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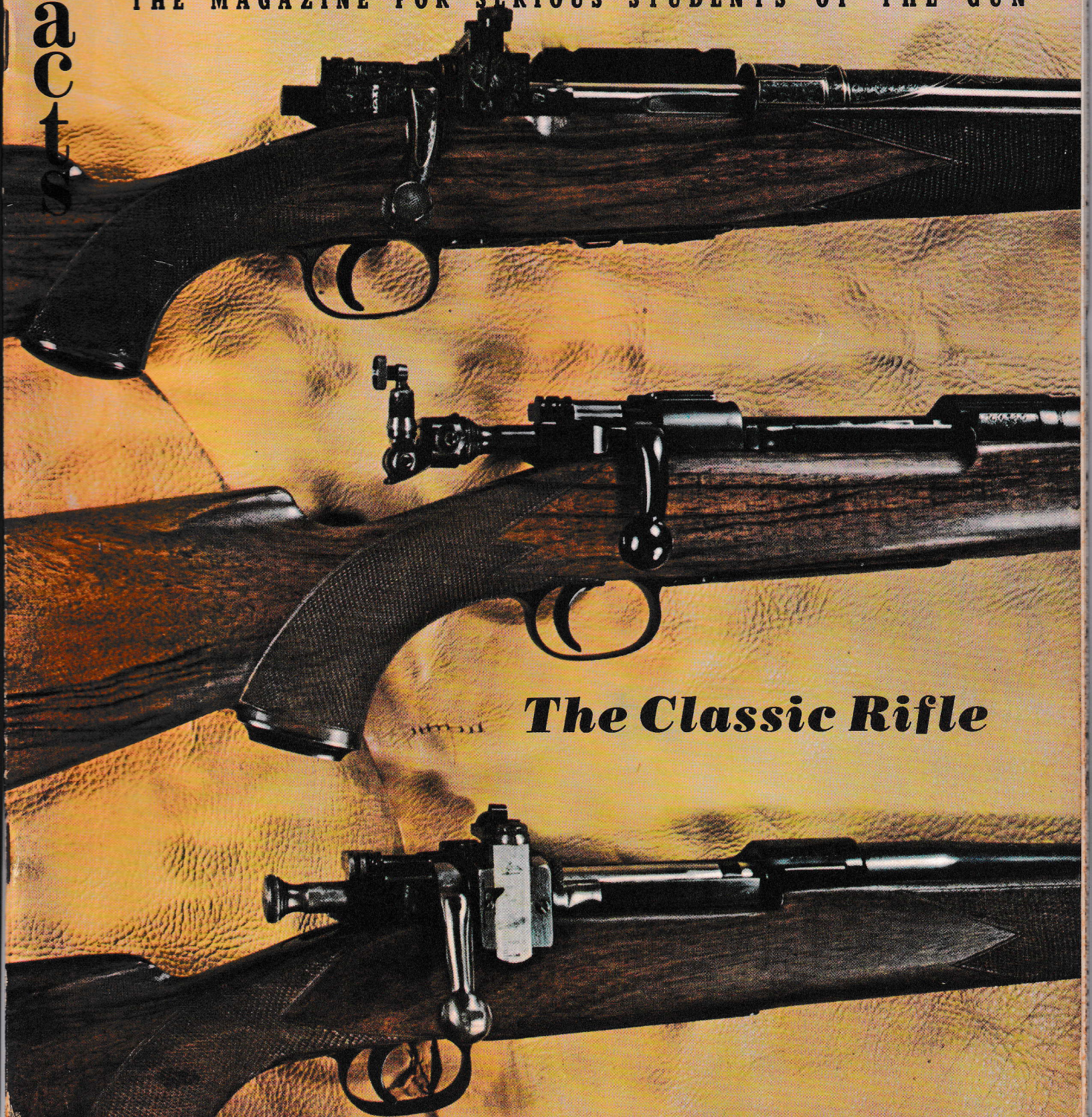
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Gunfacts

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Gunfacts

THE MAGAZINE FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS OF THE GUN



The Classic Rifle

Gunfacts

THE MAGAZINE FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS OF THE GUN

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COVER PHOTO: These four rifles surely fill the bill. They are, top to bottom: A Griffin & Howe-stocked M1922 Springfield; Griffin & Howe sporter, caliber 25 H.P., serial number 4, which belongs to Steve Miller; a Sedgeley Springfield in 405 Winchester. On the back cover, you'll see Griffin and Howe sporter, serial number 6, this one in 250 Savage on a commercial Model 98 "K" short action. The background came from a couple of deer, and the photo was made by Ken Warner and Fred Davis on 4 x 5 Ektachrome using an overhead camera and floodlights.

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the editor says

One sometimes finds illumination in strange parts of the daily newspaper. In Washington, one reads the society page at least part of the time, since legislators and such are often mentioned. Thus, Miss Betty Beale of the Washington Sunday Star gushed recently:

"Ken Keating, our next ambassador to India, former Senator from New York, and most recently a judge, confided at a party not long ago how he protected himself on the unsafe streets of Washington. This will tip the people of India off as to the kind of sure and independent man they will be dealing with.

Said Ken, when he used to live here in Georgetown he liked to take a walk every night. It was always after dark, and sometimes very late when he got to his daily constitutional.

Since crime was already rampant before he moved away from Washington, and even a man walking late at night on the streets was taking his life in his hands, the senator always carried a gun. But what kind of a gun?

The white-thatched dimpled New Yorker carried a shotgun in plain view of all passersby. Needless to say, he was never held up or otherwise molested, although it did give some friends who ran into him one night a bit of a shock.

