

THE WALTHER FACTORY

by Ron Clarin.

In memory of my Uncle Tennie Clarin (1920-1998).

Due to a recent grant of permission to post an article about the Walther factory ([*see the link below to Tim Hawkin's excellent article](#)), including interviews with Veterans of the 90th Infantry Division, I thought it would be a good time to re-visit this topic, and make it a "Sticky Post". What really happened at the Walther factory just before, and after it was captured and occupied by the US Army in WW2? Will we really ever know for sure? Probably not as many details as we would like. To bad we don't have a time machine so we can go back and see. I have tried to organize some solid information here from several sources, including some of my own research and opinions. The following post may give everyone some insight concerning this subject.



There were two divisions in General Patton's 3rd Army that reached the town of Zella-Mehlis, and the Walther factory. The 11th Armored Division, and the 90th Infantry Division. My Uncle was in the 90th Division, 344th Field Artillery Battalion (he was a combat medic), and was at the Walther factory when it was captured. General Patton called the 90th "My best infantry division". The shoulder patch of the 90th was "T/O" which in WW1 stood for Texas/Oklahoma (when divisions were assembled regionally). In WW2 the T/O patch came to stand for "Tough 'Ombres". The men of this division fought in 5 major campaigns, including: Normandy, Northern France,

Rhineland, Ardennes, and Central Europe. From the shores of Normandy, all the way to Czechoslovakia, the 90th Division advanced faster and farther than any division in WW2. In fact, they were pushing so fast, at times they would literally drive up on the Germans and totally surprise them. At other times, the Germans didn't even know they were in the area. But this rapid advance also caused them problems. They were sometimes attacked from the



Uncle Tennie – somewhere behind the Siegfried Line

flanks, or even from the rear by German troops that had been bypassed. The men of the 90th spent 308 days in combat, with a cost of 19,200 men killed and wounded. My Uncle passed away in 1998. And although I know he was very proud to have served in this division, he did not like to talk about it much. I have since spent hours and hours doing research on this division, and how it relates to the Walther factory. I have read the unit histories, actual unit reports from the National Archives, and many books on the subject (including some written by actual Vets). I have also talked to, and interviewed surviving vets of the 90th Division. Further, I have talked to fellow moderators, collectors, and historians, both from the US and Europe concerning this subject. So you might say I have done a bit of homework.



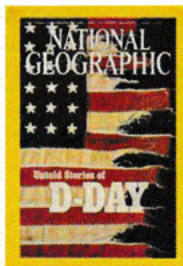
To summarize what I have learned: Lead elements of the 11th Armored, 22nd Tank Battalion, reached Zella-Mehlis on April 4th, 1945. By one account, they were perhaps 70 to 80 miles ahead of the 90th Infantry Division. I first believed that they waited for the infantry troops to catch up (the 90th Division), or their own infantry, before entering the town or the factory. But they did have their own infantry with them (the 55th Armored Infantry Battalion). It is now clear that the surrender was fairly quick, and that one of their first priorities was the Walther factory. Here is a quote from Kenneth Moeller, 11th Armored Division Headquarters "When we reached Zella-Mehlis we were seventy or eighty miles out ahead of our supporting Infantry Divisions. We were now attached to XII Corps, and Corps sent us an order to hole up for a few days until the Infantry Divisions could catch up. We circled the wagons just like in the Old West. We set up road blocks and rested. We also visited the Walther Pistol Factory, and reduced their inventory. I selected a 22-caliber, a 7.65 mm. Polizei Pistole, and a P-38 to carry home as souvenirs". The 11th Armored was not equipped for ground fighting, or the house to house, or building to building fighting, that may have been required. They left that to the Infantry. Most of the German towns were nearly deserted when the Americans approached. I think the German civilian population was somewhat scared, and did not know what to expect. I'm sure the German military was not playing the Americans up to be liberators or heroes, but as a "true enemy". There would always be some civilians that were brave enough to stay, and probably remained hidden until they realized it was safe to come out. From talking with Vets that were there, this seems to be the case with Zella-Mehlis as well. It appeared to them to be mostly deserted, and looked similar to many other towns they had been through. It was the towns that the German troops chose to occupy, and fight from, that were in big trouble. These would be the ones that would be attacked, and virtually flattened by American artillery. Also, the book "Walther, a German Legend" by Manfred Kersten, contains information that the town was not deserted. The people were merely hiding as the tanks approached, and at some point they raised the white flag and made contact with the Americans. There were three battalions of Deutsche Volkssturm troops organized in Zella-Mehlis, they were designated Battalion numbers 438, 439, and 440. The Volkssturm were Germany's "civilian home guard", and were usually poorly trained, equipped, and poorly armed. Deutsche Volkssturm translates to "German People's Assault". There were normally about 1,000 men in each battalion. Of which, many would have been old men, young boys, or others normally not suited for regular military service. Apparently Fritz Walther and the Mayor (Bürgermeister) had convinced a large Volkssturm force of about 2,000, to abandon the town and go elsewhere. They would have been no match for the 11th Armored Division. This probably prevented a potentially disastrous loss of German lives, and destruction of the town by superior US forces. The Mayor was detained and driven around town, indicating to the citizens the surrender.

The US forces were looking for the Walther brothers and soon took them into custody. The Walther factory was surrendered in the presence of the Walther brothers. With the American Captain issuing orders to allow them to enter the factory if necessary. As in every other town, the people were ordered to surrender their private firearms as well. And of course Fritz Walther was not exempt from this order (**see the link below for information on what was taken from the home of Fritz Walther, according to affidavits by Vets of the 11th Armored Division). Many fine pistols and rifles were taken from his home. And the Walther brothers were detained and questioned extensively over the next few days. The line becomes somewhat blurred between what may be considered "war trophies" and souvenirs, versus, what may be considered looting. I would never pretend to know what these brave young men were thinking, or had been through to this point in the war. Many of them, along with their commanders felt they deserved everything they could get their hands on. My personal feeling is somewhere in-between, and somewhat sympathetic to the German civilian population. Vets that I talked to, were somewhat happy there were arms factories in Zella-Mehlis, and surrounding towns. But at the time, they were more concerned about the German army, and what lay ahead in the next town. They knew they had the Germans on the run, and after all they had been through, surviving the rest of the war became very important to them. The capture of this particular town, and the Walther factory was neither a highlight, nor the defining moment of the war in the minds of these Vets. Gerald Hadcock (a surviving 90th Division Vet) told me "Ron, there were plenty of German pistols laying around for us to take, we just thought it was kind of neat to get a brand new one from the factory". These are the ones that many kept, and took home with them.



The photo is from the book "Battalion Surgeon" by Dr. Bill McConahey. Gerald Hadcock is on the far right.

The actual capture of the factory: I spoke to Cyril Leuelling (another surviving 90th Division Vet). He was a platoon sergeant, and a squad leader in the 359th Infantry Regiment, with "C" Company. He was on the advance infantry team that day (which I believe was attached to the 11th Armored), and told me that he and his men were literally the first US G.I.'s in the factory. There was not a fight for the factory, but he told me it was obvious the German's had just slipped out the back door prior to their arrival. Although I am not exactly clear on which building he was in. His memory of the factory was good, and he was very clear on what happened that day. It is reported from German sources that there were only small groups of Germans troops left in the city. They had only two tanks, neither of which was fully functional. The German General in command, wanted to leave the town with his soldiers, but the party office wanted to defend the city with the help of the Volkssturm at all costs.



Fritz Walther along with the mayor supported a peaceful surrender of the town. And the remaining troops moved in the direction of Oberhof on April 3rd. But, I believe the Germans had left a small contingent to guard the factory, and only left when it was clear the Americans were approaching, and it was lost. What was left in the factory was definitely worth guarding and staying for, but I guess the Germans figured it was not worth dying for. Sergeant Leuelling took seven .32 caliber pistols (not sure how many were PP's or PPK's) from the factory that day. He told me he soon realized that he could not carry all of them very easily, and gave five of them away. He recalls handing them up to guys in tanks (members of the 11th Armored Division I presume), which left him with two. He said by the time he arrived home with his stuff, there was



only one left in his bag (somebody had stolen the other one). The one he ended up with is PP SN 348575p. Sergeant Leuelling (right) is featured in the June, 2002 issue of National Geographic. This issue is about D-Day, and I highly recommend it for anyone interested in WW2.

