

# 1906 "Test" Lugers: A Reappraisal

Ed Dittus

guns@myakka.com

March, 2025

"1906 German Army Test ... A very rare Luger" - Jan Still

"Very important Luger and possibly the rarest true variation of a German army related Luger"

- Philip A, in Luger Gunboards

1. Introduction
2. 1906 Initial Issue 101: Fundamentals of Identification
3. So where did the term "Test" Luger come from?
4. The Data
5. The Examples
6. Background
7. What does the 1906 Initial Issue Luger look like?
8. 1906 Initial Issue Modifications
9. The Auxiliary Lugers of 1906
10. On Serials
11. Appendix I: Order Concerning Distribution of 1906 Initial Issue Lugers
12. Appendix II: Data Base
13. Appendix III: Machine Gun Regiments
14. Appendix IV: References

## 1. Introduction

I was fortunate to recently find, and purchase, a 1906 "Test" Luger. When I first got it I did not realize the depth of the rabbit hole I entered.

To begin, the Lugers that are the subject of this paper are not "Test" Lugers by any commonly accepted meaning of the term. A directive of June 27, 1907 (Appendix I) makes it clear that these weapons were, in fact, issued to active troops and were to be actually trained with.

2. Of the self-loading pistols procured for Machinegun Companies in 1906, the number required for peacetime training of enlisted men (20 guns) is to be left or allotted to each Machinegun Company as directed by the Ordnance Corps.

(Görtz, 1910, p. 310)

These were, as the documents show, the first Lugers officially issued to German Army troops. Görtz (2010) states this definitively:

"It should be noted that these were not further trials pistols ... but were procured as service weapons for regular issue, not for further field trials." (p. 350)

They were issued to "experimental" Machine Gun Companies, a fact that might have suggested that some sort of "testing" was going on. This is not supportable by the existing literature.

As such, the word "Test" is inappropriate. I suggest that henceforward we use the term "**1906 Initial Issue**" when discussing these pistols. This accurately describes what they are: the first Lugers issued to German Army troops.

## **2. 1906 Initial Issue 101: Fundamentals of Identification**

Before we discuss the details, let me suggest, in cheat sheet fashion, how one identifies a 1906 Initial Issue Luger. Note that these Lugers were military and would all have been chambered in 9mm.

Key initial difference from P.06 Lugers

- Large (2.8mm) Three digit serials.
- Military acceptance and proof stamped on left side of barrel extension.
- No hold open.

The foregoing characteristics are necessary and sufficient to identify an Initial Issue Luger. This P.06 Lugers would have a five digit serial as well as a factory installed hold open without an acceptance mark associated with it. And, naturally, being civilian, there would be no military markings. They might, though, be found in either 9mm or .30 caliber.

Changes from the original pistol most likely occurring around issuance ca. 1907:

- Machine Gun Regiment engraved on grip strap. Note that the Regiment will likely be one of those in the list that follows. This occurs on approximately 50% of observed cases. Note that one case has a Regiment that is not on the list.

We assume that all were so marked. This is not based on observation of a significant sample.

Changes from the original pistol most likely occurring around 1913:

- Removal of Grip Safety
- Redesigned left grip to fill space left from Grip Safety removal
- Filled in space on the front side of the sear blocking bar
- Change of "Safe" position of the safety bar switched to "Down".
- Original *Gesichert* stamp peened out and new stamp applied in upper position
- Addition of hold open

These characteristics will be discussed more fully.

### **3. So where did the term "Test" Luger come from?**

There are seven references (that I have been able to discover) that refer to these weapons specifically (see Appendix IV), of which six have only a short paragraph (or less) of discussion and only three that use the term "1906 Test Luger" (Still 1991 & 2007; Noll 2020). Costanzo (1977) refers to "Trials" that occurred in 1906. These "Trials" concerned Frommer and Mauser pistols (Walter 1986 p. 131). I suspect that a misreading of Costanzo's statement was the reason that the 1906 Initial Issue Lugers became "Test" pistols.

