

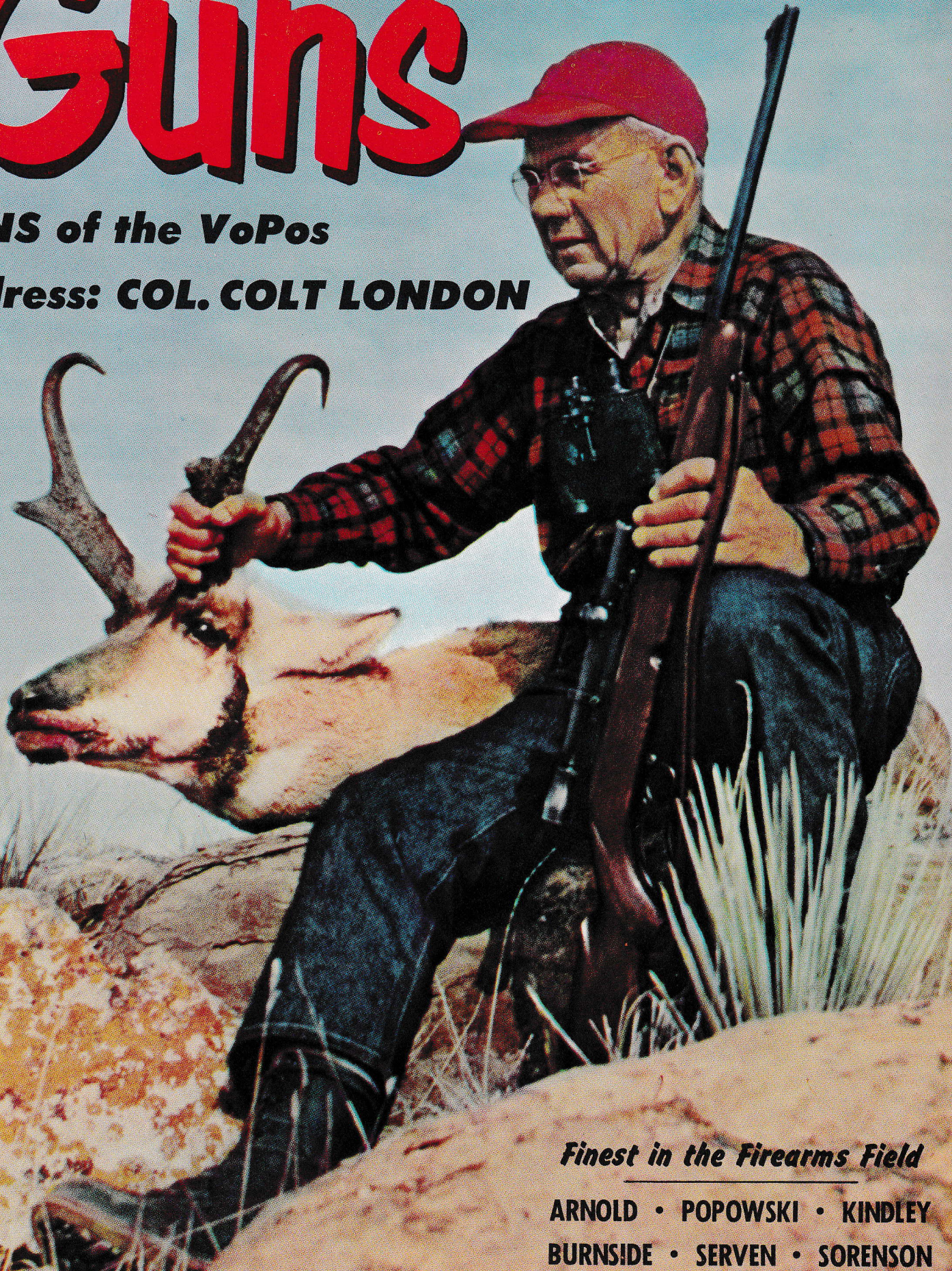
NOVEMBER 1963 50c

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NOVEMBER, 1963
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THE COVER

Larry Chaffee, a director of NRA, took this fine pronghorn antelope with one shot in Montana. Gun is a Winchester Model 88 in caliber .308, and scope is Lyman's Alaskan in Redfield Jr. mount. Chaffee used 150 grain Sierra bullet in front of 46 grains of 4320. Larry's old friend Bert Popowski acted as guide on this trip and took cover photograph.