Please read the following e-mail I received this evening (1/3/2008) from the son of an 11th Armored veteran:

Ron

My late Dad, Hank Carey was an intelligence officer for the 490th Armored Field Artillery Regiment in the 11th Armored Division during World War II. After he passed away in 1997 we were cleaning out the house and found a PPK stuffed over a heating duct in his basement.

It took a while and some searching until we found out the story of what had happened on April 4 1945 when the 11th entered Zella-Mehlis.

There's quite a bit of discussion of them on the 11th Armored's web site: <http://www.11tharmoreddivision.com/>

"With the capture of Suhl, Zella-Mehlis, and several surrounding smaller Thuringia towns, one of the largest munitions industry prizes of the war fell to the Thunderbolts. Included among them was the famed Walther Arms Works. A capitulation of the arms, armament parts, and materiel seized in the area included: Pistols, P38—1,600; 7.65mm—4,600; Signal—598; 22 cal.—325. Sniper rifles and scopes complete—2,210; scopes incomplete—4,420; rifles partly assembled—1,140; 113 lathes, 97 milling machines, 41 drill presses, nine punch presses, two hydraulic presses, and 40 grinders. At least 500 new type enemy carbines and 2,500 Burp guns with sufficient parts for an additional 5,000 were uncovered at Suhl. Over a million rounds of small arms ammunition were included. This material was found in several large plants and over 50 small, decentralized plants. In addition to weapons, several of these factories produced parts of robot aircraft." (source: http://www.11tharmoreddivision.com/history/11th_book/chapter_3.htm)

Also I've attached a JPEG of a letter I received in late 2001 from Sgt. Harry Schaeffer, [text below, image next page] of Company B in the 22nd Tank Bn, discussing the capture the Walther Factory and the Walther family. I have it in a high res PDF (7.1MB) that I can send you if you want.

He does mention the CIA in the letter, I pretty sure he was talking about the 11th's intelligence officers who's job it was to interrogate captured prisoners (they were still fighting at that time) as the CIA didn't come into existence until the late 40's.

Regards,

Joe Carey

The other information I think most of you know I already have in my article here, and plenty of links to the 11th Armored website. The letter is of great interest. Here is the actual letter with my typed version below that. It is a great story. Here again, I can confirm these are the Units that were initially at Zella-Mehlis. And to hear some of the stories from these Vets is as good as it gets! When he talks about the CIA it is also obvious to me that he is talking about the intelligence officers from the 11th Armored Division as Joe Carey mentions in his e-mail. Also note that he had direct contact with the Walther family as it sounds like they were in danger of getting lynched by the angry former forced laborers.

To: Joe Casey,

Re. Capture of Walther factories in Zells-Mehlis.

Co "B" 22 Tk. Bn. and a Co. from the 55th A.I. Bn. was in on the action in capturing the main factory. Took the Walther family and had to put them in the jail house to keep the liberated Polish slave laborers from killing them. I believe there was over one thousand of them that was liberated. I am Sgt. Harry Schaeffer (communication chief in Co. "B"). I was guarding a prisoner (a private) until the C.I.A picked him up. He did KP duty while with us. When he was picked up by the C.I.A, I had the man inform him I am a Jew. He broke down and cried. At the time we captured Zella-Mehlis the 3rd Army was pushing towards Berlin. My Division was spearheading the 3rd Army in that sector at that time. That was when Gen. Patton was made to turn southeast to the Czechoslovakian border and go south along it staying in Germany all the way to Austria.

**Hope this information helps you.
Sincerely,
Harry Schaeffer**

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Sincerely

Harry Schaeffer



Harry Schaeffer
11221 N 73rd Ave
Peoria, AZ 85345-5817

11th Armored Division G-2 after action reports (below), state the following under the category of Zella-Mehlis Plants: "KARL WALTHER WAFFEN FABRIK: There are five plants in all. Plant A is located at No. 4 Goethe St. Plant B is at No. 15 Kleinbahnhofstrasse. Plant D is at No. 61 Strasse der SA. And plant E on Suhlestrasse. Plant C is in another town, namely WASUNGEN GERMANY (which was built in 1936). In all about 2400 persons were employed of whom half were foreigners. Production figures ran about 45,000 pistols and automatic weapons a month.

ZELLA-MEHLIS War Plants:

- 1) **KARL WALTHER WAFFEN FABRIK:** There are five plants in all. Plant A is located at No. 4 Goethe St. Plant B is at No. 15 Kleinbahnhofstrasse Plant D is at No. 61 Strasse der SA. and Plant E on Suhlestrasse. Plant C is in another town, namely WASUNGEN GERMANY. In all about 2400 persons were employed of whom half were foreigners. Production figures ran about 45,000 pistols and automatic weapons a month.
- 2) **I. G. ANSCHUETZ:** Approximately 600 workers (of whom half are foreigners). Approximately 20,000 parts for Schmeissers produced monthly.
- 3) **MERCEDES:** There are three plants in all. Approximately 2500 workers are employed, of whom only about 250 are foreigners. They manufacture parts for machine guns.
- 4) **FRITZ LANGENHAHN:** Approximately 350 workers are employed, of whom half are foreign. They manufacture parts for the Schmeisser.
- 5) **MORITZ UND GASSENBERGER:** There are about 200 workers of whom half are foreigners. They manufacture parts for the machine guns.
- 6) **FRANZ SCHMIDT:** This man has a factory for repairing guns for the Wehrmacht. It is small, but there is a substantial stock of guns on hand.
- 7) **FOSS AND CO (VENUS WAFFENWERK):** There are approximately 300 workers, and parts for the Schmeisser are manufactured.
- 8) **WEIHRAUCH:** There are about 750 employees and the items of manufacture are igniters, and sights for guns (telescopic sights used by sniper).

Periodic Report Number 112 11 April 1945
COLLAPSE IN COBURG

MUNITIONS PRIZE

With the capture of Suhl, Zella-Mehlis, and several surrounding smaller Thuringia towns, one of the largest munitions industry prizes of the war fell to the Thunderbolts. Included among them was the famed Walther Arms Works. A capitulation of the arms, armament parts, and materiel seized in the area included: Pistols, P38—1,600; 7.65mm—4,600; Signal—598; 22 cal.—325. Sniper rifles and scopes complete—2,210; scopes incomplete—4,420; rifles partly assembled—1,140; 113 lathes, 97 milling machines, 41 drill presses, nine punch presses, two hydraulic presses, and 40 grinders. At least 500 new type enemy carbines and 2,500 Burp guns with sufficient parts for an additional 5,000 were uncovered at Suhl. Over a million rounds of small arms ammunition were included. This material was found in several large plants and over 50 small, decentralized plants. In addition to weapons, several of these factories produced parts of robot aircraft.

CC R renewed its effort to establish lateral contact with CC B during the early morning of April 5. A small task force was successful in breaking through to Oberhof after reducing three roadblocks. The bulk of the command, which had been organized into two forces, moved toward Meiningen from Zella Mehliis at 11:30 a.m. The 22nd Tank Battalion with an additional infantry company moved along the Rohr-Meiningen axis and on reaching the airport was encountered by dug-in panzerfaust crews and infantry. After a bitter fight the airport was seized at 3:00 p.m. and the battalion advanced to the East edge of Meiningen against small arms fire.

Table of organization and equipment for a WW2 Armored Division: This chart shows manpower and armament for an armored division in WW2. And, although the 11th Armored Division may not have been quite at full strength due to

at losses, this is what they would have brought to bear against Zella-Mehlis and the surrounding area. Not to mention the fact that they had two infantry divisions with them (the 90th and the 26th). There would have been no way the few unorganized German troops, and the Volkssturm could have mounted any significant defense against them. The quick surrender of Zella-Mehlis was the wise thing to do for the citizens.

