

THE TOTENKOPF LUGER

by Klaus Schad

I recently acquired some new information from several books which I would like to share with the membership. Hopefully, I can shed some new light onto this mystery. Criticism and discussion are welcome.

The sources of this information are the following books: Das Ehrenbuch der Deutschen Pioniere and Die Geschichte des Deutschen Heeres im Weltkrieg 1914-1918. And, a special thanks to Jan C. Still, Reinhard Kornmayer, Bob Pedigo and Ulrich Schiers of the Wehrgeschichtliches Museum in Rastatt/Baden.

In my opinion, two important origins of the Totenkopf P.08 are discussed as Nos. 2 and 5 on page 105 of **Pistols of Germany and Its Allies in Two World Wars, Vol. I** by Jan Still. I would like to discuss the Garde-Reserve-Pionier-Regiment and the Stosstrupp of WWI in light of these new information which I have uncovered.

The Garde Reserve Pionier Regiment (G.R.P.R.) was a distinct and listed unit created in 1916 of the 3rd and 4th battalions of the Garde Pionier Bataillon. The regiment itself consisted of three battalions, approximately 3000 men, commanded by a Major Dr. Reddemann. The flamethrower troops of the G.R.P.R. were called Stosstrupps. (**Das Ehrenbuch**, pg.520). The concept of stosstrupp had been established by the G.R.P.R. and only much later integrated into other units.

It should be noted that **Das Ehrenbuch** was written by none other than Major a.D. Dr. Reddemann himself and he should have known if his flamethrowers were called Stosstrupps or not! Since the G.R.P.R. was a distinctive unit, then its Stosstrupps had to be distinctive also!

On July 28, 1916 after 150 missions, this famous regiment was honored with its highest award from the Kaiser: the Totenkopf. The award was a patch worn on the lower left uniform sleeve. From that moment on, the members of the G.R.P.R. called themselves "Die Totenkopf Pioniere." The accompanying photos taken in October 1989 at the Rastatt Museum in Baden, West Germany show this award. The G.R.P.R. was an elite unit and even after WWI, whenever the surviving members attended their veteran meetings, they proudly displayed the Totenkopf badge on their civilian clothes!

In 1915, the leader of the 3rd Company of the Garde Schützen Bataillon, Captain Willi Rohr, was transferred to the Armee Abteilung Gaede, where he reorganized the recently formed Sturm bataillon. Because of its gallantry, success and courage, this batalion was honored and named after its leader, Sturm Bataillon Rohr. His methods and tactics in modern warfare were soon adapted by most combat units. During thre summer of 1916, additional Sturm bataillone were formed by order of the High Command. Sturm bataillon Rohr consisted of one transport company, one light grenade launcher company, one battery of 105mm howitzers, two machine gun companies and one platoon of

Flamethrowers. Please note that the Stosstrupps of the G.R.P.R. were permanently detached to the Sturmbataillone. (*Die Geschichte*, pg.187) Therefore, the Stosstrupps of the G.R.P.R. were an integrated unit of the Sturmbataillon wearing the Totenkopf insignia. This is contrary to the unsubstantiated opinion of some authors such as John Walter, that the Stosstrupp was never a distinctive unit with totenkopf insignia.

Jan Still discussed the Totenkopf Luger with a former employee of a large and well known firearms dealer/importer, who indicated to him that of tens of thousands of surplus Lugers were imported in the 1960s, over two years time approximately sixty to seventy Deaths Head Lugers were stored with other rarities in a special room, reserved for collectibles. Virtually all these Lugers had several features in common: 1. Most were 1917 and 1918 dated, all were DWM and Erfurt, with DWM predominating. A couple were 1920 reworks and all of 9mm caliber. 2. Most were matching. Proof marks were 100% military. 3. Deaths Head were stamped and not engraved. 4. Deaths Head were at least of two types. The "Lazy-S" was displayed above and under the skull. Few had the true skull and crossbones superimposed and not all were stamped sideways on the receiver. 5. Approximately 50% of the observed 60-70 Deaths Heads were received originally as destroyed guns. These had holes of approximately 1/3" drilled through the side of both receiver and barrel clear into the chamber at a 45° angle.

What of the other possible explanations of the Totenkopf insignia? The 1. and 2. Leib Husaren Regiments, Braunschweigisches Husaren Regiment Nr.17 and the Braunschweigisches Infanterie Regiment Nr.92? It is my opinion that a mix of early dated, or even one issue marked Deaths Head Luger should have been found. The Stosstrupp Hitler, SS, Weimar Republic and Freikorps? We really do not have much to go on that, especially no documented proof. An examination of Freikorps insignia shows a few units used the Totenkopf insignia. A condemnation destruction mark? The Germans are not a wasteful people. What would be the purpose for someone to come up with a Deaths Head stamp in order to discard the weapon? A simpler symbol would be more believable. However, those imported Lugers with drilled holes may lend some credibility to this theory.

I would like to agree with Randall Gibson that the "Lazy-S" does not stand for an "S" at all. It could very well symbolize the flamethrower hose spraying death to the enemy. The hoses of the heavy duty stationary equipment measured up to thirty meters (90 feet). A good chance to solve this mystery would be the discovery of a Totenkopf Luger with a unit mark. According to Kenyon, page 232 2nd column, the author is confirming the existance of many such unit marked Lugers. If the membership has any knowledge about this, then your immediate response would be greatly appreciated.

In my opinion, until definitive evidence to the contrary is found, the "origin" of the Totenkopf Luger is the G.R.P.R.!

The pictures were taken in October 1989 at the Wehrgeschichtliche Museum in Rastatt/Baden.
The Totenkopf patch on the left lower uniform sleeve was awarded to the Garde Reserve Pionier Regiment on July 28th 1911 from Kaiser Wilhelm II. From that moment on the G.R.P.R. called themselves proudly "Die Totenkopf Pioniere".



John F. McAhon to the Imperial P08 "Volks" .

I recently acquired a 1912 Erfurt P08, ser. #7056a. One thing struck me as unusual: the rear connecting pin has the 'heraldischer Adler', or Erfurt proof eagle, on the left face of the pin. I haven't seen this before, and cannot find reference in any of the recently available documents from the German archives to explain the presence of the eagle. Does anyone have any ideas, info., etc.?

To Joe Schroeder, George Winat, Klaus Schad

I just (4-13-90) received the April edition of AM. Many thanks to all of you for the submissions of the Erfurt data. Joe, can you furnish additional data on the '17 Erfurt you wrote about...serial, etc. I'll be looking forward to the picture of the unusual proof. George, what are the different proofs, and the mark added when they retrofitted the holdopen? Klaus, I envy your list of unit marked Erfurts, and the Stuttgart-made holster. I went to high school in Stuttgart, 1958-62.

To Tom Heller and Don Hallock

Many thanks for the recent trades. Your pieces filled two gaps in the year dates, and I am just tickled pink. All I need now is a 1911 dated Erfurt, and the year dates will be complete.



Zu den modernsten Nahkampfmitteln gehörte der „Flammenwerfer“, der insbesondere gegen Unterstände, Maschinengewehrnesten und Tanks Verwendung fand. Es handelt sich um einen tragbaren zylindrischen Behälter mit langem Schlauchmundstück, aus dem mittels Preßluft brennendes Öl in einer riesigen Stichflamme geschleudert wurde. Die Entzündung erfolgte beim Ausströmen auf chemischem Wege. Die dabei entwickelte Hitze war derart, daß die Getroffenen sofort zu Kohle verbrannten. Hinter der starken Rauchwolke konnten sich die Sturmtruppen leicht entziehen.