whether or not the arm was ready for action. Originally designated the Modell HP (*Heeres Pistole*), in 1938 it was officially adopted by the *Wehrmacht* and redesignated *Pistole 38* or, more commonly, P-38.

The P-38 was manufactured by Walther, Mauser and Spreewerke mbH, Berlin. While these firms' names do not appear on issue guns, they were given codes ("ac" and "480" for Walther, "svw" and "byf" for Mauser and "cyq" for Spreewerke).

The P-38 had a five-inch barrel, and measured 8<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches overall, and, like the Luger, held eight rounds in its magazine. Grips were of a black or brown bakelite-like material. Early production guns exhibited superior workmanship, but as the conflict wore on, finish was forsaken for speed of production. Those P-38s made in 1944 are often so crude as to appear uncompleted—but early or late manufacture, they all had one thing in common—they worked exceedingly well.

One of the more unusual arms used in

**The 9 mm DA Walther P-38 auto (shown with holster) was the Wehrmacht's principal handgun.**



**The most common Luger used by the Wehrmacht in WWII was in 9 mm and had a four-inch barrel.**

**Although the P-08 (Luger) had been officially superseded by the more reliable P-38, it was still widely used and became a favored war trophy.**



**Mauser Schnellfeuerpistole was the only fully auto handgun used by the Wehrmacht. Caliber was 7.63 mm.**



**Walther PPK was popular with officers, police and specialized troops. Larger PP model was also issue.**



**Mauser's HSc was arguably the most sophisticated pocket auto of the war years. Over 250,000 of these double-action .32s were made before the cessation of hostilities.**

limited numbers by the *Wehrmacht* was the Mauser M-1932 *Schnellfeuerpistole*. Basically a variant of the famed Model 1896/1912 Mauser "broomhandle," the *Schnellfeuerpistole* was one of that small, elite group of fully automatic handguns.

Originally designed in the early 1930s by Josef Nickl (following the lead of a similar Spanish arm offered by Astra), the M-32 had a ten- or 20-round detachable maga-



zine, was recoil operated, and capable of spitting out 850 7.63 mm rounds per minute; manufacture was solely by Mauser.

Its silhouette (excepting the extended magazine) was virtually identical to that of the '96, however, it had the added feature

**Sauer & Sohn's M-38 pocket pistol was a reliable double action with a concealed hammer. This 7.65 mm blowback featured a cocking indicator to show when the gun was ready to fire. Mag held 8 rounds.**

of a selector switch on the left side of the frame. When the pointer was placed on "N" the gun could be fired in the normal semi-auto mode. On "R" (*reihenfeuer*—repetitive fire), however, the M-32 could discharge all of its rounds with a single pull of the trigger. The switch was slightly modified in 1936, and the gun was redesignated the *Modell 712*.

As with the P-08, the M-32 could be fitted with a detachable shoulder stock, making the piece somewhat more manageable in the full-auto mode. In fact, the gun never achieved anything approaching univer-



**Though a bit outdated, the M-34 Mauser pocket auto was still used by officers and SS police units. The gun was single action, 7.65 mm.**



**The Wehrmacht employed foreign weapons such as the Polish Vis 35 "Radom." This 9 mm was one of the most reliable guns of WWII.**



**The G-41(W) (top) was an early successful semi-auto battle rifle. Its bolt mechanism, coupled with a Russian Tokarev gas system, produced the Gewehr 43 (above). The G-43 was considered accurate enough for sniping and was made with an integral scope rail.**