ARMORED DIVISION, T/O 17

O & EM

Entire division	14,620
Division headquarters	307
Headquarters company	111
Service company	160
Armored signal company	256
Armored reconnaissance battalion	872
Armored regiments (2)	2,424
Armored field artillery battalions (3)	709
Armored infantry regiment	2,389
Armored engineer battalion	1,174
Division trains	1,948
Attached medical	414
Attached chaplains	14

Principal Armament

Carbine, cal. .30	6,042
Gun, antitank, self-propelled	126
Gun, antitank, towed	68
Gun, assault, self-propelled	42
Gun, machine, cal. .30, light	237
Gun, machine, cal. .30, light, ground	54
Gun, machine, cal. .50, heavy barrel	103
Gun, submachine (included on ordnance vehicles)	1,654
Gun, submachine (on quarter-ton truck)	506
Howitzer, self-propelled, 105mm	54
Mortar, 60m	57
Mortar, 81mm	27
Pistol, cal. .45	3,850
Rifle, cal. .30	1,628
Tank, light, with armament	158
Tank, medium, with armament	232
Car, armored, reconnaissance, with armament	79
Car, halftrack, M2, with armament	691
Car, halftrack, M3, without armament	42
Car, scout, with armament	40
Other vehicles (including trailers)	2,146

Armored Infantry Battalion reports: Specific information on this unit's mission, troop movement by date, and a summary of what happened. Also interesting is the reporting of casualties, and prisoners of war taken. Note especially the dates of April 4th, 5th, and 6th. The enemy casualties reported for just the date of April 5th, were 100 killed and wounded, and 619 prisoners taken.

20

1 April 1945

The Battalion, operating as a component of Reserve Command, was at REICHLÖB, GERMANY, at the beginning of the period, having closed there the previous day. The Division was attacking north-east in the direction of KULDA with combat commands abreast. Reserve Command, following CG B on the left, was prepared to support either combat command. At 0800 the Battalion moved east and north, via HAUSWURZ, GIESEL, SCHLITZ and HUNFELD, to UNTERWEID, closing at 1545. En route it was attached to CG B and upon arrival at UNTERWEID was given the mission of clearing the woods northeast of the town. The mission was accomplished by 1810 and in accomplishing it 4 enemy trucks and 4 multi-barreled mortars were destroyed. Defensive positions were set up for the light on the high ground north and east of the town. At 2200 the Battalion reverted to Reserve Command. In addition to the enemy losses in material, 13 PWs were taken. The Battalion strength of 1 April 1945 was as follows:

UNITS	STRENGTH	
	O	EM
Hq & Hq Co	13	156
Co "A"	4	287
Co "B"	4	292
Co "C"	3	285
Ser. Co	2	70 (3 Warrant O)
Med Det	2	33
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	28	1123 (3 Warrant O)

2 April 1945

The Battalion remained in UNTERWEID, furnishing "B" Company as convoy protection for Division Trains while elements of Headquarters Company evacuated Allied prisoners liberated by CG A at GRIMMENTHAL. Enemy casualties for the period were: 6 prisoners taken.

3 April 1945

The Battalion, less "B" Company, departed assembly area in the vicinity of UNTERWEID at 0900 and moved to new assembly area in the vicinity of STEINBACH-HALLENBURG, closing at 1730. Our casualties for the period were: 1 EM killed. Enemy casualties for the period were: 13 prisoners taken.

4 April 1945

The Battalion, less "B" Company (attached Division Trains) and "C" Company attached 22nd Tank Battalion, and with "C" Company 22nd Tank Battalion attached, was given the mission of clearing towns and areas from STEINBACH-HALLENBURG north to SCHMAL-KALDEN, west to the WERRA RIVER, east and south to axis WALBACH-METZELS-CHRISTES. Three task forces, each containing a platoon of tanks and one infantry, were formed and the mission was begun

at 0830. Attacking forces were recalled at 0930, as Reserve Command was given the mission of capturing ZELLA-MEHLIS. Two task forces were organized, one under the command of Lieutenant Colonel F. K. HEARN and consisting of "A" and Headquarters Companies, 55th Armored Infantry Battalion, and "C" Company, 22nd Tank Battalion, and the other consisting of "A" and "B" Companies, 22nd Tank Battalion, and "C" Company, 55th Armored Infantry Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel J. T. WINGARD. These task forces, formed into tank-infantry teams, moved out from STEINBACH-HALLENBURG at 1300. The only enemy resistance encountered by the attacking forces consisted of 3 undefended road blocks which were by-passed by the tanks and reduced by the infantry. Lead elements entered ZELLA-MEHLIS at 1630 without opposition. The town was cleared by 1800. Company "A" was reformed and sent northeast on the OBERHOF road to clear it and make contact with CC B. Two extensive undefended road blocks, each 50 yards or more in depth, were reduced before dark. A third extensive road block was encountered but it was decided to wait until daylight to remove it and the company withdrew to ZELLA-MEHLIS for the night. Three small arms factories were taken under guard in ZELLA-MEHLIS and a perimeter defense set up for the northern half of the town. Enemy casualties for the period were: 3 prisoners taken.

5 April 1945

At 0800 "A" Company, resuming its mission of contacting CC B at OBERHOF, reduced 4 defended road blocks, knocked out one 75-mm SP gun and contacted CC B in OBERHOF at 1100. Company "B", having rejoined the Battalion 4 March 45, was dispatched at 0800 to clear towns west of ZELLA-MEHLIS on the ZELLA-MEHLIS-MEININGEN axis with one platoon of "C" Company to clear the woods on either side of this axis. After BENSCHHAUSEN and SCHWARZA had been cleared, the mission was cancelled and the attacking forces held at SCHWARZA. Reserve Command had been given the mission of capturing MEININGEN and the airport in the vicinity thereof. In order to form two balanced task forces, our "C" Company was exchanged for "C" Company of the 22nd Tank Battalion. One force was designated Task Force HEARN and the other Task Force WINGARD. The plan was to attack with the two task forces abreast, Task Force WINGARD on the left. Task Force WINGARD moved at 1130 with Task Force HEARN following at 1200, initially on the same route. Task Force HEARN proceeded through SCHWARZA where "B" Company joined the column, and then toward MEININGEN via KUHNDORF and HELBA. A road block defended by small arms and mortar fire was encountered 2 kilometers east of HELBA. This block was reduced and a 75-mm SP gun destroyed in the vicinity of HELBA. The forces then proceeded into MEININGEN, encountering only SA, and sniper fire at the outskirts. The Battalion was relieved in MEININGEN by the 101st Infantry Regiment, 26th Infantry Division. Relief of the Battalion was accomplished by 2000 and the Battalion returned to ZELLA-MEHLIS, closing at 2300. Estimated enemy casualties for the period were: 100 killed and wounded with 619 prisoners taken. Our casualties were: 2 EM wounded.

6 April 1945

Unit remained at ZELIA-MEHLIS, sending platoon-size patrols to SUHL, OBERHOF and STEINBACH-HALLENBURG. At 1300 a task force, consisting of "C" Company, less 1 platoon, plus 2 assault guns of Headquarters Company, was sent to GRIMMENTHAL to protect a bridge. This task force ran into dug-in enemy infantry and AT fire in the vicinity of OBER MASSFELD and lost one assault gun to enemy action. The balance of the Battalion remained in ZELIA-MEHLIS performing maintenance. Our casualties for the period were: 2 EM killed, 44 EM wounded and 3 EM missing. 1 105 mm assault gun was knocked out.

7 April 1945

The Division zone, had been shifted south and the Battalion was ordered to move at 0730, via SCHWARZA and GRIMMENTHAL, to assembly area west of THEMAR. In an exchange of companies with the 22nd Tank Battalion, the Unit received their "C" Company for its "B" Company. The Battalion, moving behind the 22nd, closed in LEUTERSDORF at 1030. Balance of the day patrolled the VACHDORF-LEUTERSDORF area. Estimated enemy casualties were: 32 prisoners taken.

8-9 April 1945

Unit remained in VACHDORF-LEUTERSDORF assembly area continuing patrol and maintenance activity. The Battalion was alerted to move the morning of 10 April at which time the Division would renew the attack to the southeast to capture COBURG and NEUSTADT. Reserve Command was to follow CC A with this Unit as its lead element. 2nd LT HENRY B. KIELING was assigned to Company "A" on 8 April.