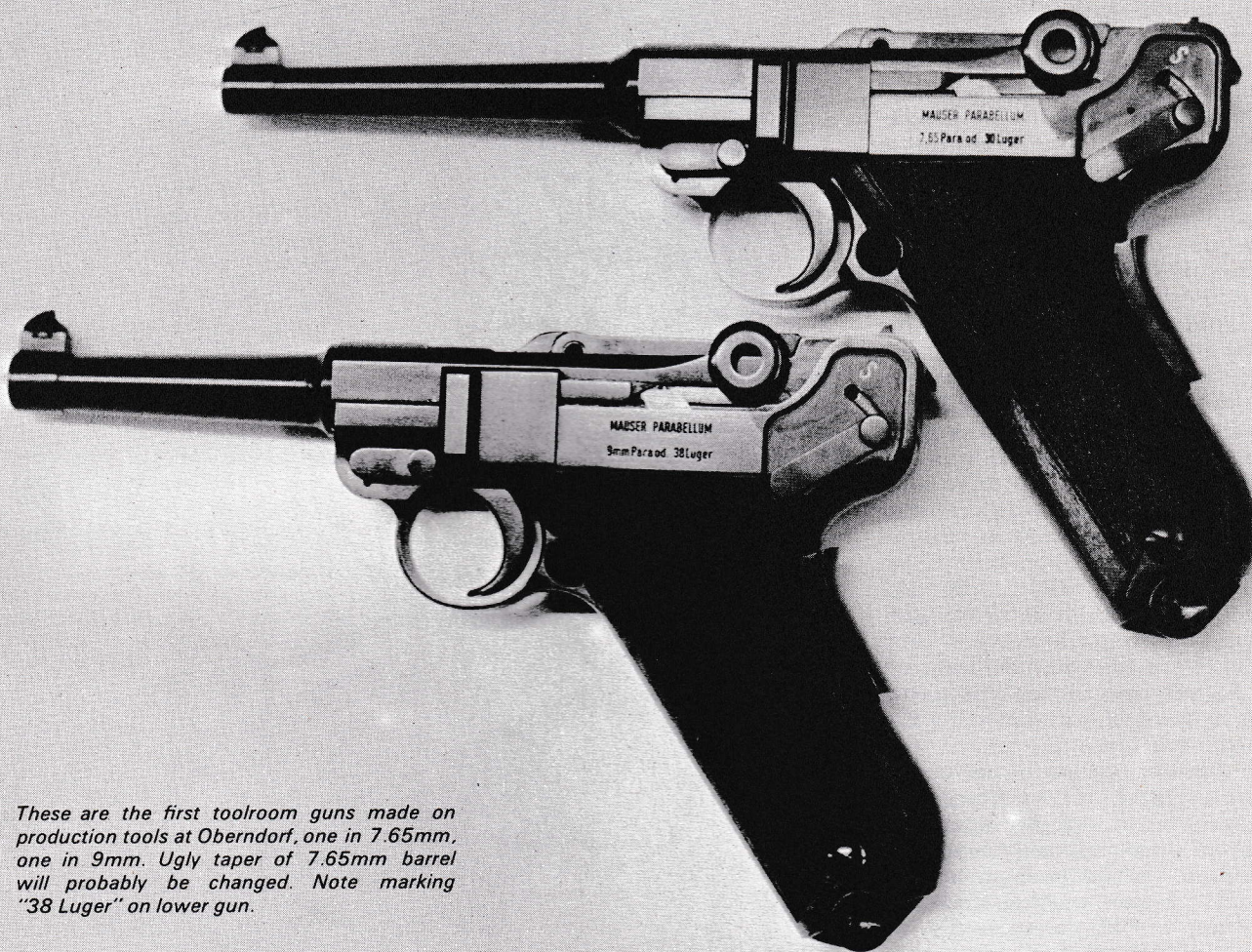
The former senator had a permit to own a gun, and certainly no one could accuse him of carrying a concealed weapon."

Personally, I would consider the late-night toting of a loaded shotgun an eminently sensible procedure in Washington, D.C., so I have no quarrel with Ambassador-to-be Keating on that score. And Miss Beale plainly doesn't know much about anything so I can't fault her for thinking a "permit" was needed to own a shotgun in Washington, though it is now.

However, I remember Sen. Keating as a left-wing sort of Republican from New York, secure in a gun-controlled electorate until he got beat in an election by Robert F. Kennedy. This defeat predated the latest surge in gun laws, so memory does not serve to recall Keating's position. Whatever

THE PARABELLUM STORY

(Continued)



These are the first toolroom guns made on production tools at Oberndorf, one in 7.65mm, one in 9mm. Ugly taper of 7.65mm barrel will probably be changed. Note marking "38 Luger" on lower gun.

This is Part II of a detailed, on-the-spot examination of the post-WW II production of Georg Luger's most famous design.

by Jan Stevenson

PART TWO:

THE PARABELLUM STORY

by Jan Stevenson

Oberndorf fell to the French on the 20th of April, 1945. For two and a half years Mauser had been nesting on a heap of Parabellum parts that no one, least of all the German army, had wanted. As soon as they learned of this the French developed an overwhelming and quite unexpected interest in the Luger—such is the fascination of the gun. Herr Weiss and a crew of 400 men were kept at work in the *Schweden-bau*, under French guard, and had assembled some 5,000 pistols by the time they ran out of receiver forks in 1947. (They also put together a lot of other pistols) Roughly 100,000 parts, including a few frames, remained, and these all went to France along with the finished pistols. Meanwhile the French were doing land-rush business with earlier Lugers taken from German troops or confiscated from civilians. Many of these must have gone to France intact; thousands more were disassembled, and shipped as parts in sorted batches. As late as 1957, by which time nearly 70% of the old Mauser plant had been dynamited flat, the French still had a few Germans at work in Oberndorf tearing down Lugers and sorting the parts. A heck of a lot of pistols can be disassembled in ten years.