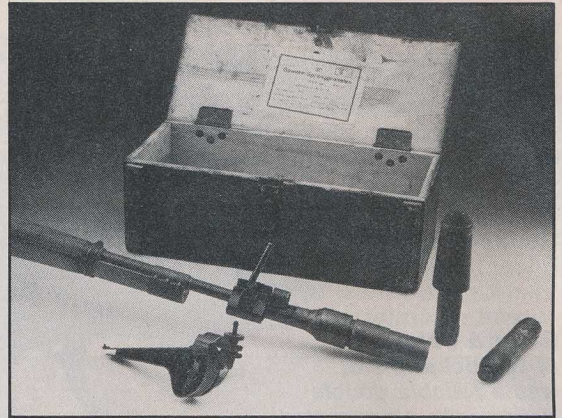
**The Gewehr 41(M) semi-auto had a curious bolt-like cocking handle. This Mauser-designed rifle was not as reliable as Walther's G-41(W), so production was curtailed.**

sal issue because of complaints of handling difficulties which included a rather embarrassing penchant for cooking off rounds when the chamber became overheated after only running through a couple of magazines-full of ammo in the "R" mode.

Other German-made pistols popular with officers included the famed Walther PP and PPK double-action pocket pistols mainly in 7.65 mm (.32 ACP), and the Mauser HSc. In addition, while not really issue, more than a few Model 1934 Mauser pocket pistols were carried by high-ranking officers and others.

The Walther PP made its debut in 1929 as a state-of-the-art blowback double-action pocket pistol. Its name was derived from *Polizei Pistole*, as the gun was favored by police forces throughout Europe. It was an issue weapon during WWII, though re-





The K-98k Mauser was fitted with a variety of accessories including a grenade-launcher. Specialized grenades were also made.

For training purposes, the Germans used .22 RF versions (above) of their standard 8 mm K-98k (top).

# Guns of the Wehrmacht

stricted, somewhat, to the *Luftwaffe*.

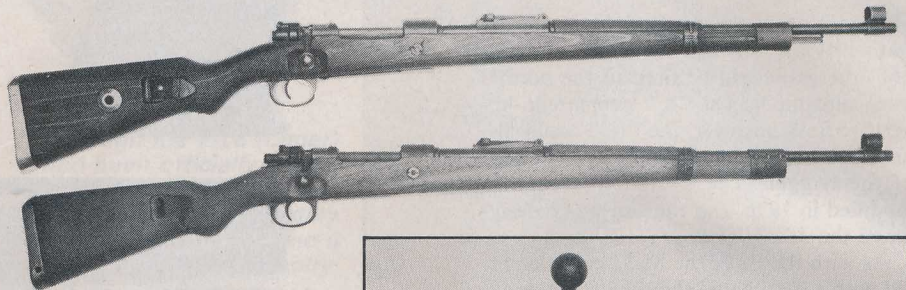
The PPK (*Polizei Pistole Kriminal*) was a slightly smaller version of the PP, with a reduction in magazine capacity from eight to seven 7.65 mm rounds. The PP measured 6.8 inches and the PPK, 6.1 inches. Both guns had external hammers and plastic grips, though those on the PPK were wraparound and somewhat fragile. Both of these guns will often be found stamped, etched or engraved with a variety of German military and Nazi party designations. Guns so marked are amongst the most collectible of WWII vintage autos.

Not to be outdone, Mauser introduced a streamlined pocket auto, the HSc (*Hahn Selbstspanner*—hammer, self-cocking, Model c) in 1940.

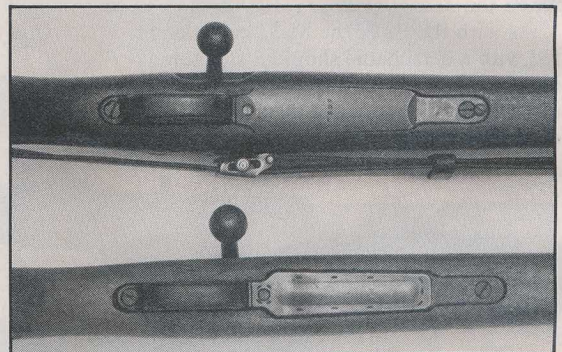
It was a refinement of earlier pistols (Models a and b) and featured the most modern silhouette of any pistol on the market. Looking very much like an Art Deco product of the 1930s, the HSc was a double-action 7.65 mm pocket model with a semi-concealed hammer that quickly found favor with the services. Over 250,000 were eventually made prior to VE Day.