10 April 1945

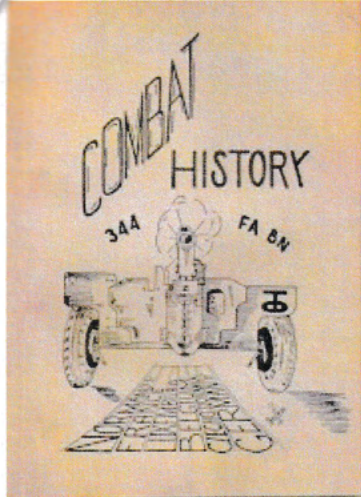
The Battalion departed assembly area VACHDORF-LEUTERSDORF at 1100, moving behind CC A and 41st Cavalry. The column moved via THEMAR to HILDBURGHAUSEN, thence south via STEINFELD, STREUF-DORF and RODACH. RODACH was entered from the north by the 22nd Tank Battalion and from the south and east by this unit. The Battalion cleared a 3 kilometer radius from the town, taking an arc south of the main east and west road through the town, while the 22nd cleared a similar arc north of the road. Battalion closed RODACH at 1830 and set up a perimeter defense for the southern half of the town. Estimated enemy casualties were: 8 prisoners taken.

11 April 1945

The Battalion moved from RODACH at 1400 and closed at EINBERG at 1800. Here it became a part of CC A and a part of a task force under the Battalion Commander, was alerted to move at 0715 12 April behind a cavalry point to out the KRONACH-LICHTENFELS road and be prepared to move on KRONACH. The task

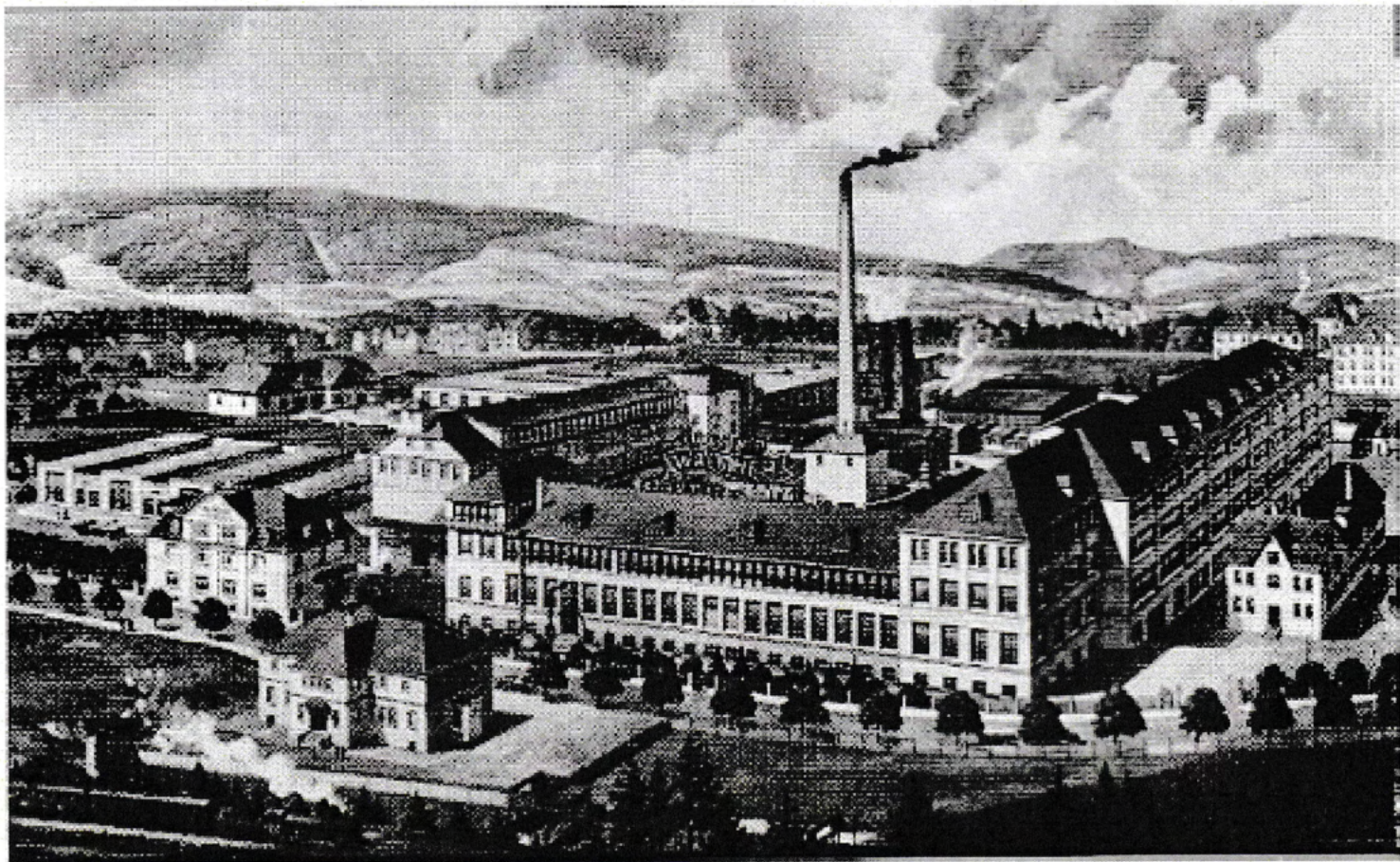
the factory was captured: The rest of the 1st Battalion, 359th Infantry reached Zella-Mehlis at 1730 hours on April 6th to take over the guarding of the Walther factory. At this point the 11th Armored Division was relieved, and the 11th no longer had control of the factory or town. Officer's of the 359th would have had the right of first access to the factory. As in all military situations, rank has it privilege. Anyone that has been in the military knows exactly what this means. They would have taken pistols from the Walther factory museum, and the nicely engraved presentation pieces first. The officer's would have determined what they wanted to take, and then decided when, whom, and how much, the rest of the men would receive. Besides those that were ordered to guard the factory, most of the rest of these units were only in the town and around the factory for one day. I believe my Uncle's unit may have had a little more time than the infantry units to be at the factory, because the artillery units generally were to the rear, and in support of the infantry. Here is a quote from the unit history of the 344th FAB: "Major Conn traded his gold leaves in for a set of silver leaves on April 5th. Moved to Bad Liebesstien, where we ran across several German Military Hospitals crowded to capacity. The next day we moved into an assembly area, letting the 87th Division takeover where we left off, at Liebrode, where we did not even lay the guns. On the 7th we took off for Heiderbach. The trip was a smooth one until we drew near Zella Mehliis, where the roads were thoroughly jammed with GI vehicles of every description. Finally reached our destination. A pistol factory was located in Zella Mehliis, where the officers went down and picked up several cases of guns that were distributed to the batteries for souvenirs. We had to supply 25 trucks for the infantry, in order to bring them up to the line. The next day we left Heiderbach for Schmiedefeld, passing through Suhl. Colonel Munson and his driver Cpl. Van Riper and radio operator Cpl. Sheldon, returning from the 1st Battalion CP saw a German soldier run across the road in front of them and head for the woods. Van fired on him and caused his surrender, bringing back his "Burp" gun as proof".