### **4. The Data**

Typically, when one embarks on research into a firearm (or virtually any other area of inquiry), one goes to the classic data sources. There, one expects a fair to high level of consistency. There might be a snippet of additional information as one peruses the sources but one does expect consistency. And if there is some odd piece of information, subsequent authors will acknowledge it and reconcile it with commonly accepted facts or clearly refute it.

Oh really? Silly boy. These are Lugers after all.

I think that it is important here to underscore the paucity and unreliability of the data regarding these things. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there are 17 extent examples of these pistols. Of these, there are photos of six. Data has been repeated and passed from one writer to the next with, I fear, little investigation and virtually no references or corroboration.

A sampling of the thin literature is in order. I will reference Görtz repeatedly in this

section inasmuch as he devotes far more discussion to these weapons than any other author.

As I mentioned, there are seven references that refer to these weapons of which six have only a short paragraph (or less) of discussion.

Costanzo (1977), the earliest reference that I have come across, refers to 50 Lugers being "tested" (and failing) in 1906, he also cites an inspection mark that he is alone in reporting. Görtz points out that Frommer and Mauser pistols were "tested" at this time and they failed, thus securing adoption of the Luger. Could Costanzo have mistaken what pistols were tested? He is, however, quite specific in identifying two "Lugers" from this testing (#3 & 48) that are in collectors hands today. Naturally, no photos were provided nor have they appeared anywhere else.

Walter (1986 & 1995) refers to testing, also in 1906, of Mauser and Frommer designs, both of which failed. This event may have been the one reported by and misinterpreted by Costanzo. He was almost certainly misinterpreted by Still:

Walter (1986, page 131) reports that approximately 375 9mm caliber 1906 style Lugers were tested by experimental infantry machine gun detachments starting in 1907. (Still, 2004)

Walter says no such thing. He was referring to the testing of the Frommer and Mauser pistols.

Though, later, Still (2007a) does seem to question Walter on a Forum post:

Walter (page 131) reports three, sn 118, 171. and 193, which are described as retaining their grip safety. However he further states that they bear only a single acceptance stamp forward of the side plate (he may have these confused with the 1902 German Army Test).

Walter, in both his references, refers to three "survivors" of this early deployment (# 118, 121 & 183) which all have: "a single military inspector's mark on the left side of receiver ahead of the trigger-plate." I have been able to physically examine # 171. It has no marks whatsoever. This pistol was held up as one that was originally issued in 1907 as a "Test" Luger in four references between 1986 and 2007. It wasn't. A cursory examination of it would have confirmed this. Clearly the writers never saw it. And Walter's insistence on a "single" inspectors mark on a "Test" Luger is inconsistent

with other references and the few examples for which we have photographic evidence. Walter (1995) does, however, have an illustration of an Old Model Luger used in early tests (Plate 4). This example is too early to be considered an Initial Issue but it does have one inspector's mark ahead of the trigger plate. Perhaps this was the source of the confusion about inspector's marks. One might be forgiven for identifying Walter's examples as "questionable", one of which certainly is.

As one reviews the literature, one is rather struck by the variation in the reported number and form of acceptance marks. Görtz (2010, p. 309) states, rather authoritatively, that:

They were stamped with two Spandau arsenal inspector's marks  
(crown/O on early pistols, crown/E on serial numbers above approximately 100)

Yet Costanzo provides an illustration of marks purportedly on two examples (Serials 3 & 48, p. 248):



And another example that had avoided the scrutiny of the aforementioned authors has a distinct mark resembling the one in Costanzo (serial 19):



As you can see, the references provide a bit of a challenge. From them there does not appear to be a definitive method of identifying these weapons, hence our "Cheat Sheet", above.

## 5. The Examples

Appendix II contains the data on examples that have been either referenced in the literature or personally examined by the author. There are 17 examples of 1906 Initial Issue Lugers and three examples that meet many of the criteria for such an identification but lack Military acceptance marks. Of the 17, 10 have Regimental

markings, one has later Police markings. None of the remainder have been examined so we do not know whether they were issued and/or marked. Similarly, we do not know whether all examples were modified to P.08. specifications. Know the military acceptance marks for nine of the 18 examples. And, if that were not enough, two of the examples (from Walter 1986 & 1995) might well have been misidentified by him thus reducing the sample by two.

