

# New Findings on German and Basel Police Lugers in the 1916 Commercial Serial Range

by William A. Reupke, Ph.D.

## Background

Several years ago Weimar collector Shayne MacMahon reported a German police Luger in the same serial number range (74900 to 76100) as the scarce and unusual Type I Basel police Lugers (Note 1, Ref. 1). The report confirmed what we had previously suspected, namely, that not all Lugers in this serial range went to the Basel police (Note 2). We suggested the designation **1916 Commercial** to denote any Luger in this serial range nearly identical to 1914 Commercial except with original 1916-patented safety sear, regardless of final destination (Refs. 2, 3). Since then additional Lugers in this serial range not destined for Basel have come to light.

## Data

Table 1 shows the newly identified Lugers interspersed with known or probable Type 1 Basel police Lugers. All but the commercial Navy are German police variants. Table 2 lists new details about these guns. Table 3 shows those guns along with other German police Lugers originally marked in the commercial style.

## Analysis

Table 2 shows that the receivers of Lugers found in the lower half of the 74900-76100 serial range have sharp reentrant corners at the base of the "inclines" indicating manufacture in 1917 or earlier. These observations are based on revisions, dated 1917, to official P. 08 drawings which replaced the sharp corners with 0.5-mm radius fillets (Ref. 12). For low-number Table 2 Lugers like 74976 and 75207 this may mean that the guns themselves were assembled c. 1916-1917, and it would lend additional credence to the new designation **1916 Commercial**.

On the other hand, suspected Basel Lugers like 75389 and 75521 would not have reached the Basel police until 1921 leaving a potential gap of 4-5 years between production and their

use in Basel. The guns well could have been impounded from 1919-1921 owing to export restrictions but still leaving a potential gap of 2-3 years to explain.

Table 3 shows that those Lugers in the 74900 to 76100 serial range which went to the German police fit correctly into a pattern of police Lugers bearing commercial acceptance stamps and with commercial-style serial numbers. Those at the beginning of the table would not have been acquired new because prior to about 1918 ordinary German police did not use Lugers (Ref. 5) while those Lugers near the end of the table probably were acquired new. The Lugers of interest to us here fall in the middle and they will be the subject of the discussion below.

(1) The Basel police report that their Lugers were acquired in 1921 from Germany yet Germany was not permitted to export military-type weapons after the Treaty of Versailles went into effect. Thus in December 1919 the Dutch ordered cal. 9 mm Lugers from Vickers, and in 1922 DWM refused Finland its request for cal. 9 mm Lugers. How the Basel police acquired approximately 400 cal. 9 mm Lugers from Germany in 1921 remains a mystery.

(2) The reverse is also true, that is, not all Basel police Lugers are in the 74900-76100 serial range. In particular those Basel police Lugers obtained by reworking WWI Lugers (Type 2 Basel police Lugers) have letter-suffix serial numbers appropriate to that source.

## 1916 Commercial Lugers Acquired by Officer Private Purchase

One explanation of the Table 3 pattern is that some of these Lugers were purchased privately by Imperial Army or *Reichswehr* officers, civil servants, or other official personnel, and that some guns were then stamped with the *Reichswehr* property mark '1920' to prevent their being turned in for reward as part of the government's

civilian disarmament program. Upon retirement some of these personnel would join German police units, and many of their weapons would receive sear safety. This sequence of event would explain the features of many of the Table 3 German police Lugers particularly those examples in the 74900 to 76100 serial range. An objection to this explanation is that the official orders to mark *Reichswehr* weapons with the '1920' property stamp specifically provided that privately purchased weapons should not be marked (Ref 9).

One answer to this objection is that most privately purchased weapons indeed were not '1920' marked, but the directives were not always followed exactly. Indeed, it is believed that the work was done in haste (Ref 9). Thus some privately purchased weapons would have been marked in spite of the directive and some not marked, consistent with the '1920' mark found on some but not in all of the Table 3 Lugers.

A small letter 'P' mark - first reported by MacMahon - applied to the unblued frame of nearly all **1916 Commercial** Lugers which have been examined to date (see Table 2) may at first suggest the German word *Privat* to indicate that these weapons were intended for private sale. But this is unlikely since Lugers intended for commercial sale were distinguished from the beginning of production by their distinctive serial number format and distinctive commercial proof marks; consequently there would be no need for an additional mark.