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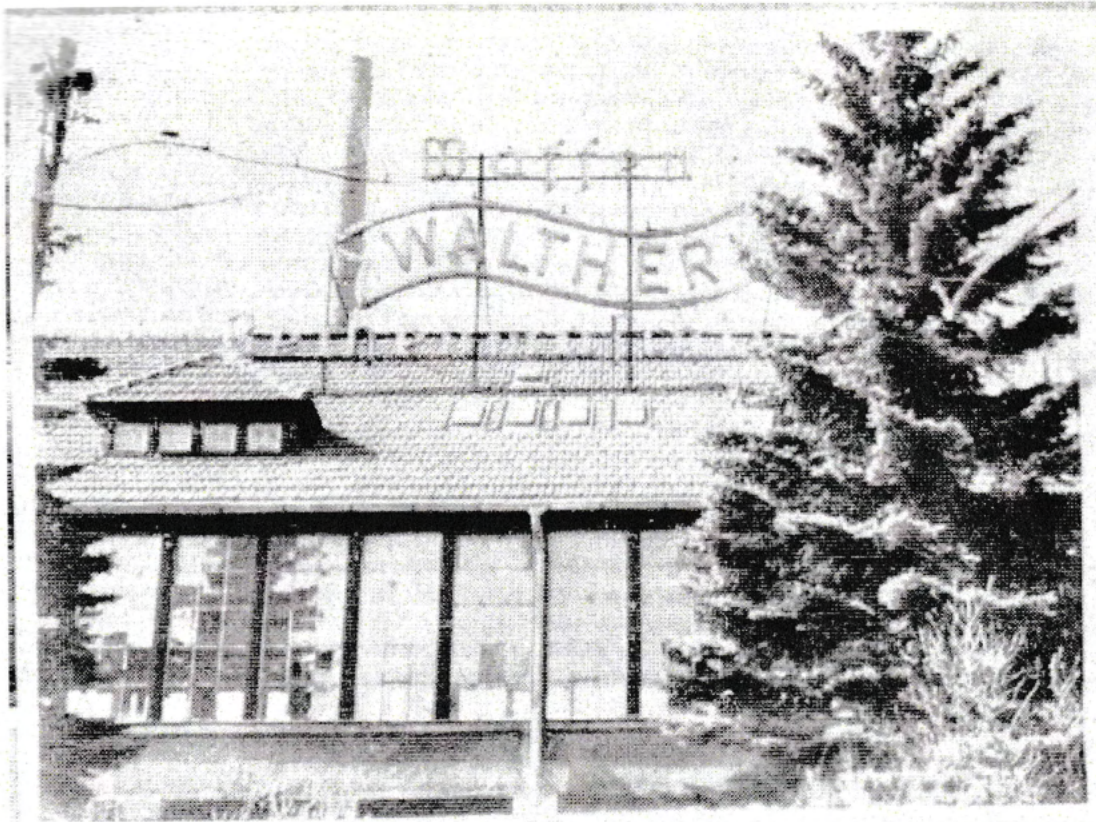


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So therefore, my Uncle's unit was there one day after the infantry arrived, and stayed at the plant while most of the infantry pushed ahead. Twenty five truck loads for just this one unit, can you imagine! So of course the Americans would have taken the "all matching" assembled pistols that were left in the factory first. Many were packed in crates ready to be shipped, and made easy pickings for the American's.



Walther Plant photo courtesy of Joe Wotka from the book "Waffenfabrik Walther 50th Anniversary Book".



(above)
During their takeover of the Walther factory the Americans found 100's of assembled P.38's ready to be shipped. Photo courtesy of the US Army. Identified from left to right are: Sgt Walton H. Stucky, Lt. Daniel H. Howell, Pfc. Pete Martinez

(left)
Rank has it privilege. Lt. Daniel H. Howell shows to Colonel A. I. Schepps part of the booty from the Walther factory. An engraved, gold-plated PP with ivory grips.

ac45 "c & d" block mis-matched pistols: At one time I was spending a lot of time tracking all ac45 P.38's to try and determine what was still in the factory at the time of capture. The mixed parts on these, the slow deterioration of quality, the lack of acceptance stamps, and finally the total mis-matching of parts, can really be interesting and informative. Orv has taken over the tracking of these, but I will provide a link to what I had a while back. You will see some interesting ranges of SN's and their markings, that correspond to what was happening at the factory. I do not believe that every "c & d" mis-match pistol was assembled by a former factory worker, nor do I believe that every one was assembled by a US G.I. I think the truth probably lies somewhere in-between. ***And there now appears to be evidence that some of these mis-matched pistols were assembled before the Americans occupied the factory.** There are no known examples of these found in Europe, all of these parts guns came home with American troops. The Walther factory would have been under constant guard, and tight security. There was then a transition from the initial capture forces, to more of an occupying, and control force. There are Vet accounts of former workers being allowed back in to help with the assembly of pistols. I don't think the German workers "magically" appeared back at the factory to help the Americans. Remember, about half were forced labor foreign workers, happy to be liberated and on their way home. Apparently, the foreign workers did some damage to the factory. They also did some looting of the factory, and the city of Zella-Mehlis, to exact some revenge, once the German troops had withdrawn. Even some of the German workers had fled the city, or stayed home in the face of the American invasion, and probably trickled slowly back to town. In the case of the Vet that Orv spoke with, a German official was directed to get workers back to the factory to assemble pistols. So you could say they were forced to come back to work at the factory. They would then be compensated with food and cigarettes. Hence the nickname "cigarette guns". It is possible the G.I.'s had used up all the assembled frames, slides, and barrels at this point, and needed some help with the remaining small parts. I do not believe that there were a large number of worker's that came back, and it would have been under American security and supervision that this occurred. I certainly believe the G.I.'s would have been able to do the final assembly of the major components, and some of this took place as well. We all know with just a basic knowledge of weapons, after looking at the P.38, the frame, slide, and barrel, can be slapped together in a couple minutes. Obviously the G.I.'s did not care about matching SN's on these late war pistols, although once in a great while, an all matching one does show up. Maybe the matched ones were done by a German worker?, or else somebody got incredibly lucky. We will never know for sure. As you can tell, I do not believe we should pigeon hole everything into these neat little "black and white" categories. And say for example: "all these pistols were done this way", and "all these pistols were done that way". This makes no sense to me. The thing that does make sense, is that there were many things going on at the time. Organized chaos at it's best! The Americans were dealing with things on the fly as best they could, and things changed from day to day. So keep an open mind about what happened, and why things don't always make sense from a collectors point of view. This area of Germany also had many skilled gunsmiths, engravers, and metal workers. That is why we see so many custom pistols done for the G.I.'s that were engraved or plated. Again, a lot of different things going on during this time frame of the capture of Walther, and then during the post capture period.



ac 45 #181c all matching with fnh barrel, and beautiful Durofol grips. It has the cog type hammer, and the following small parts are phosphated: extractor, slide stop, trigger, trigger bar, safety lever, and top cover. It came with 2 phosphated jvd mags. Taken from the Walther factory by my Uncle Tennie Clarin April 7th, 1945.

new information! When was this pistol assembled, and by whom?? For the answer, see the information below:



There now appears to be surprising new evidence that at least some mis-matched pistols were assembled at the Walther factory, before the American occupation of the factory. This evidence leads me to believe that the Germans were assembling pistols from previously rejected, sub-contracted parts sent to Walther, and newly manufactured parts. We have a signed affidavit from a 11th Armored veteran that states this pistol was already assembled. Also, we have the original capture paper that documents this to the G.I., with the slide number on it. This pistol had remained in his possession until it was purchased in the late 1970's, at which time he was asked to provide this information. If you read this letter very carefully, there seems to be little doubt how, and when he obtained this pistol. Right down to the date, and the fact that it came assembled, already packed in a wooden crate. His memory seemed clear, and I can vouch for the fact that his Unit was there on the dates given. I have the Unit reports from both the 11th Armored, and 90th Infantry divisions. I had always suspected that sometime prior to the capture or the plant, they got word the Americans were on the way. Production had stopped at some point, and a decision must have been made to assemble what they could. I am guessing this was done only a few days before the 11th Armored arrived, and maybe continued up to the day before. Certainly there was panic and disarray at the factory. And previous policies, methods, and controls may have been disregarded at this point. Exactly when the head inspector left the plant, and how much control was left at the factory, can only be speculated. I would also guess there was still hope of getting some of these pistols in the hands of German troops, or maybe even the Volkssturm, at this very late time in the war. I believe this was also the case with the late war PP's, and PPK's. We can certainly say that these things were out of the "norm" for the Germans. But desperate times, call for desperate measures. And we can also say, we saw things that went on at Spreewerk and Mauser that were not normal at the very end of the war. It does not totally surprise me that this evidence existed. The Vet also talks about seeing several hundred other P.38's in various stages of construction. These certainly could be some of the others that were assembled later by former factory workers and G.I.s. So once again, things do not always fit into these neat little categories. And there seems to have been a combination of things going on, and more than one right answer to this equation. This information, description, and documents are courtesy of "dietch". A long time collector of pistols with capture papers, and member of this forum.



This P-38 has an ac-42 slide with only one waffenamt on the right side, a 44 production i block frame, a c block barrel and a waffenamt'd but unnumbered locking block. All the small parts are phosphated except for the trigger and hammer that are completely in the white. Also interesting to note, that the grip screw enters from the opposite side. It is in EXC.++ condition which further seems to support the story of him taking it from the crate, and having it stored all these years.