Many officers, basing their choice on a track record of some 25 years, chose to arm themselves with the popular Mauser M-1934 pocket auto. This gun began life in 1910 as a 6.35 mm which was enlarged in 1914 to handle the more effective 7.65 mm round. In 1934, the gun's grip and take-down catch were slightly modified, and many parts were stamped, rather than

*continued on page 80*



Though early K-98k's (top) were well-finished, as the war progressed, the rifles became cruder (above). Many manufacturing short-cuts were taken, such as (right) substituting some milled parts with stampings. Features were eliminated, and walnut stocks became laminated beech.



The StG45, like the earlier StG44, fired the abbreviated 8 mm Kurtz round, shown at right with a longer 7.62 mm Russian round.



Despite more refined designs the bolt-action Kar 98k still remained the Wehrmacht's main rifle.





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## GUNS OF WEHRMACHT

continued from page 56

milled, producing the last of the line. This single-action gun had checkered walnut grips that surrounded the backstrap, as well as a concealed striker. It held eight rounds and measured 6.2 inches overall, with a barrel length of 3.4 inches. As well as officers, the Model 1934 was apparently used by the SS police units.

One other German firm, J.P. Sauer and Sohn of Suhl, produced a popular double-action pocket auto used by the *Wehrmacht* and police. Like the HSc and PPK, the Sauer M-38 magazine held eight 7.65 mm cartridges.

The gun was some 6.3 inches long and sported a 3½-inch tube. It too was a blow-back, and though the hammer was internal, a loaded cartridge indicator protruded from the rear of the slide when a round was in the chamber. The Model 1938 had two-piece plastic grips.

As well as those guns designed and produced in Germany, the *Wehrmacht* adopted a number of foreign arms as it overran Europe. Since almost 30 different handguns of varying calibers were employed, any detailed discussion here would be impractical. Let it suffice to say that Belgian (Browning P-35 "High Power" and M-1922FN), Polish (Vis 35 "Radom"), Hungarian (M-37), Czech (M-27 and M-38), and other firearms were produced for, and pressed into service by, the *Wehrmacht*.

As the Allies were getting closer to Germany's borders, almost anything that would shoot was being issued to the *Volks Sturm* (home guard). This included the old Imperial M-1879/83 10.55 mm *Reichsrevolver*, as well as numerous commercial revolvers and autos in varying calibers.

Unlike the United States, which in 1936 adopted the semi-auto M-1 Garand rifle as standard issue, the German *Wehrmacht's* primary long arm was a bolt-action, box magazine repeater—albeit, one of the finest weapons of its type ever devised.

The *Karabiner* 98k was the final link in the chain of a long line of military arms based on the classic Mauser *Gewehr* 98. The original Kar 98 was devised as an arm for cavalry and artillery. It had a barrel almost a foot shorter than the infantry rifle, and it was stocked to the end of the muzzle. Few of these arms were made because of excessive muzzle flash and recoil.

In 1905, the *Karabine* 98a was introduced for use by cavalry, artillery and signal troops. It extended the Kar 98's barrel from 16.9 inches to 23.6 inches and introduced a stacking hook beneath the front band. Like the Kar 98, the 98a's bolt handle was turned down, and the stock was recessed to enable soldiers to better grasp the knob and work the action.

The Kar 98b was manufactured following WWI to arm the *Reichswehr* (army). This was basically a version of the *Radfahrer Gewer* (bicycle rifle) used by *Jäger*

*Radfahrer* troops during the Great War.

Finally, in 1935, the Kar 98k emerged. As it originally appeared, the rifle weighed some nine pounds, measured 43.6 inches overall and had a barrel length of 23.62 inches. It chambered five 7.9 mm x 57 Mauser (commonly termed 8 mm Mauser) rounds within an internal magazine. The Kar 98k had a side-mounted leather sling, plus a steel disc inlet into the stock to assist in taking down the bolt.