The French postwar involvement with the Luger was serious enough that new Luger magazines were produced in France for awhile. Exactly what the French military had in mind for the Parabellum I have no idea. Certainly they weren't sold commercially in France, and so far as I know only a few have been seen since. As put up at Oberndorf, the French Lugers had a dull finish and most carried the Mauser "byf" code. Random markings—whatever came of the parts bin—were frequent. These guns were not proved in Germany, but according to a French source, they are identifiable by a small 5-pointed star which was stamped ahead of the serial number on the left front of the receiver.

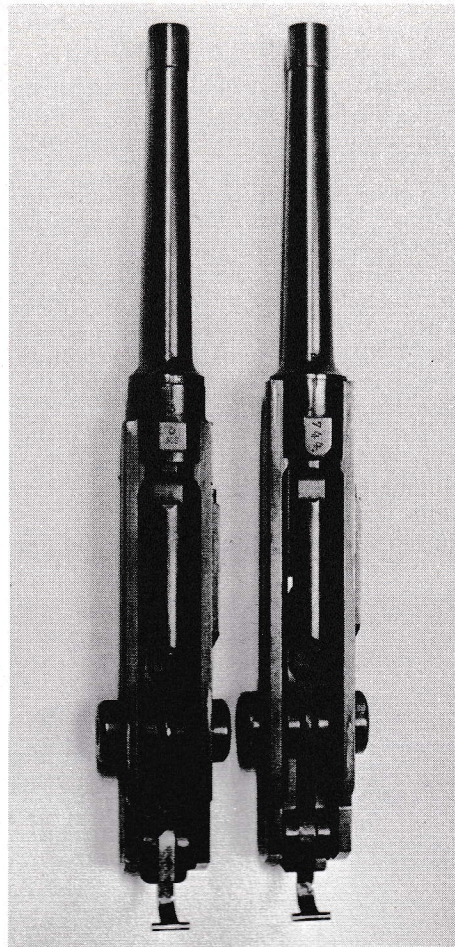
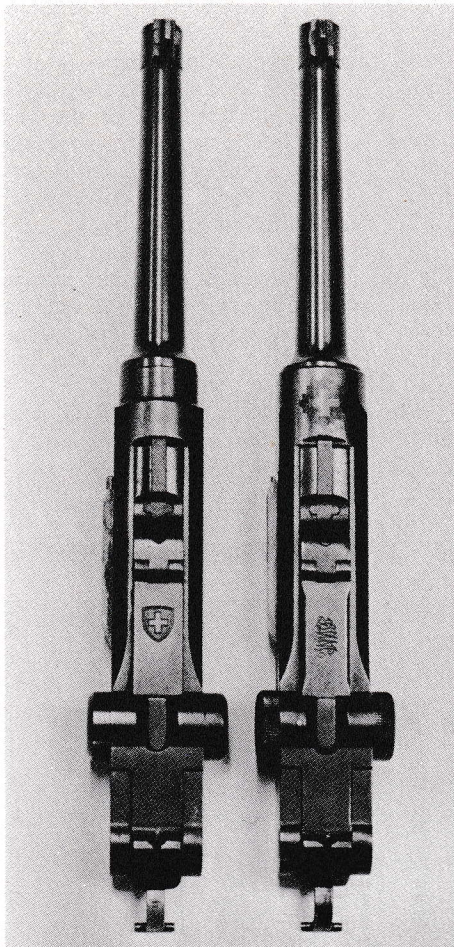
Meanwhile, Krieghoff found themselves briefly within the American occupation zone until we magnanimously pulled back and turned Thuringia—the center of German small arms production over to the Soviets. It is reported that several hundred Lugers were assembled for our transient forces, and that some of these guns had no markings whatsoever.



Controversial Model 1924 Swiss is easily recognizable by its flatsided grips, dull finish, and "Waffenfabrik Bern" inscription on the front link. Despite the label, it probably went into production in 1913.



The 1929 Swiss, replete with tool marks and red plastic handle, is no thing of beauty, and that, says Stevenson, was the Luger's prime purpose. Note straight front strap, flat safety, and total absence of knurling



Swiss 29 receiver assembly, compared with a DWM 1906, shows smooth toggle knobs and lathe-turned receiver ring. These, plus unthreaded alignment shelves on barrel shank and inside receiver ring, were virtually the only alterations. Both, unlike the P-08, have the long (21mm) receiver ring. Underside of same units shows loss of front railing caused by lathe-turning the ring, and simplified, square receiver lug on Swiss pistol.

The Russians, in the usual vengeful and shortsighted fashion of that era, promptly divested the plant of machinery, then flattened it. It is doubtful that Krieghoff's blueprints survived, and virtually certain that his tooling was dissipated in Russia and put to mundane tasks. The East German *Volkspolizei* were armed with the Luger through the late 1950's, and it is possible though unlikely that some of these may have been assembled from Krieghoff's spare parts stock. It's extremely unlikely that any Parabellums have been manufactured within the Soviet sphere of control since the Second War—Russians are much too pragmatic for that.

With the publication of Fred Datig's monumental and scholarly text *The Luger Pistol* in 1955, the Parabellum came of age as a serious collector's item. Added to its essential mystique and historical significance was the fact that it had been made in a profusion of variations; collectors soon priced the non-ordinary Luger out of reach of the shooting public. Germany, as a source, had been bled dry by the French, and enterprising importers had fairly ransacked the rest of the free world. The market potential in both the U.S. and Europe was burgeoning, and then began some ten years of intricate and uncoordinated maneuvering designed to put the old mechanical maze back in production.