CERTIFICATE

13 February 1946
(Date)

1. I certify that I have personally examined the items of captured enemy equipment in the possession of Joseph Karnowski, 37728121 and that the bearer is officially authorized by the Theater Commander, under the provisions of Sec VI, Cir 155, WD, 28 May 1945, to retain as his personal property the articles listed in Par 3, below.
2. I further certify that if such items are to be mailed to the US, they do not include any items prohibited by Sec VI, Cir 155, WD, 28 May 1945.
3. The items referred to are: One P-38 and holster Serial No 4519 2



Robert W. Floyd
(Signature)
ROBERT W. FLOYD

Capt., Sig C, Commanding Co. 215th Sig Sv Bn
(Rank, Branch and Organization)

(This certificate will be prepared in duplicate)

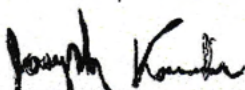
CAPTURE OF THE CITY OF ZELLA MEHLIS

Read this document carefully.

My name is Joseph Karnowski, USA Serial 37728124 and in 1945 I was a Corporal assigned to the 151st Signal Company, 11th Armor Division in the European Theatre of Operations during WWII.

On the morning of 6 April 1945 my unit was attached to Combat Command a, 11th Armor Division in Zella Mehlis, Germany, which was several days after the capture of the city and the Walther Small Arms Factory. I was allowed into one of the buildings which was a long narrow building lined with glass windows. This building was designated as building Plant D. At the end of the hallway several hundred P-38 pistols were in wooden crates stored on wheeled carts. I took pistol number 4519f as a souvenir and latter registered it as a war trophy. I left Zella Mehlis on the morning of 8 April 1945 and was wounded on 12 April 1945. Later I was reassigned to Co C 3184 Signal Service Battalion in which I served the rest of my tour before returning to the United States.

During my time in the factory which was about 30 to 45 minutes I saw several hundred P-38 pistols in various stages of construction but we were not allowed to take any of these pistols because they had not been inventoried. Parts for these pistols had been thrown everywhere and there was a guard posted inside to protect the large machines from damage because the plant workers had attempted to destroy them.



JOSEPH KARNOWSKI
80044 19th Street
Kansas City, KS 66048

Notice the mention of S/SGT's Bergh and Hens in this letter.

CAPTURE OF ZELLA MAHLIS, GERMANY

On April 3, 1945, OCB of the 11th Armored Division was given the mission of capturing Zella Mehlis which was the home of the Walther's small arms factory. Two task forces were organized, one under Lt. Col. F. K. Hearn and consisting of "A" and Headquarters Companies, 55th Armored Infantry Battalion and "C" Company, 22nd Tank Battalion; and the other consisting of "A" and "B" Companies, 22nd Tank Battalion, and "C" Company, 55th Armored Infantry Battalion under the command of Lt. Col. J. T. Wingard. These task forces, formed into tank-infantry teams, moved out of Steinbachhallenburg at 1300.

The only enemy resistance encountered by the attacking forces consisted of three undefended road blocks which were by-passed by the tanks and reduced by the infantry. Lead elements entered Zella Mehlis at 1630 without opposition. The town was cleared by 1800.

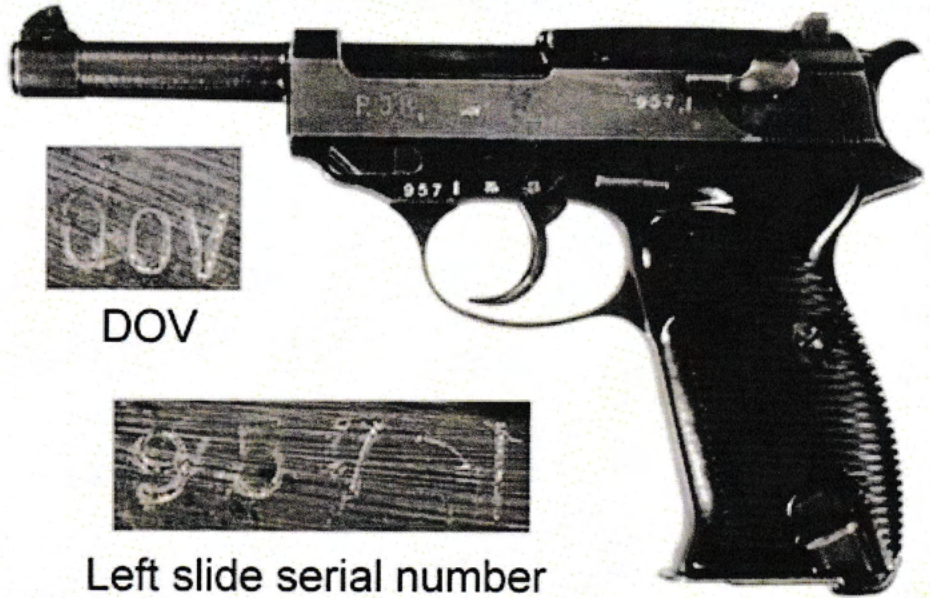
The factory contained one of the largest caches of pistols, rifles and automatic weapons in Germany. Enemy weapons included 500 late model carbines, 2500 machine guns, sufficient parts for another 5000 machine guns, and over a million rounds of ammunition. This ordnance was discovered in several large plants and in more than 50 small plants. Besides weapons, many of the factories produced parts for robot airplanes.

After a quick look into the large factory, Company "A" was reformed and sent northeast on the Oberhof Road to clear it and make contact with OCB. After reducing three extensive road blocks, we returned to Zella Mehlis where S/Sgt. Edward Bergh and S/Sgt. Leander Hens took the Burgermeister in tow to walk around the town securing billets for our Company. We left Zella Mehlis on the morning of 7 April 1945.

Newer information! When was this pistol assembled, and by whom?? For the answer, see the information below:

Some more amazing information has now surfaced concerning these late war parts guns captured at the Walther factory by our American G.I.'s. We previously believed these were assembled post war, or were just plain old mis-matched pistols. This "dov" slide pistol was purchased recently by Mark Castel from longtime collector Bill Mohler. Bill Mohler was very interested in these original Vet bring back pistols. He attended many 11th Armored reunions in the 1970's, and 80's with the idea of buying these. Bill was also very interested in the history of these "last ditch" pistols, and had the foresight to actually record the history, and get Vet statements concerning the capture of these. For that, I believe we owe him a debt of gratitude. The above pistol and information now owned by "dietrich", were also in the collection of Bill Mohler at one time. So with Bill's connection to the 11th Armored Division we can see how the two pistols tie together. It had long been rumored that this Czech factory ("dov") had been tooling up for the production of P.38's, and/or P.38 parts. Buxton speculated in "Volume Two" that perhaps they had produced 100-200 slides in early 1945. The bottom line is that we now have direct VET evidence that this pistol was captured at the Walther factory on April 4th, 1945. So it appears that these "dov" slides do exist, and this also confirms the previous evidence that these parts pistols were assembled prior to the American capture of the Walther factory. This evidence includes a signed statement by a veteran of the 11th

Armored Division named S/SGT Edward Bergh. He was in the Walther factory along with S/SGT Leander Hens, and took this pistol the morning of April 4th, 1945. If you read this document, it ties directly back to the evidence that came with "dietrich's" pistol posted above. Including, mentioning then names of Bergh and Hens in the Karnowski letter. These guys were in the same unit as Joseph Karnowski, whom took his pistol on April 6th, 1945 from the same building. Their descriptions of this building and what they saw there are very similar. This building is described by the Americans as "Plant D", with an address of 61 Strasse der SA. I believe this building was some distance from the main factory. Walther had acquired additional buildings some years earlier due to war expansion. This then, would have been a satellite facility, and also would have explained why it survived the main factory's destruction. I think it is safe to say these Vet statements corroborate each other. I have examined these documents, checked them against unit reports, and I am prepared to say that they are authentic. This evidence also includes a letter of authenticity from Warren Buxton, whom examined this pistol in 1999. Also included are photos of the actual building where they captured this pistol, which apparently still stands in Zella-Mehlis today (or at least it did in 1994), a wartime photo of S/SGT Edward Bergh with his 11th Armored patch, a photo of a German guard at the Walther factory (note the P.38 holster on his belt), and a photo left to right of Ray Stordahl (another 11th Armored veteran), Leander Hens, and Edward Bergh, back in Zella-Mehlis for a visit in 1994. These firsthand veteran accounts, are the best historical



DOV

Left slide serial number



No markings on the right slide

...nce we have concerning what happened at the Walther factory in April of 1945. The fact that we can "kill two
...s with one stone" and authentic these "dov" slides, as well as further strengthen the fact that these type of pistols
...ere already assembled before the Americans captured the Walther factory, is a wonderful thing!