The rifle's rear sight was graduated from 100 to 2,000 meters, though the gun's maximum aimed effective range was really about 500 meters. The 98k was stocked with walnut to within a few inches of the muzzle, and incorporated a bar for a knife-style bayonet and integral cleaning rod.

Guns produced prior to, and during the early years of the war, were of top-notch construction. As the conflict continued,



The *Volks Sturm* (home guard) used a variety of obsolete guns including the Model 79/83 *Reichsrevolver*.

however, workmanship and materials became strictly utilitarian. For instance, laminated beech stocks were substituted for walnut, and the bolt dismounting disc, bayonet lug and cleaning rod were eliminated (a small hole was drilled in the side of the buttplate to assist in bolt takedown).

Sniper versions of the 98k were also produced, and accessories, to include grenade launchers, were provided for the rifle.

As many of the defeated nations used versions of the '98 Mauser, the *Wehrmacht* was not above pressing those arms into service. These included the Czech M-1924 and M-1933, which were modified and officially termed M-1922t and M-1933/40 by the Germans.

A *Volks Sturm* version of the Model 98 was made and designated the VK98. Workmanship on these guns left much to be desired. Stocks were crudely hewn and finished, and metal parts rough in the extreme. Most of these last-ditch rifles were single-shot, although limited numbers were equipped with ten-round magazines, which were originally intended for M-43 semi-automatic rifles.

Strangely enough, because of their grotesque appearance, few VK98s were picked up as souvenirs by Allied soldiers, and they are now scarce collector's pieces.

The German army preferred to use .22 caliber versions of their service rifle for training purposes. This sub-caliber objective was achieved by either having a conversion unit fitted to a standard 98k, or by



using the *Sportmodell* 34 and the KKW rifles, which were actually made as .22s. These single-shots were built to specs similar to those of the 98k. They were sold commercially and were favored by the *Hitler Jugend* (youth) movement and the NSDAP (Nazi party). Manufacturers included Mauser, Gustloff Werke, Erma and Walther.

Just because the major part of the *Wehrmacht* was armed with bolt-action repeaters, it did not mean that the authorities weren't interested in developing semi-automatic battle rifles. Two early guns of this ilk were the *Gewehr* 41(W), devised by Walther, and Mauser's *Gewehr* 41(M). Both were in 8 mm Mauser and held ten rounds in external, fixed metal box magazines. Their specs were similar too, with the 41(M) measuring 46¼ inches overall as opposed to the 41(W)'s 44¼-inch length.

The barrels of the guns ran 21¾ inches and 21½ inches, respectively, while they hefted 11.25 pounds and 11.08 pounds.

Mechanically, however, the two rifles were considerably different. The M-41(W) had a bolt with flaps which locked as the firing pin ran forward, and which disengaged as the bolt carrier moved to the rear. The gas system involved a muzzle cone which trapped gas and forced a floating piston to the rear. The piston then pushed an operating rod and bolt carrier backwards, unlocking the bolt.

Mauser's rifle had a blast cone, piston and operating rod too, however, the rearward movement of the rod pulled the back portion of a two-piece bolt away from the front section, thus camming the forward locking lugs out of the locking spaces in the receiver.

While the 41(W) had a top-mounted operating handle, the 41(M) utilized a bolt-like assembly, which, fortunately for the shooter, did not rebound when the mechanism operated. Both guns were loaded through the tops of the receivers with two five-round clips.

Of the two systems, the M-41(W) was by far the more successful, and several thousand were produced, the majority of which were sent to troops on the Eastern Front.

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Still, the M-41(W) was not without its faults. It was criticized as being muzzle heavy and prone to fouling. Finally, its bolt mechanism was combined with a Russian Tokarev-style gas system to produce the *Gewehr* 43, and its brother, the Kar-43.