## 1916 Commercial Lugers Acquired as Imperial Army Test/Acceptance Weapons

Another suggestion is that the low numbered Lugers may have been acquired by the Imperial Army c. 1916 to test the 1916-patented safety sear



design. As official property eventually most or all would have been 1920-marked. Indeed, it was not unusual for the military services to acquire test or acceptance guns from the commercial serial number range (Ref. 10). The 'P'

mark could designate the German word *die Prüfung* which may be translated as 'Test', 'Examination', or 'Inspection', or *die Probe* meaning 'Trial', 'Test', or 'Sample.' Later the test guns could have been routed to German police units where they would receive a sear safety.

On the other hand, we believe that these Lugers were not all made c. 1916. A low-numbered example, 75207, shows the good quality fit and finish which we associate with military P. 08 manufactured by DWM in 1916, and it has the earlier receiver and the normal slide guides on the frame. But a high-numbered example, 75927, has the poor quality fit and finish we associate with military P.08 manufactured c. 1918, and it has the later receiver and defective slide guides on the frame. A new question arises: For what purpose were the later and poorer quality examples manufactured?

#### 1916 Commercial Lugers Acquired as Police Test/Acceptance Guns

If the Imperial Army did not acquire all of these Lugers c. 1916 as test pieces, then, if police testing occurred in the period 1918-1920, when economic conditions in Germany were severe, the use of low quality parts or even rejected parts becomes a possibility.

The P-marking might then mean *Probe* or *Prüfung* as before, or just *Polizei*.

Note, however, that the 1920 property marking common to such guns then must have been police-applied rather than *Reichswehr*-applied. Although police orders parallel to the *Reichswehr* orders to apply the property stamp have not been reported, the police would have equal reason to prevent the clandestine turning in of the guns for reward during the civilian disarmament program. Given the previous acceptance of the Luger by the military and wide experience with the Luger acquired during WWI, the police test and acceptance process did not need to be very extensive.

That some of the subject Lugers could have been intended for police test raises the possibility that if initial police requests for test Lugers in Germany

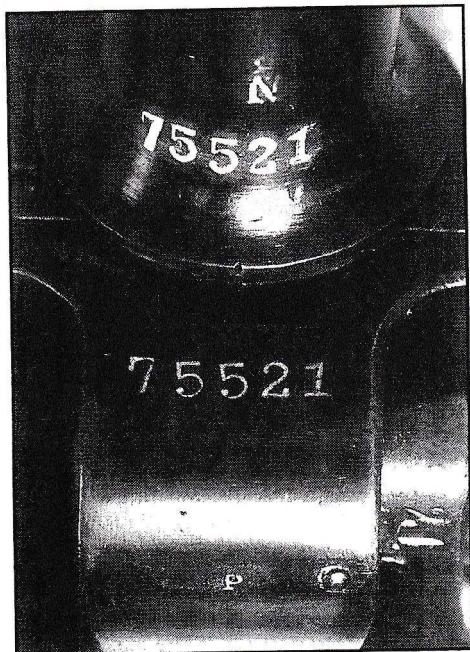


Figure 1. Detail of Typical 1916 Commercial Luger. 1916 Commercial model is identical to 1914 Commercial model, to include horizontally-oriented Crown Nitro proof on left side of receiver and matched, factory-numbered cal. 9 mm proofed barrel, but differs in having 1916-patented sear bar and letter 'P' on underside of frame near take-down lever.

Serial Number	Caliber (mm)	Barrel Length (mm)	Property Mark	Comments
74976	9	100	1920	Eagle/33 barrel no. 3, sear safety, Ref. 4
74985	9	100		'1923 Commercial'. R. Shattuck, List #177, 1978
74997	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police mag only, similar to mag of 75690, Ref. 6
75115	9	150		Navy. Barrel unnumbered. R. Shattuck, List #237, 1999
75207	9	100	1920	Unit marks partially removed, no sear safety, Ref. 4
75389	9	100		Swiss provenance.
75441	9	100		W. Glaser, Zurich. G. Glover, Auto Mag 13 (4) 1980
75445	9	100		W. Glaser, Zurich. As above.
75504	9	100		M. Morris, private communication, 1996
75521	9	100		Swiss provenance
75690	9	100	1920	Complete rig, sear safety, Ref. 1
75704	9	100		W. Glaser, Zurich. As above.
75902	9	100		W. Glaser, Zurich. As above.
75909	9	100		W. Glaser, Zurich. As above.
75927	9	100		Swiss provenance
75941	9	100		J. Marrs, private communication, 1997
76028	9	100		Swiss provenance. S. MacMahon, Auto Mag 13 (1) 1980
76049	9	100		W. Glaser, Zurich. As above.
76071	9	100		K. Cumberland, MAX Show, Pittsburgh, September 2002