I make more use of weasel words such as "it appears" or "it seems that" and so on than I am comfortable with but, until our knowledge base expands, that is the best one can do. If ever we needed a clear demonstration of T.E. Lawrence's dictum, this pistol provides it:

### **A series of exceptions to some undiscoverable rule**

#### **6. Background**

The German Army "tested" Lugers over a fairly long period. By 1906 it seems that the decision to employ this weapon had been made (though not formalized at the highest level) and a contract was made with DWM to provide some number of these weapons to the Army, specifically to certain Machine Gun Regiments (Appendix III). The number provided has been variously reported but the number 220 seems to be popular and the serial numbers were a series separate from other production and that they extended from 1 to about 220 (I will come back to the serialization question anon). These were drawn from production of New Model Lugers which began their serials at 25xxx.

#### **7. What did the 1906 Initial Issue Luger look like when issued?**

These pistols are standard M. 1906 Commercial Lugers in 9mm. They have 4" barrels, grip Safeties, short frames, commercial numbering and other characteristics appropriate to this model. They were not equipped with a hold open per Military requirements though production commercials produced at the same time did have that feature. They also did not have a stock lug. The word *Gesichert* (Safe) was present under the safety lever in the LOWER position. That is to say SAFE = UP. This final point is the only difference between these pistols and their commercial brothers. The commercial versions had the finish under the safety lever in the lower position polished bright. It is thought that the *Gesichert* engraving was because the receivers were left over from the recent production of Navy versions. This is speculation.

They also had the internal marks characteristic of the early issue new model commercials ie. The Catherine wheel stamp on the ring next to the barrel stop as well as

one digit stamped on the other side of the stop. The last two digits of the serial are on the bottom of the sear and the stop lug and there is a flaming bomb stamp in the well that accommodates the side plate release.

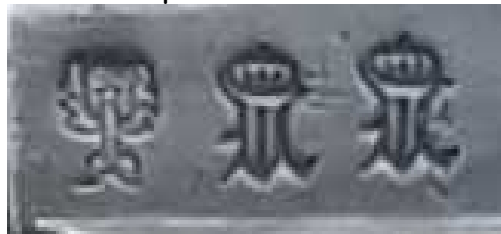
These pistols, being Military issue are ALL chambered in 9mm.

A purported Initial Issue MUST show:

- Army Proofs: (crown/O) on early pistols, crown/E on serial numbers above approximately 100). Please see the note on data for the inevitable potential exceptions.



Note that three reported examples have different acceptances. Serial 19 shows:



This particular example appears to be an intact 1906 (with grip safety).

Serials 3 and 31 reported by Costanzo purportedly have this mark:



- Commercial numbering (ie. "Hidden")
- Serials up to approximately 350 (?)
- Catherine Wheel stamp on receiver ring bottom



- Serial under the sear bar



- Single digit inspection number on receiver ring bottom



And other characteristics consistent with routine production of P.06 Lugers.

While it is assumed that the original configuration of this pistol was a New Model P. 06, two examples that have come down to us retain the grip safety and all the others reflect the changes associated with that conversion (Görtz p. 309). These changes are identified below.

So, as issued 1906 Initial Issue Lugers are, essentially, early production 1906 Lugers without a hold open and with military acceptance stamps on the left side of the barrel extension and with low serial numbers (ie. less than, say, 350).

Interestingly, the serials on the frame and barrel are relatively large, 2.8mm.

### **8. 1906 Initial Issue Modifications**

At some point the forward grip was engraved with a regimental identification, whether this was universal for all issued pistols is unknown. At some other point, presumably in 1913 or thereabouts, when Lugers were recalled to have a hold open installed, some number of these pistols were converted to P.08. configuration regarding the presence of the grip safety. That is to say that the grip safety was removed and the safety lever was converted to "SAFE = DOWN". The word *Gesichert* was engraved in the upper position and the original word was obliterated (and that is the correct word) by application of a punch, repeatedly. The left grip was replaced with one that covered the

absent safety.