Capture of the Walther Small Arms Plant

On the morning of April 4, 1945, I, S/SGT Edward Bergh and S/SGT Leander Hens entered the Walther Small Arms factory at Zella Mehlis, Germany as members of the American 11th Armor Division.

Escorted by one of the SS factory security guards, we were guided through the Walther building located on Strasse der SA in which the P-38 pistols were assembled. In a long narrow room lit by a wall of windows, I noticed several hundred P-38 pistols in different stages of assembly. At the end of the room, crates of pistols completed and assembled were stacked on several wheeled carts. Each crate contained twenty pistols, ten per row. I removed Pistol 9571 from the top crate and tucked it in my belt under my battle jacket. Several civilian factory personnel were present and we immediately dismissed them from the building.

Around noon, approximately fifty foreign workers from the compound located down the street were freed and began to enter the factory and beat on the lathe and press machines with iron bars and pipes. We quickly chased them out of the building and posted security guards at the entrance.

S/SGT Hens and myself located the Zella Mehlis Bergermeister and secured billets for our company.



Edward Bergh

Warren H. Buxton

3055 Trinity Drive, No. 626
Los Alamos, New Mexico, 87544-2350, USA

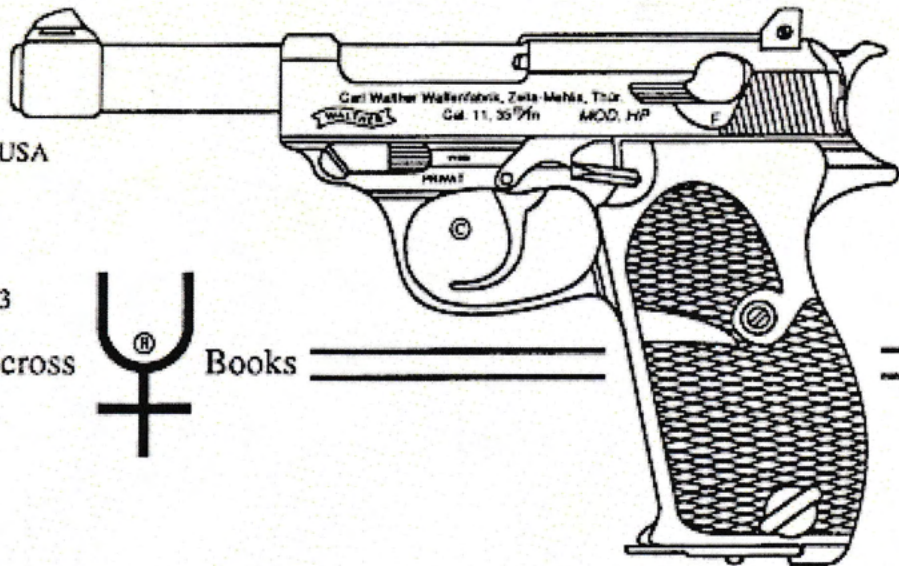
July 20, 1999

Phone: 505-662-6591; Fax: 505-662-0663
eMail: ucross@roadrunner.com

Ucross



Books



Mr. Bill Mohler
9210 West 81st Terrace
Overland Park, KS 66204

Dear Mr. Mohler:

Thank you for sending P.38, dov, serial 9571 (957L) for examination.

This is indeed a most rare and interesting P.38. It is only the second "dov" marked specimen I have ever seen.

After examining this pistol in detail I have no doubts as to the authenticity of its slide and in connection with SSgt. Bergh's statement and capture paper have no doubts as to its origin as being taken, fully assembled, from the Walther factory in early April 1945.

Walther was the controlling firm for all of the P.38 manufacturers. That would explain why this slide was at the Walther facility.

The last "L" range was reached in late 1944 and the frame and barrel (an "fnh" component) could have been left over from that time and then assembled by Walther in the late war 1945 era along with many other formerly unused parts. It is quite probable that the original pistol was an ac-44 but its slide had been rejected during its manufacture. When the time came in 1945 to make use of that older ac-44 frame and barrel this "dov" slide was picked up and assembled to them.

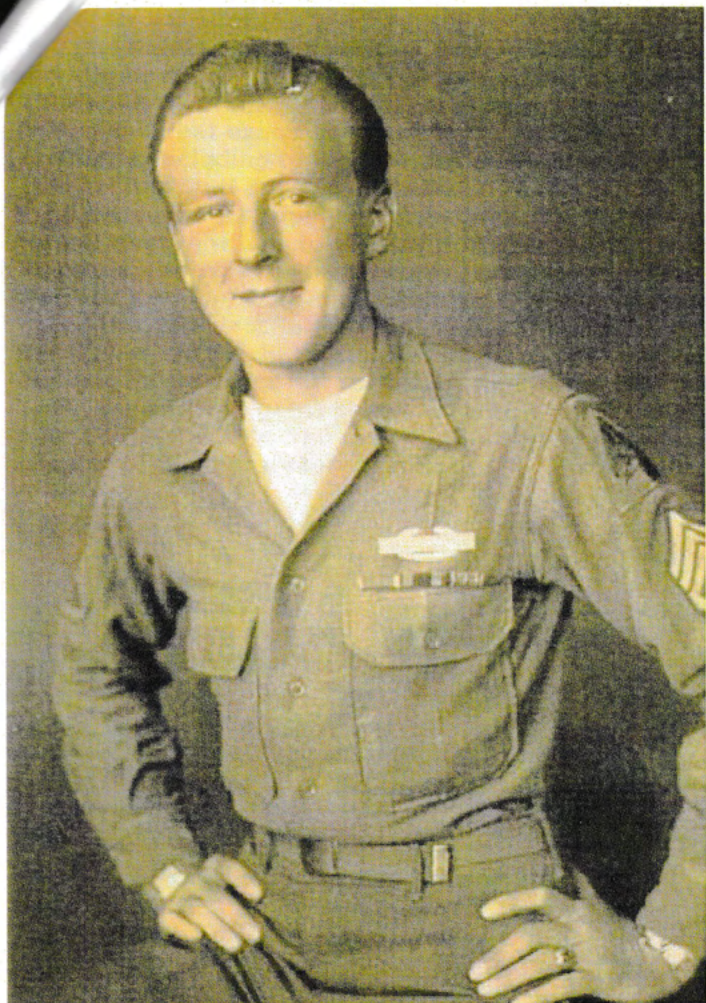
The production of the "dov" P.38 components is discussed in my Vol. 2, *The P.38 Pistol*.

Have a nice day.

Yours truly,

Warren H. Buxton
Warren H Buxton





S/SGT Edward Bergh



German guard at the Walther factory



Left to right-Ray Stordahl, Leander Hens, Ed Bergh. 11th Armored veterans reunion (photo taken in 1994).