Table 1. German Police Lugers in Type I Basel Police Serial Range

List of German police Lugers amongst known or suspected Type 1 Basel police Lugers continues to grow. Although our sample is small it is of more than passing interest that the German police Lugers tend to populate the lower end of the serial range. Excess production of German police test Lugers might have been sold to the Basel police.

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fell short of expectations thus resulting in overproduction then DWM or German police suppliers might have approached a foreign police department - specifically the Basel police - to dispose of the surplus.

### Conclusions

The lowest number Lugers studied here, with sharp corners at the base of the receiver inclines, if assembled at about the same time as the receivers were made, likely were produced c. 1916-1917. This conclusion lends credence to the new designation **1916 Commercial**.

The 1920 property-marked German police Lugers interspersed in the Type I Basel police Luger serial number range are: (1) part of a pattern of German police Lugers which started out as ordinary, commercially numbered and proofed guns but ended up being used in police units via retiring German military officers, civil servants, or other official personnel who had purchased them privately; or (2) were acquired by the Imperial Army c. 1916 as test or acceptance pieces and

subsequently routed to German police units; or (3) were acquired directly by the German police c. 1918-1920 for testing. Conceivably these Lugers could have arrived in German police units through more than one of these channels.

All but one of the Lugers examined in this study bear a small letter 'P' mark applied to the underside of the frame before blueing. The exact significance of this mark is unknown but *Privat*, *Probe* or *Prüfung*, or *Polizei* are possibilities consistent with items 1, 2, or 3 above, respectively. Unravelling the



Figure 2. Side view of typical 1916 Commercial Luger. Unusual combination of horizontally-oriented Crown Nitro proof on left side of receiver and 1916 patent safety sear configuration distinguish this model from 1914 Commercial (1908 safety sear configuration) and post-World War I model (vertically-oriented Crown Nitro proof).

					Receiver Radius at Incline		Underside Frame Near Takedown		Slide Guides Back Frame		Frame Well	
					-1917	1917-	Unmarked	P-marked	Normal	Defective	Normal	X-marked
Serial No.	Observer	Type	Property Mark	Sear Safety								
74976	V. Skirmants	G	1920	●	■			●	●		●	
75115	R. Shattuck	n/a			n/a	n/a		●	●		●	
75207	V. Skirmants	G	1920		■			●	●		●	
75389	Author	B			●			●	●		●	
75521	Author	B			●			●		●		●
75690	S. MacMahon	G	1920	●	n/a	n/a		●	●		●	
75927	Author	B				●		●		●		●
75941	J. Marrs	n/a				●	●		●		●	
76028	S. MacMahon	B			n/a	n/a		●	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
76071	Author	n/a			●			●	●		●	

G = German police, B = Basel police (assigned on basis of provenance)

n/a = Data not available

■ Undercuts complicate the identification of receiver type. Identification by author.

Table 2. Noteworthy Features of some Lugers in the 74900-76100 Serial Range

Note the use of 1917 and earlier receivers in the lower-numbered guns suggesting manufacture c. 1916-1917. Note also the tendency of defective frames to concentrate in the upper half of the serial range. Possible explanations of the unusual letter 'P' mark on the underside of the frame near takedown lever are discussed in text. Complete validation of trends shown here would require a larger sample.

Diagrams adapted from *World of Lugers Proof Marks*, 1977, Sam Costanzo.



exact significance of this marking would almost certainly shed additional light on these scarce and unusual Lugers.