The picture below shows a comparison of an original grip from a Grip Safety equipped Luger (Top) with a modified grip.



It is unknown how many Initial Issue pistols were so converted. Lack of conversion is not, therefore, indicative of anything. There is one confirmed example that was not converted (# 16).

Such pistols are apt to have a hold open installed. If it was installed due to the military order, you will

find a small acceptance mark on the right side of the barrel extension.  
n.b. Photo is NOT from an Initial Issue Luger.

For further discussion of the issuance and modifications to these weapons, the reader is referred to Görtz (2010, p. 311-318).



When issued, these pistols were doubtless model 1906 commercial pistols and it was only when the final design of the Luger for Army service was finalized that they were modified to P.08 specifications.

### **9. The Auxiliary Lugers of 1906**

On a related topic, it appears that DWM produced some number of pistols to the same specifications as those produced for the Machine Gun companies which were not acceptance marked or proofed though serialized in the "Initial Issue Luger" manner ie. large three digit numbers.

Görtz suggests that the serials are above the (supposed 220) upper limit for the issued Lugers. He also states that the Hold Open was factory installed at the time of manufacture so no inspectors mark is associated with it. These were commercial Lugers in every way except for the odd serials.

Serial 171, as reported by Walter (1986 & 1995) and Still (1991 & 2007) as a "Test" Luger is not a "Test" but, rather, one of these.

At present there are three examples of this pistol, serials 55, 171 and 229. They are identified in the database as Aux(iliary).

The basic tell for this (sub)variation is that there are no Military stamps on the barrel

extension and the presence of a three digit serial number. Also, it's hold open was installed at the time of manufacture (no inspection stamps). The existence of serials 55 and 171 is interesting from a number of standpoints. Perhaps the most significant is that they fall into the sequence of hitherto reported authentic Initial Issue Lugers. That suggests that issuance of the so-called Test Lugers did not follow an uninterrupted block of serials.

## 10. On Serials

This discussion was triggered by a footnote in Görtz (p. 352-353):

*The directive from the War Ministry of 27 June 1907 stated that the scale of issue of these pistols would be 20 per Machine Gun Company for peace time training purposes. This directive was sent to the HQ's of the Gardekorps and 10 other Armeekorps who had participated in the formation of the then experimental Machine Gun Companies; the serial numbers of these pistols run up to around 220 however, which corresponds to 20 pistols per Korps, rather than 20 per Company, issue at this scale to all 16 Companies listed above implying a requirement for some 320 pistols, rather than the ~220 of the known serial number range: the reasons for this discrepancy are lost in time.)*

The documented issuance of these pistols was 20 per Machine Gun Company. The highest serial (220) corresponds (perhaps accidentally) to issuance of 20 pistols to each of 10 Army Corps. If 20 were issued (as documented) to each Machine Gun Company then that would imply around 320 pistols in total. How many were issued? Is it possible that the highest serial noted is just, by the luck of the draw, below the magic number that corresponds to issuance to just the army Corps? If 20 were, in fact, issued to all of the Machine Gun Companies, where are the other 100 (more or less?).

As Görtz states:

**"the reasons for this discrepancy are lost in time" (p.353)**

Or, perhaps, DWM produced some number of pistols beyond the ones that have the Army acceptance marks. To quote Görtz on different pistols:

*... DWM produced pistols in excess of the numbers needed, as mechanically identical examples of both exist in the same serial number ranges with higher numbers in the 859x and 995x - 6x ranges, with and without grip-safety respectively, but without the crown/D acceptance marks types.) (p. 86)*

Perhaps we know of them. Perhaps they are the "Auxiliary" Lugers discussed above.