In 1956, pursuing academic rather than commercial interest, Datig had discussed the question with both Mauser and SIG management in Germany and Switzerland respectively. Both said that tooling up anew for the Parabellum would be fun but entirely impractical. It was a thumbs-down answer both places, yet geographically Datig was on the right track, one which many would follow, for Switzerland seemed the last best hope for a new Luger.

Back as early as 1911, with the dark thunderhead of impending war looming ominously over Europe, the fiercely isolationist Swiss began to fear for their arms supply. Their Schmidt-Rubin service rifle was manufactured at home, for many obvious reasons, but the Maxim machine gun and the Parabellum pistol were both bought from Germany. Swiss authorities began negotiating a license arrangement with DWM, and received the full production package—blueprints, work sheets, etc.—for both guns. The Maxim, known as the MG-08 in Germany, was dubbed the M11 by the Swiss and was put in production by *Waffenfabrik Bern*, the federal armory, in 1912. Unfortunately, the chronology on the Swiss Luger is not so clear.

Switzerland, we recall, adopted the Parabellum in 1901 and started off

This page from an SIG prospectus of fairly recent distribution clearly shows the Luger frame and receiver fork. By the time Mauser got onto it, SIG had scrapped their tooling.



Verschiedene Griffstücke und Verschlussgehäuse



Wraparound 06 trigger with machined-on mounting pin was ridiculously expensive. Though they nose-bobbed it, the Swiss couldn't make it much cheaper. Mauser will prudently cast this part.

with an order for 3000 pistols of the 1900 Model. The improved 1906 pistol was much more to their liking, but at this point the tale gets mucky. Ten thousand two hundred fifteen pistols, numbered from 5001 to 15215 and believed to be 1906 models, were delivered to Swiss authorities by DWM-Karlsruhe. Since the Karlsruhe branch is not known to have ever manufactured arms, we assume either that the paper work was handled there or that for some long forgotten reason this particular order touched down at Karlsruhe en route from Berlin to Switzerland. An additional 99 or 100 pistols, numbered from 5001a to either 5099a or 5100a, depending on your source, likewise came through, and it's moot whether these were 1900's or 1906's.

At this point the Swiss Model 1924 arrives on the scene. It's an easily recognized gun. The finish is a dull blue, the receiver ring carries no marking, and "Waffenfabrik Bern" surmounted by a small, plain Swiss cross, is stamped on the top of the front toggle link. The grip panels, rather than being gracefully curved and checkered on their entire surface, are flat sided and checkered only on this plane, leaving an unchecked border of slightly less than 1/2" to slope down and meet the straps. According to Datig, the model of 1924 went into production in that year, continuing through 1933, by which time exactly 17874 pistols, numbered from 15,216 through 33,089, had been manufactured. The figures figure, but the dates are doubtful.

Worst of all, the Swiss don't even officially recognize a model of 1924. The Bern-issued gunsmith's manual opens with the statement, "There exist three models of Swiss Lugers: (a) Model 1900, (b) Model 1906, (c) Model 1929." The manual, of course, was prepared for mechanics rather than historians, but inquiries to Bern itself have singularly failed to run the origins of the M1924 designation to ground.

The only recorded alteration of the pistol occurring in the mid-1920's took place on 1 November 1927, when the Swiss changed their gauging practices. This affected primarily the barrel. Interior dimensions henceforth were read outward from the standard. Thus prior to this date the bore was a nominal 7.65 mm with a plus-minus tolerance of .03 mm. After 1 November 1927 the bore was 7.62 mm with a plus-only tolerance of .05 mm. This was a change in measuring procedures, not in the gun, save that allowable slop in bore diameter was cinched down a hundredth of a millimeter. The DWM drawings were completely redone, but the gun was not. The P-08 trigger made from special section or profile

stock during WW II is another rare example.

According to the best of current information, the 1924 Model—or Swiss-built '06 for a more accurate term—went into production at Waffenfabrik Bern about 1913.