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Toggle	Serial Number	Number Style	Factory Date	Property Mark	Proofs	Sear Safety	Magazine Safety	Unit Marks	Comments	Reference
DWM	40266	Mixed	None	1920	BUG	Yes	No	-----	Matched mag. Police E/D stamp.	J.Still, p.114
DWM	42423	n/a	None	n/a	BUG	Yes	n/a	n/a	Eagle 2 marked	R.Shattuck, #177
DWM	52023	n/a	None	n/a	BUG	Yes	n/a	n/a	35, TP marked. Holster, 2 matching mags.	R.Shattuck, #171
DWM	52583	n/a	None	n/a	BUG	Yes	n/a	n/a	Matched mag.	R.Shattuck, #183
DWM	52828	n/a	None	n/a	BUG	Yes	n/a	n/a		R.Shattuck, #173
DWM	568XX	n/a	None	1920	Horiz.Nitro	Yes	n/a	n/a	Refinished	K.Kontos, Winter 2000
DWM	69107	n/a	None	n/a	n/a	Yes	n/a	n/a	Matching Haenel stainless mag.	R.Shattuck, #184
DWM	71812	Comm	None	None	Horiz.Nitro	Yes	Yes	n/a	Also Imperial proofed	J.Still, p.234
DWM	72261	Mixed	None	1920	Horiz.Nitro	Yes	Yes	1952	Circle S left receiver.	G. Henrotin, p. 110
DWM	74188	Comm	None	None	Horiz.Nitro	Yes	Yes	n/a	Complete rig.	J. Still, p.235
DWM	74976	Mixed	None	1920	Vert.Nitro	Yes	Yes	-----	Eagle/33 barrel numbered 3	V.Skirmants, Ref.4
DWM	74997	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Numbered police mag only, similar to 75690	M.Morris, Ref. 6
DWM	75207	Mixed	None	1920	Horiz.Nitro	No	No	S. ---	HZA JL 20 marked rt. receiver	V.Skirmants, Ref. 4
DWM	75690	Mixed	None	1920	Horiz.Nitro	Yes	No	648	Circle S left receiver. Complete rig.	S.MacMahon, Ref. 1
DWM	87144	Mixed	1921	None	Horiz.Nitro	Yes	Yes	-----	Matching barrel with Nitro proof	W.Allman, Ref. 8
DWM	6169m	Mixed	None	1920	Vert.Nitro	Yes	No	n/a	Matched police mag	J.Still, p.117
DWM	5749q	Comm	None	None	Vert.Nitro	Yes	No	S.D.III.43	C/G barrel proof	J.Still, p.138
DWM	7777q	Comm	None	None	Vert.Nitro	Yes	Yes	n/a	C/G left receiver. Complete rig.	J.Still, p.136
DWM	4982r	Mixed	None	None	Vert.Nitro	Yes	Yes	-----	Complete rig. S.B.2415 marked holster.	J.Still, p.133
DWM	6808r	Mixed	None	None	Vert.Nitro	No	No	S.Sta.I.372		J.Still, Third Reich, p.208
DWM	8920r	Mixed	None	1920	Vert.Nitro	Yes	No	n/a	Converted Broomhandle holster. P.B. 130 marked	J.Still, p.118
DWM	2349s	Mixed	None	1920	Vert.Nitro	Yes	No	-----	Two matched wood bottom mags.	J.Still, p.146
Blank	2437t	Comm	None	None	Vert.Nitro	Yes	Yes	L.Ka.309	EWaA68 acceptance. Complete rig.	J.Still, p.145
DWM	1138v	Comm	None	None	Crown U	Yes	No	n/a	Complete rig. 1934-dated Sunburst K holster.	J. Still, p.289
DWM	1167v	Comm	None	None	Crown U	Yes	No	n/a		J.Still, Third Reich, p.228

n/a = Data not available ----- = Unit marks removed or never had unit marks

**Table 3. Some German Police Lugers in Commercial Serial Range with Commercial Acceptance Marks**

Lugers shown in table fall into three groups. Those at the beginning likely were first acquired privately by Imperial Army officers, were sometimes given the 1920 property stamp when officers joined the Reichswehr, and acquired a sear safety when retiring officers joined police units. Those at the end of the table likely were acquired new directly by police units. Lugers in between these groups are transitional in nature and could have been acquired privately by Imperial Army or Reichswehr officers, acquired by the Imperial Army as new-type sear test guns, or acquired directly by police units as test guns c. 1918 or 1919.