Görtz describes the Manual on these (true) First Issue Lugers in some detail. In it (in 1907 remember) are described two types of safety:

"the safety was described as either "a) ...pistol with automatic safety and applied safety" or simply as "b)...pistol with applied safety"" (p. 350)

He goes on to state:

"the duality of the manual in this regard, however, indicates that both types were in simultaneous use during 1907. Both types must therefore have been in service at the time of issue of the manual in June 1907, and yet the P.08 was not adopted officially until August 1908, nor was the first batch of 50,000 ordered from DWM until November 1908. This manual therefore raises the question of what exact precursor version of the P.08 without grip safety was in service with the M.G. units in 1907 along with the known militarily accepted New Model pistols." (p. 351)

One might bravely suggest that there is an actual date for the modifications to the Initial Issue Lugers and that is immediately prior to issuance thus making them pistols with only an "applied safety". One might also suggest that the "Auxiliary" Lugers were issued along side of them. They, or the examples we have seen, have both the "applied safety" and the "automatic safety".

**A Bold Claim.** Perhaps one day we will know.

**Appendix I**  
**Order Concerning Distribution of 1906 Initial Issue Lugers**

<i>Kriegsministerium</i>	<i>Berlin W.66. 27.6.1907</i>
<i>Nr. 669/07 geh.A.2</i>	<i>Leipzigerstr.3.</i>
<i>Secret</i>	
<i>Self-loading Pistols for Machinegun Companies</i>	
-----	
<i>1. On account of two new models of self-loading pistols having recently been submitted by Frommer and by Mauser, the arming of enlisted men of the Machinegun Companies with self-loading pistols is suspended for the time being.</i>	
<i>Allocation of self-loading pistols and related ammunition at war allowance level - Annex VII to Regulations of 13 May 1907, No. 511/07 Secret.A.2., concerning raising of new Machinegun Companies - will consequently only be effected after termination of pending tests.</i>	
<i>2. Of the self-loading pistols procured for Machinegun Companies in 1906, the number required for peacetime training of enlisted men (20 guns) is to be left or allotted to each Machinegun Company as directed by the Ordnance Corps.</i>	
<i>3. Practice ammunition for self-loading pistols will be made available in accordance with note 4a of Annex I of to the above mentioned Regulations.</i>	
<i>By order</i>	
<i>Wandell</i>	
<i>To</i>	
<i>The Royal General Commands of the Corps of Guards I, II, IV, V, VII, VIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII Army Corps</i>	
<i>(KA, A X 3 B420 b.)</i>	<b>Sturgess, p. 310</b>

1906 INITIAL ISSUE (II) LUGERS								
	Serial Number		Inspection Marks	Unit	Modified to P.08 Specs	Photo	Location	Reference
1	3 <sup>1</sup>	II		?	No?			Costanzo 1977 p. 248/Still 2007 p.24
2	8	II	EE	145.R.M.G.62.	Yes	X	Germany	<a href="https://www.lugerforums.com/threads/luger-first-issue-ser-8.132936/">https://www.lugerforums.com/threads/luger-first-issue-ser-8.132936/</a>
3	13	II	?	129.R.M.G.76.	?			Still 2007 p.24/Noll 2020 p.3
4	16	II		121.R.M.G.16.	No	X	Belgium	
5	28	II	?	6.F.M.G.10.	?			Still 2007 p.24/Noll 2020 p.3
6	29	II	Non-Matching Upper	6.F.M.G.8.	Yes	X		Still 2007 p.22/Noll 2020 p.3
7	32	II	?	65.R.M.G.xx.	?			Still 2007 p.24/Noll 2020 p.3
8	40	II	OO	72.R.M.G.70	Yes	X	Germany	Noll 2020 p.3
9	48 <sup>1</sup>	II		?	No?			Costanzo 1977 p. 248/Still 2007 p.24
10	51	II	?	?	?			Still 2007 p.24
11	105	II	?	?	?			Still 2007 p.24/Noll 2020 p.3
12	107	II	EE	135.R.M.G.17	Yes	X	USA	
13	117	II	EE	Illegible	Yes	X		Still 2007 p.24/Noll 2020 p.3
14	118 <sup>2</sup>	II	?	?	?			Walter 1986 p. 131/Still 2007 p.24
15	166	II	EE	132.R.M.G.13.	?		USA	Still 2007 p.24/Noll 2020 p.3
16	193 <sup>2</sup>	II	?	?	?			Walter 1986 p. 131/Still 2007 p.24
17	209	II	EE	176.R.M.G.68.	Yes	X		Still 2007 p.27
18	55	Aux	None	None	No	X	USA	<a href="http://phoenixinvestmentarms.com/History%20Book%20dwm06.htm">phoenixinvestmentarms.com/History%20Book%20dwm06.htm</a>
19	171 <sup>2,3</sup>	Aux	None	None	No	X	USA	Walter 1986 p. 131/Still 2007 p.24
20	229	Aux	BUG	None	No	X	Germany	Sturgess p. 312