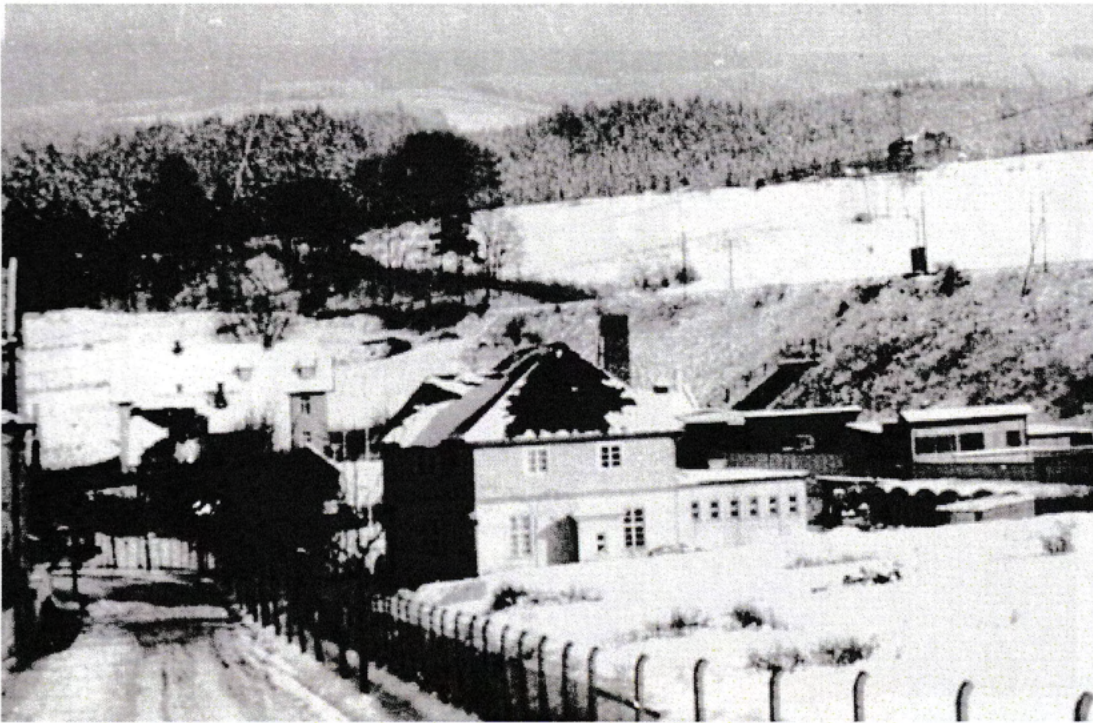
destruction of the Walther factory: After Germany was defeated it was divided up into occupation zones. The city Zella-Mehlis, and the Walther factory ended up in the hands of the Russians. The Russian took over Thüringen in the middle of July 1945. The commander was Wassili I. Tschuikow , Chef der Sowjetischen Militäradministration Thüringen (SMATH). Of course, they were notorious for taking everything- lock, stock, and barrel, and carting it back to Russia. What exactly was left in the factory is not known. Although it is sure that they cleaned out anything that remained, including tooling for the production of P.38's, and perhaps any factory records, drawings and blueprints etc. It is not known if any records survive to this day. Once the factory was empty, the Russians layed a "quilt trip" on the local people about supplying arms to the Nazi war machine. The citizens of Zella-Mehlis also felt guilty about using forced labor in the factory. They probably wanted to forget about this and have a "fresh start". With the help of the Russians, the Walther factory was blown up and destroyed. According to the book "Walther, a German Legend" by Manfred Kersten, the small adminstration building and formal reception building were left standing. This building was called the Gemeinschaftshouses in the Walther 50 year Anniversary book, and it was the focal point of the festivities during the 3rd Reich. This building can be seen above, in the first print of the Walther factory. It is the smaller building in the lower left corner to the front of the main factory. The destruction of the Walther factory was a sad day. Truly, the end of a great company, with a great history of making fine firearms. By the wars end they had produced over 584,000 P.38's. The new Walther factory at Ulm, started to produce P.38's again in 1957. Thus, starting the next chapter of Walther history.



Photo courtesy of Per Mathisen



Photo courtesy of Per Mathisen.



This photo shows what the factory had on the other side of the street.
On the right side we can see the factory shooting range. This photo also courtesy of Per Mathisen.

day Zella-Mehlis. The following two photos are of the only remaining buildings from the factory.



Photo courtesy of Per Mathisen. Taken in recent years of one of the buildings that is left. This building lies right outside of where the main entrance to the factory was.



Picture on the same street. Now you see the office building on the right behind Per. The main entrance to the factory was between the office building and the new building, where the gate is. Per tells me that the old office building was used as an athletic school during the time of the East Germans.

***A very interesting article:** Titled "The Walther Factory at Zella-Mehlis, April, 1945" by Timothy M. Hawkins. The following link will take you to an excellent article that appeared in the March 2005 issue of AUTOMAG. Tim has graciously given permission to have it posted here for our members. He is a long time collector and member of NAPCA. This article is self-explanatory, but it is a compilation of interviews Tim did with Vets from the 90th Division at one of their recent reunions. *Note that he also spoke with Cyril Leuelling. It does offer some further insight into the Walther factory. It also talks about engraved pistols (PP's & PPK's) that some of the men got, including one or two they had made for General Patton. Make sure you scroll all the way to the last page. *Note on the last page of the article, the picture of one of these that belonged to Fred T. Penry (note his name and the T/O logo near the top of the slide). Thanks go out here to "Atarian" for helping with the scanning, and PDF work on this. Here is the link for this excellent article: **This is a must read!!** http://p.38.home.att.net/The_Walther_Factory_at_Zella-Mehlis_April_1945.pdf

***Another very interesting article:** Containing information provided by Bob McMahon that appeared in the February 2006 edition of AUTO MAG. Bob has graciously given permission to also have it posted here. Bob is a long time collector and member of NAPCA, that is especially interested in the history of WW2, and these pistols. It concerns a Model 9 he purchased in 1988, that came with some very interesting information. Make sure you scroll all the way to the last page. You will find the affidavits from the veterans of the 11th armored, and the list of weapons taken from the home of Fritz Walther especially interesting.

***Another must read!!**

<http://p.38.home.att.net/Letter to Tom Knox 12-15-2006.pdf>

An interesting link: This will take you to The Library of Congress website, and to the Veterans History Project. This is about William M. McConahey, whom was the battalion surgeon for the 344th FAB. He was the man my Uncle worked directly for in WW2. There is an excellent audio interview, photo's, and his entire book titled "Battalion Surgeon" is also online here. I highly recommend this book for everyone to read. It is chalked full of history and information on what it was like for these Vets. I believe it is also available from the 90th Division website. I found out to late that Dr. McConahey was here in Minnesota at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. He passed away before I knew that, or had a chance to meet him. **An excellent website!**

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cocoon/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01026/>

Other links:

This is an interesting link to the 90th Division website that talks more about the "trophy and souvenir hunting G.I.'s". It offers a little insight into what this guy considered the difference between scrounging and looting. It confirms that the 11th Armored guys were the first ones at Walther, with the 90th Infantry right on their heels. It even goes as far as identifying the G.I.'s in the photos as being from the 90th Infantry Division, 359th Infantry Regiment, whom were given the task of guarding the factory. And guard it they did! At the same time they helped themselves. This is exactly as my Uncle described it.

<http://www.90thdivisionassoc.org/90thDivisionFolders/mervinbooks/XII/XII1504.pdf>

My Uncle in WW2. An earlier post about my Uncle, a photo of him, and the P.38 he brought home from the factory.

<http://forums.p38forum.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=8753&start=0&postdays=0&postorder=asc&highlight=uncle+ww2>

The research on the ac 45 pistols. A previous post, with a list of serial numbers, and markings on these pistols.

<http://forums.p38forum.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=9427&start=0&postdays=0&postorder=asc&highlight=ac+45+research>

The 90th Division Association. A great website to look at, especially their online library.

http://www.90thdivisionassoc.org/90thDivisionFolders/framesfiles/mainframes/main_frameunit.htm

The 90th Division Association. The Combat History of the 344th Field Artillery.

<http://www.90thdivisionassoc.org/90thDivisionFolders/mervinhogg/344/frameunit.htm>

The 90th Division-United States Holocaust Memorial Museum recognizes the 90th Division as a "liberating unit" for freeing the inmates at the Flossenbug concentration camp.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10006141>

The 11th Armored Division Association. One of the divisions that was at the Walther factory. Memories: "The European Theater of Operations 1944-45" by Kenneth W. Moeller. See the section title ZELLA-MEHLIS April 5th, 1945.

http://www.11tharmoreddivision.com/history/moeller_memories.htm

The 11th Armored Division. "Over the Rhine" by Hal Steward. More great information about Walther. See the section titled "Munitions Prize" http://www.11tharmoreddivision.com/history/11th_book/chapter_3.htm

The 11th Armored Division. Memories of WW2 by PFC Robert S. Zimmer. More information about the factory, and the bushel baskets of pistols that they took.

http://www.11tharmoreddivision.com/history/a_22tk_zimmer.htm

The 575th with the 11th Armored.

http://www.11tharmoreddivision.com/history/575_AAA_History.html

I welcome anyones input here. Especially anyone that may have additional information, Vet accounts or stories, documents, photo's, or information about the Walther factory. All other comments, questions, and opinions, are also welcome.

Best Regards,
Ron

Moderator

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