Eventually built by Walther; Gustloff Werke, Suhl; and Berliner-Luberker Maschinefabrik AG, Lubek, the G-43 was

*continued on page 82*

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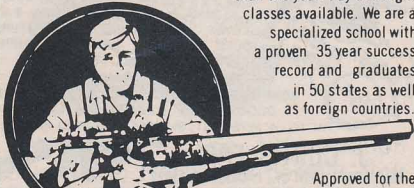
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## GUNS OF WEHRMACHT

continued from page 81

made in considerable numbers right up on to the end of the war. It was two pounds lighter than its predecessor and had a detachable ten-shot magazine. Like the Kar 98k, as the war progressed, finish on the G-43 began to suffer, and laminated stocks became common. The G-43 was regarded as accurate enough for sniping work and all were made with an integral scope mounting rail.

Following World War I, the Germans, feeling that the regulation 7.92 mm x 57 Mauser round might be too powerful for standard infantry use, began looking for a less potent substitute.

In 1938, Polte Armaturen und Maschinenfabrik in Magdeburg, came up with the 7.92 mm *Infanterie Kurtz Patrone* (7.92 mm Infantry short cartridge) with a case length of only 33 mm and a powder charge about half that of the standard 7.92 mm cartridge.

To coincide with the development of the 7.92 mm Kurtz, Hugo Schmeisser of C.G. Haenel Waffen und Fahrradfabrik, Suhl, and Walther began working on gas-operated rifles to chamber the bobbed 8 mm cartridge. What eventually emerged were two separate designs, termed the *Maschinenkaribiner* 42 [MKb42(H) and MKb42(W)]. Both of these guns were gas-operated, capable of either semi- or full-automatic fire, and had 30-round detachable magazines. While the MKb42(W) was longer and heavier than the Haenel, it produced a cyclic rate of fire of 600 rounds per minute (rpm), as opposed to its rival's 500 rpm. Though some 8,000 of each were eventually produced, neither design was considered entirely successful, and the Haenel design was eventually modified into what was originally termed the *Maschinenpistole* 43 (MP-43).

While the MP-43 was not really considered a particularly hot property, when its practicality as an assault rifle was demonstrated to skeptical officials, the gun was redesignated the *Sturmgewehr* (assault rifle) 44. This gas-operated arm, like the Haenel, had a 30-round magazine and a cyclic rate of fire of 500 rpm. It measured 37 inches overall with a 16½-inch barrel. Apparently the authorities' trust was well-placed, for the StG44 performed yeoman service in Russia. One aberrant use of the MP-43/StG44 involved the attachment of a curved *Krummer Lauf* ("bent course") barrel extension with an integral prism to allow the gun to be safely fired around corners, over parapets, or from inside armored vehicles at either 30- or 90-degree angles. The device was pierced with several small holes to reduce the velocity of the bullet from 2,100 feet per second (fps) to just under 1,000 fps, greatly limiting the round's effectiveness.

In the latter months of the conflict a delayed blowback StG45 with roller bearings was introduced. It saw little service,

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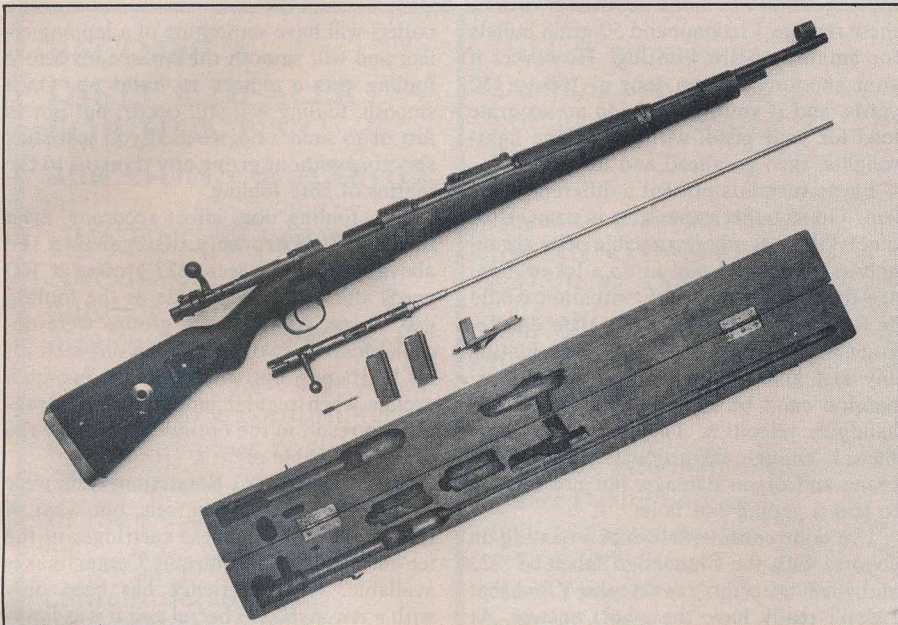
though it did provide the model for some postwar auto rifles.