1: These two pistols were initially identified by Costanzo. Still repeated the identification without comment. Costanzo identifies a unique acceptance mark and suggests a testing program that is not referenced elsewhere.

2: These pistols were initially identified by Walter. He specifically states that a "single inspector mark on the left side of the receiver". Other sources (and examples) show two such marks. Further #171 is problematic - it has no inspection marks. These entries are questionable.

3: This pistol has no inspection marks, it is not a "test" Luger

**Appendix III**  
**Machine Gun Regiments Who Received 1906 Test Lugers**  
From Görtz (2010, p. 352)

- Garde-Regiment zu Fuss (Berlin) 3.G.M.G.1.
- Garde-Regiment zu Fuss (Berlin) 4.G.M.G.1.
- Garde-Füsilier-Regiment (Berlin) G.F.M.G.1.
- Regiment Königin Augusta (Berlin) 4.G.G.M.G.1.
- Grenadier-Regiment Nr.3 (Königsberg) 3.R.M.G.1.
- Grenadier-Regiment Nr.6 (Posen) 6.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.13 (Münster) 13.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.65 (Köln) 65.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.72 (Torgau and Eilenburg) 72.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.114 (Konstanz) 114.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.129 (Graudenz) 129.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.132 (Strassburg) 132.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.135 (Diedenhofen) 135.R.M.G.1.
- Königs-Infanterie-Regiment Nr.145 (Metz) 145.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.148 (Elbing and Braunsberg) 148.R.M.G.1.
- Infanterie-Regiment Nr.176 (Kulm and Thorn) 176.R.M.G.1.

## Appendix IV References

Costanzo, S. (1977). *World of Lugers Proof Marks: Complete Listing of Different Variations of Proof Marks on the Luger*. (p. 248)

Noll, J. (2020). *Pistol Observation Addendum to Imperial German Regimental Marking*. Ventura, CA. Self Published (p. 3)

Still, Jan C. (1991). *Imperial Lugers and their Accessories*. Marceline, Mo., Walsworth Pub. Co. (p. 17)

Still (2004). <https://www.lugerforums.com/posts/18113/>

Still, 2007a: <https://www.lugerforums.com/posts/77510/>

Still, Jan C. (2007). *Central Powers Pistols*. Douglas, AL, Still's Books. (Pp. 24, 27,28)

Görtz, G. L. & Sturgess, J. (2010). *Pistole Parabellum - History of the Luger System*. Collector Grade Publications. (pp. 308 - 314, 349 - 353)

Walter, J. (1986). *Luger Book: The Encyclopedia of the Borchardt and Borchardt-Luger Handguns, 1885-1985*. Arms and Armour Press. (p. 131)

Walter, J. (1995). *The Luger Story*. Stackpole Books. (p. 112)

## Thanks and Acknowledgments

I had no idea when I started writing this that it would be so fraught with dead ends and annoying inconsistencies.

In any event, I would like to thank Ed Buffaloe for his encouragement and learned advice and editorial guidance.

Thanks to Bill Schmitz of [NewMexicoFirearms@Yahoo.com](mailto:NewMexicoFirearms@Yahoo.com) for selling me both(!) Lugers that got me started down this particular rabbit hole.

Finally, thanks to PhilA of the Still Gunboards for permission to quote him.