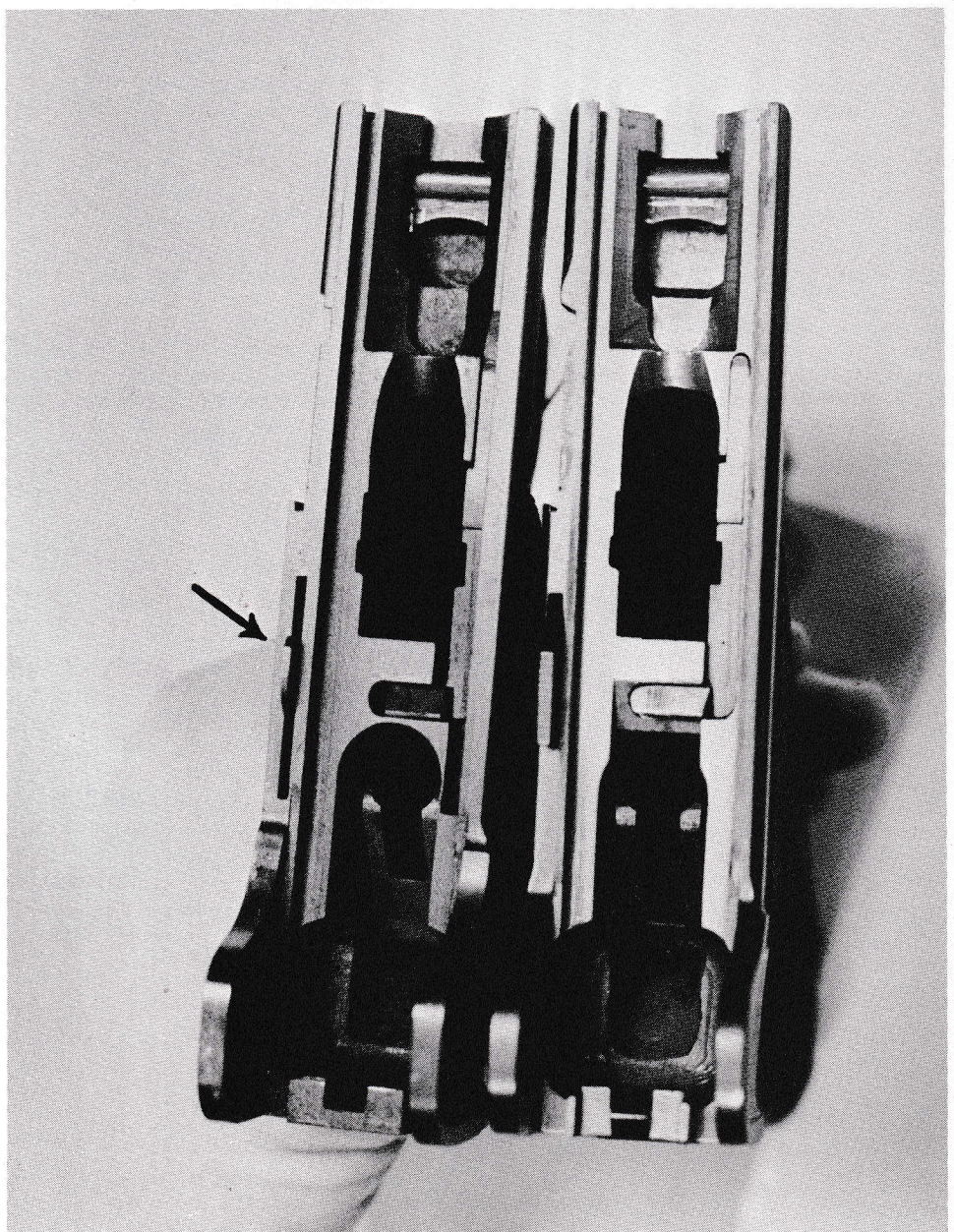
Toward the end of the 20's the Swiss, despite their penchant for incredibly complicated and expensive guns, began to realize that the Luger was an unreasonably costly wretch to build. Their economy model was dubbed the 1929, and went into production probably in 1931 or '32; the last 06-24's came through in 1933.

The alterations on the 1929 pistol were mostly external and intended to eliminate unnecessary machining. Previous Lugers, for instance, had required several milling cuts on the top

and sides of the receiver ring to achieve all those elegant bevels. The Swiss lathe turned everything ahead of the frame engagement lug. This sacrificed 3/8" of railing at the front of the receiver, and left unsightly crevasses when the gun was viewed from the front. The lug itself was cut square rather than rounded on the back.

All knurling, checkering, and grooving on the goggle knobs, take down latch, magazine release, and safety lever were omitted. The safety lever, rather than being a half oval, was flat with a knob on the end.

The trigger cover or sideplate was another silly item on the original, requiring the tool to be constantly dipping in and out of the work during manufacture. The Swiss got rid of all but one of these tortuous exercises,



Frame assemblies of 29 Swiss (left) and 06 DWM (right) show nothing like internal identity. Simplified action of grip safety in Swiss gun, and longer accommodating cut in frame (arrow) are noticeable changes; see also detail of other cuts and bevels.

generally running the cuts all the way across the piece. This has its unsightly aspects, and sideplates from the 29 will not interchange with any other Model.

The front strap shows the most visually obvious alteration, being perfectly straight rather than gracefully rounded at the toe.

Another significant change affected the barrel. Previous models had the barrel shank threaded all the way to the shoulder. The 29 left an unthreaded bearing surface behind the shoulder before the threading began. This flat was intended to mate an untapped surface inside the front of the receiver ring and automatically true the barrel in the receiver.

(There's another problem we might as well kick around at this point. The Swiss, in

many respects, were creatures of habit. They never saw reason to abandon the grip safety, nor to alter the slim 4³/₄" barrels with four grooves, right hand twist, which came on their first 1900 Models. They never changed the 21 mm barrel shank and receiver length either. When the 9mm Model of 1902 was introduced, DWM shortened the barrel shank and receiver ring to 18 or 19 millimeters. The front of the frame was hacked off to match, and rifling was changed from four to six grooves. For some reason, the 9mm Model 1904 reverted to the long receiver type. Early Model 1906's likewise had the long receiver, but sometime during the 1906 production, probably prior to 1908, all barrels, receivers, and frames were changed to the short type. The new Mausers will have the long (21 mm) receiver. Since virtually all of the two and a half million Lugers now in circulation have the short

barrel and receiver, gunsmiths attempting to fit the new long-shank barrels to short receivers, or new long receivers to short frames, will find a bit of stock removal necessary.)

The Swiss didn't officially replace the Parabellum until 1948, but tests had been going on ever since early 1944. Actual production of Swiss Lugers had ceased some four years before with the start of the war, although Bern was still fitting a few up from parts until 1950. Complete pistols were available new from Bern as late as 1958.

Frames were what they ran short on first, and SIG at Neuhausen had been the sole producer of this part. With SIG fully occupied by war production, Waffenfabrik Bern decided in 1943 to undertake frame production themselves. They contacted the Von Roll-Werke in Gerlafingen, who had supplied SIG's rough forgings, but discovered to their mild dismay that the frame forging dies were no longer usable. Rather than going to the bother of making a new set of dies, Bern dropped the whole idea. Some 28,000-30,000 of the 1929 Model had been built, depending again on who has the more accurate list of serial numbers.