The German Paratroop Corps, which was actually part of the *Luftwaffe*, began casting covetous glances at the MP-43, though the authorities felt that the 7.92 mm Kurtz round was just too anemic for their needs. Rheinmetall-Borsig, Sommerda, devised a selective-fire assault rifle for the paratroopers that took the standard 8 mm Mauser round, as they had desired. Termed the *Fallschirmjäger Gewehr* (paratroop rifle) 42, it was, depending upon the situation, to fulfill either the role of the rifle, submachine gun or machine gun. The bolt mechanism was similar to that of the British Lewis gun, and other components were an amalgamation of borrowed and original designs. Supremely efficient, the FG-42 fired from a closed bolt in the semi-

The MP-38's 32-round stick magazine projected downward in front of the receiver, providing a handy fore-grip. This 9 mm blowback was eminently controllable, and could be fired quite accurately from hip level. Measuring only 32.8 inches with the stock extended (this was reduced by eight inches when the butt was folded forward), the MP-38 weighed 9½ pounds and had a cyclic rate of fire of 500 rounds per minute.

To trim manufacturing costs, the MP-38 was modified in 1940 by the substitution of a pressed grip frame for the earlier cast aluminum, a different ejector, a plainer receiver, etc. While the gun's overall measurements were the same as those of the MP-38, the weight was reduced by almost three-quarters of a pound.

An MP-40II was also devised with a special magazine housing which accommodat-



**While some sub-caliber versions of the Mauser M-98 were manufactured, conversion units that reduced the caliber from 8 mm to .22 were also available. Trainers were employed by the services and the paramilitary.**

auto mode and from an open bolt when the selector was turned to auto.

Germany first adopted a submachine gun, or as the Germans called them, machine pistols, in 1918. The MP-18 Bergmann was a blowback-operated 9 mm, which carried 32 rounds in a Luger "snail drum"-style rotary magazine which jutted out from the left side of the receiver at a right angle.

Designed by Hugo Schmeisser, the MP-18 saw limited use in the latter part of World War I. Although the Bergmann underwent modifications (exemplified in the Berdmann MP-28, MP-34 and MP-35), the *Wehrmacht* did not adopt a radically new submachine gun for almost 20 years.

In 1938, a gun which was later incorrectly called the "Schmeisser" was accepted for service. Designed at Ermawerke, the *Maschinenpistole* 38 had an aluminum frame, plastic receiver housing and folding stock which tucked up neatly beneath the receiver.

ed a pair of 32-round magazines. When one mag was expended, the second could be moved over in rapid order, giving the soldier a total of 64 rounds.

The *Wehrmacht* also used a number of domestic and "foreign" heavy machine guns, discussion of which is outside of the scope of this piece. For those of you who are interested in such things, though, we have included color photographs of a small selection of these weapons at the beginning of this article.

While for a time the *Wehrmacht* seemed invincible, the entry of the United States into the war, coupled with severe setbacks on the Eastern Front and other foreign and domestic considerations, caused the "Thousand-Year Reich" to meet an abbreviated end in 1945.

The artifacts and weapons produced during the Nazi era dominated in Germany; however, they provide a sometimes garish, often ingenious, but always fascinating look at the trappings of tyranny.

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