All the Swiss Parabellums, all approximately 61,000 of them, had been chambered for the 30 Luger bottlenecked cartridge. The SIG pistol which replaced these was a 9mm, with a 30-caliber option to help burn old ammo supplies. This caliber overlap worked both ways, and the 9mm M29 is only a slightly less mysterious variation than the six or a dozen lost Baby Lugers that Herr Weiss built so many years ago. Bern did definitely make some three hundred 9mm barrels to be fitted to the pistols of citizens or target shooters who might prefer the larger caliber. I've seen one of these 9mm 29's and know of three others. This leaves 290-odd unaccounted for, and diligent Swiss collectors have been unable to locate them. According to a better than average rumor, most of these barrels were fitted to existing frames and the entire lot of converted pistols wound up in a Swiss ordnance depot where they've since been forgotten about, doubtless to come to light in some future inventory taking. Whether this hypothesis is myth or truth, well, that future inventory will tell.

Another virtually unknown run of Swiss Lugers was the E series. At least a hundred were made up by the Military Technical School, each slightly different in construction to test out various design ideas or manufacturing techniques. Five have turned up to date.

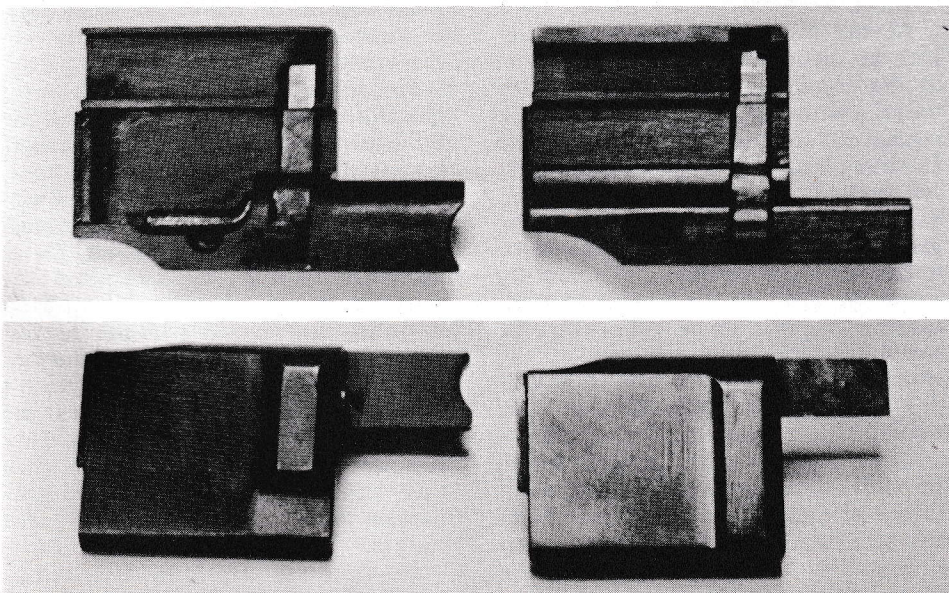
Waffenfabrik Bern was also constantly dabbling with experimental designs, and most of their efforts were num-



Grip safety on M29 was stamped, a sensible move. Only function of thumb safety is to block grip safety, and a stamping works just fine for this.



Long Swiss grip safety wraps around and disappears under stocks on right side. Mauser will do likewise, but will shorten safety for an O6-ish look.



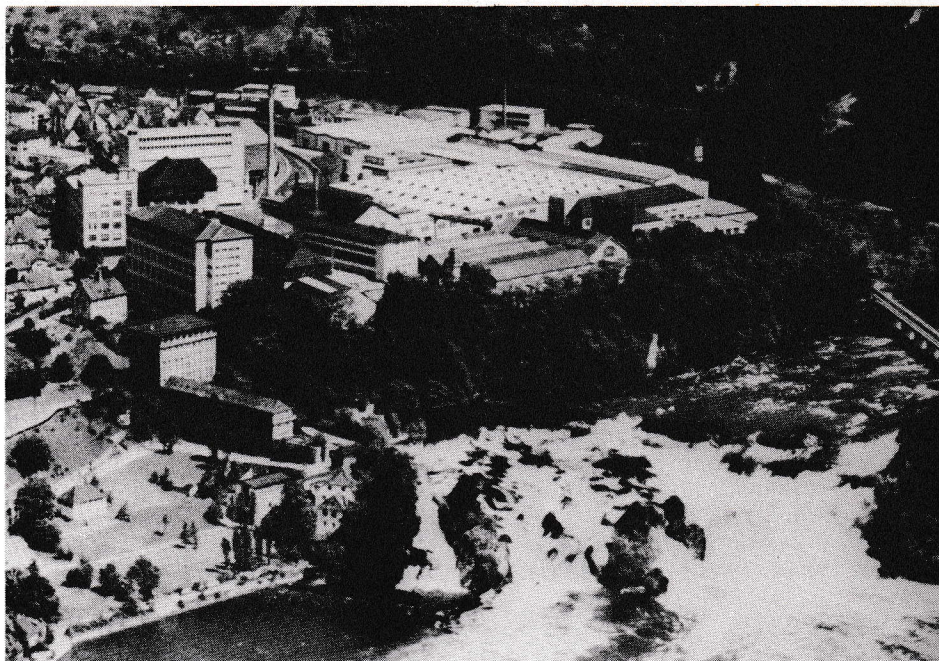
Swiss sideplate (right) is obviously redesigned, with cuts running all the way across the work. Will not interchange with any other model.

bered in a V series, standing for "Versuchsmodell." Occasionally a Swiss Luger will turn up with a serial number apropos of nothing at all. Very recently, I examined a M1929 numbered 100,000. Its authenticity is beyond any doubt whatever, and besides the serial number, which reflected probably nothing more than the Waffenfabrik's sense of humor, there was nothing unusual about the piece.

Waffenfabrik Bern managed to stockpile an enormous quantity of spare parts before the Luger was finally dropped, and for the past quarter century Switzerland has served as a Parabellum parts depot for all of Europe. Fortunately the internal components of the Luger never changed much at all, even in the 1929 Model, and most parts, with the conspicuous exception of the vital sideplate, are roughly interchangeable. Evidently a goodly supply of sideplates was left over from the 06-24, for the latest *Dynamit Nobel-Genschau* (Germany's largest parts house) catalog lists it complete for \$20; the receiver fork lists for \$21.75, and only the frame is unavailable. Attesting to this German firm's source of parts is the fact that their catalog illustration is a poor reproduction of the parts list that Bern supplies to Swiss gunsmiths. DNG changed only the order numbers.

When Waffenfabrik Bern finally ran out of Lugers, the Swiss had been shooting the toggle gun for well over a half century, and had no intention of breaking the habit. The price of second-hand Lugers in Swiss gunshops has steadily spiraled, so that it's almost impossible to find one in good shooting condition for less than \$125. So enamored of the Parabellum are the Swiss that many Swiss officers prefer to pay the difference for an 06-24 rather than putting out the lesser tariff for the issue SIG. I saw 1968 films of military qualification firing in one of the cantons, and the Luger still clearly outnumbered the Neuhausen pistol. There's no question as to which gun is the more efficient. It's that old mystique again—in Swiss eyes the Luger is the ultimate handgun. Attesting to its widespread usage, the latest Bern-issued gunsmith's manual for the Parabellum is dated 1965.

A vigorous market existed in Germany as well, with nothing much to fill it. By 1960, Second War P-08's were bringing \$100 in German gunshops, and the price for a good one is up to \$150 at this writing. These facts weren't lost on the *Erma-Werke* at Dachau, who had been marketing 22 caliber and 4mm rimfire conversion units since about 1910, and who had heavily committed themselves to the toggle-breech principle with their post-



Vast SIG complex at the Rheinfalls was the only plant in Switzerland to make the Luger frame.

war line of cast zinc Luger look-alikes in 22 Long Rifle.

About 1960, a substantial lot of diverse Parabellums found their way out of Bulgaria into neutral Austria where they were quickly pounced upon by Interarms' purchasing agents. Those deemed too many for the U.S. market were sold to Erma for \$15 each. The exact quantity involved is still unclear. Erma's managing director insists that they got only 1,000 pistols from Interarms, and of these only 800 were salvageable. Interarms' representatives, on the other hand, recall selling between two and three thousand pistols to Erma, and note that since the transactions took place while Erma was changing hands, present management may be cognizant only of the later shipments.

At any rate, Erma, taking a closer look at their merchandise, was aghast at the condition of the pistols. Every barrel, without exception, had to be replaced, and for this purpose the Dachau plant tooled up for Luger barrel production. Most of this shipment came out with 30 caliber tubes. New grips, sights, magazines, and take-down latches as well were manufactured by Erma in order to get the guns back together again. Since production of sideplates or frames was out of the question, some stock buildup by welding was reportedly done on these parts to achieve a proper fit.

The Bulgarian reworks went on sale in 1965. U.S. Army Rod And Gun Clubs accounted for a large portion of the total, and to American servicemen they sold at about \$40 each. On the German commercial market, they started off at \$50, but Erma was forced

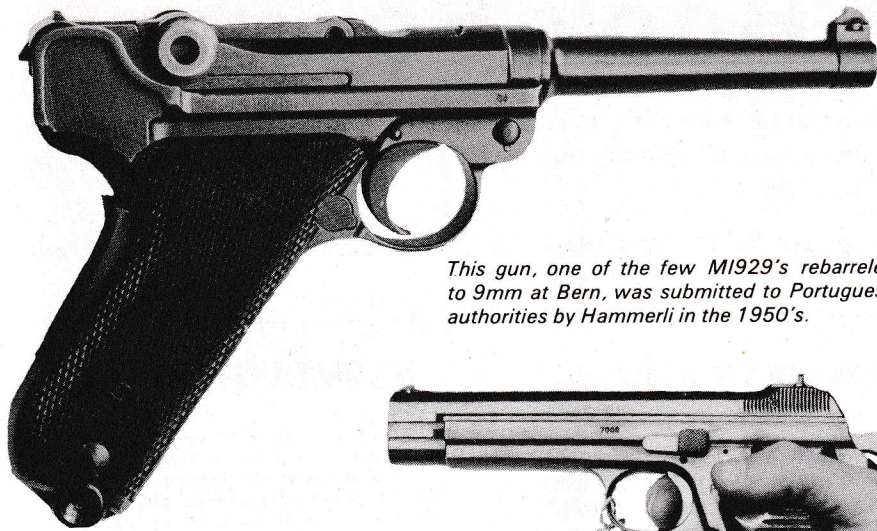
to jack the price first to \$57.50 and finally to \$67.50 as the cost of refitting them rose far beyond original expectation.

The guns were delivered to distributors in military style wooden cases. Since they were put up from parts, markings were an absolute hodgepodge. Erma themselves applied no marks whatsoever, but the guns are easily identifiable since they carry German postwar Nitro proofing and the Munich proofhouse stamp, with circa 1965 dating.

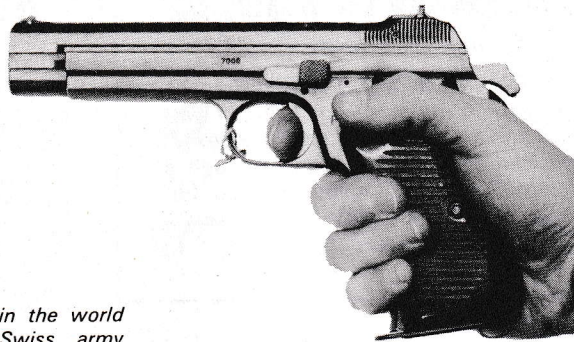
Erma continues to manufacture and supply all of the parts mentioned above, a large portion of which previously went to Dynamit Nobel-Genschau. All distribution of Erma-built parts is now being taken over by Wilhelm Hebsacker, the surplus arms dealer—sort of a miniature Interarms—in Schwabisch Hall.

Hebsacker, himself a Ferlach-trained gunsmith, had sold some 500 of the Bulgarian reworks. Recognizing a market as it stared him in the face, Hebsacker sponsored one of three European efforts to put the Luger back into production from scratch. After fairly careful study, he concluded that a new Luger would cost at least \$125 to build, and couldn't be sold for less than \$300. How much of a production run he was counting on, we don't know, but the estimates squelched the whole idea. Hebsacker's figures, however, take on considerable interest since they form an excellent base for comparison with other postwar Luger cost studies.

Back in the Alps, the Swiss Gunsmiths' Association, acutely aware of a good thing going to waste, petitioned



This gun, one of the few M1929's rebarreled to 9mm at Bern, was submitted to Portuguese authorities by Hammerli in the 1950's.



SIG SP47/8 is the finest 9mm in the world in Stevenson's opinion, but Swiss army officers, who can get it cheap, still ransack gunshops for 06-24 Lugers.

Waffenfabrik Bern in 1960 to put the Parabellum back in production. At about the same time a movement was reportedly gaining some momentum in Swiss Government circles to close the the armory down as an economy move. With this possibility supposedly hanging over them, the Waffenfabrik took the gunsmiths' request seriously indeed, and the cost quote they later delivered was without doubt rock bottom for the quantity envisioned.

What they had in mind was a simplified 1929 Model. Bern queried foundries and outside metallurgists on the feasibility of using cast parts and section stock, while their engineers went through the M1929 with a magnifying glass looking for corners to cut. Many of the component parts of the original Parabellum, it turned out, were complex for no evident reason. The extractor, for instance, has an unnecessary cheek on either side; Bern straightened it out, and many parts took a similar face lifting. Some components, they found, could be built much more economically in two pieces than one.

When it all came out of the wash, the Waffenfabrik decided they could give the gunsmiths a minimum order of 10,000 pistols for \$115 each. That the Waffenfabrik would have taken no profit on this deal is attested to by the report that in response to an American inquiry for costs on a similar run of 10,000 pistols, they quoted at \$200 each. At this more than reasonable price, though, the Swiss gunsmiths could gang up for only three to five thousand guns. Certainly a far greater

market than that existed in Switzerland alone, not considering export possibilities. The problem was that economically the gunsmiths' association was a penny-ante outfit without the capital to finance a significant initial order. That's where the project died.

Meanwhile, a slim hope appeared that the Parabellum might gain a new lease on life as a military arm. Around 1963-64 Golden State Arms in California purchased a lot of some 1200 Lugers from the Portuguese Police. The Portuguese Army, though, has steadfastly refused to part with theirs, and the M943 as well as the cherished earlier models are still in service in Portugal, though supplemented of late by postwar Walther P-38's.

Back in the '50's, Hammerli of Switzerland made a bid for this market, and sent one pistol, a Swiss 29, rebarreled at Bern for 9mm, to Portugal for military tests. What the outcome was, no one seems to recall but no orders ever materialized.

To many American importers, Hammerli seemed the ideal place to get Lugers built again. The Portuguese gesture demonstrated their interest in the gun, and since they are known for the incredibly precise, almost pocket-watch quality of the machining that went into their famed free pistols, surely if anyone could build the Parabellum to old-world standards, Hammerli could. And although Hammerli had never built the Luger—had never even done subcontract work on components, there was that great mass of tooling, dies, drawings, jigs and gauges in Switzerland which would have been

theirs on request. Thus the late '50's and early '60's saw a small drift of eager American entrepreneurs entering Hammerli's humble portals and exiting again almost immediately.

Hammerli definitely ran cost studies on the Parabellum, but what the results were they profess to have forgotten. Without doubt, Hammerli costs far exceeded the Hebsacker figures. Hammerli would have been enchanted to have received a firm order for 20,000 pistols, and a solid request for 10,000 would have seriously interested them. For less than 10,000 pieces, it doesn't even pay to tool up for spare parts production, as Erma and others have emphatically noted. But when they heard the price, the Americans saw the supposedly vast U.S. market dwindling before their eyes, and proceedings went no further. For them, too, Hammerli's quotation must be a bad memory today.

What they should have realized in the first place is that Hammerli was the last logical place to turn, for the Luger cannot be manufactured again as it once was. Machine and man hours cost dearly at Hammerli as elsewhere, and to put the Parabellum back on the market, the most advanced manufacturing techniques, in which Hammerli has but little experience, must be exploited to the fullest in a diligent effort to hold costs to a minimum.

Interarms realized, as others should have, that Mauser (who besides being the only major Luger producer after the First World War, had been part of the Ludwig Loewe combine before the Borchardt had even reached the drawing board) was the only company who could build the Luger anew. Mauser had virtually unlimited capital to absorb initial expenses and the engineering and production capability to blend ultra-precise workmanship and modern methods and metallurgy in any desired proportion, along with a management willing to gamble on such high-risk projects as they had so well proven with the Model 66 bolt rifle. The only managerial stipulation was that the deal had to show healthy profits somewhere along the line.

Interarms, the Virginia-based importers, gauged the U.S. and world markets favorably, and was one outfit with plenty of capital to put where their mouth was. They travelled to Oberndorf prepared to negotiate an absolutely staggering contract.

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