Armored cars constantly patrol Brandenburg Gate and a fully armed Vopo is stationed at Wall where two made escape by crashing truck through wall.

Guns of the VoPos

RUMORS NOTWITHSTANDING, EAST GERMAN POLICE ARE BEING ARMED WITH THE LATEST RUSSIAN GUNS, EQUAL TO THE BEST

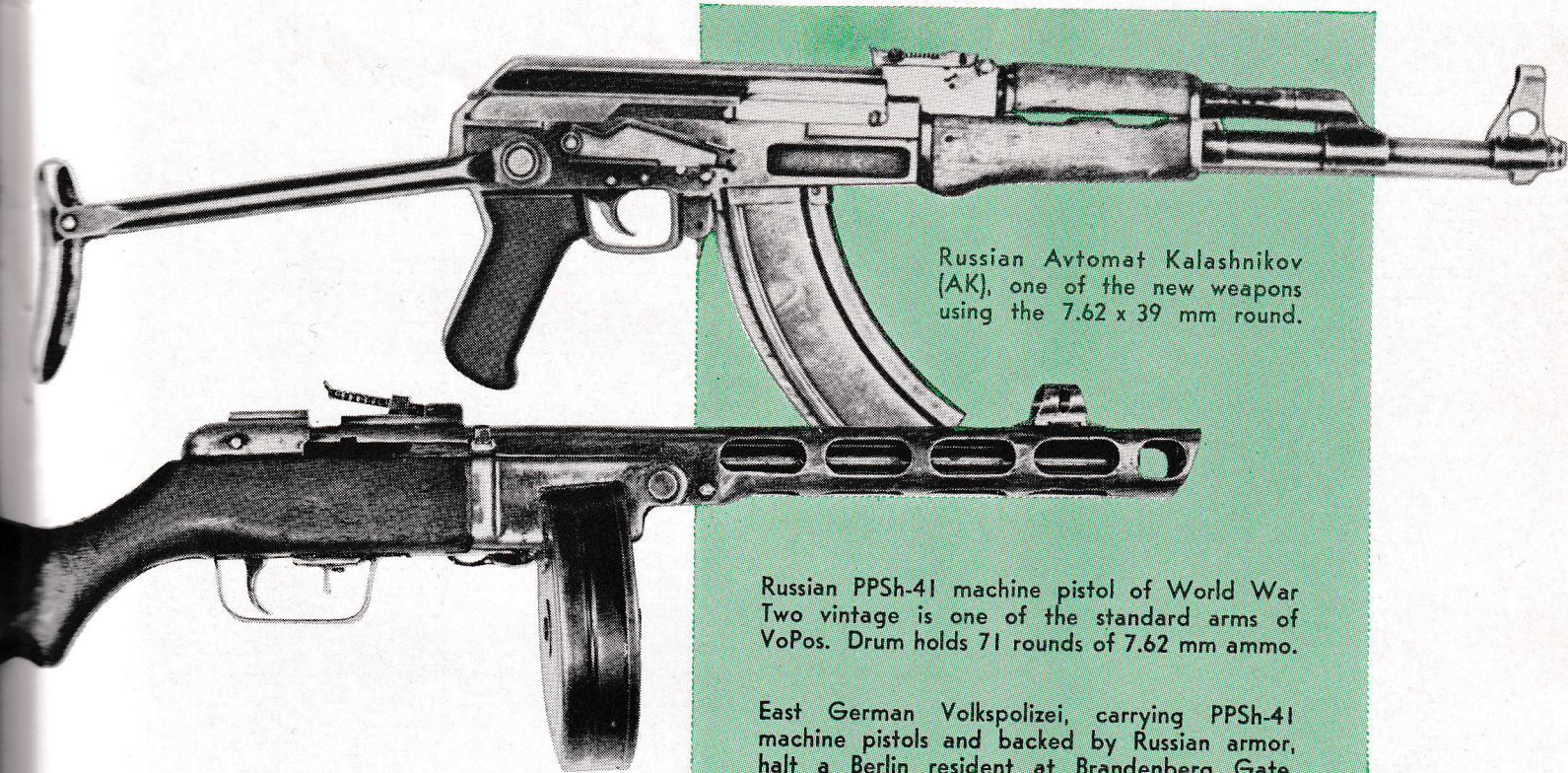
By JOHN F. ARNOLD

SINCE the building of the wall which divides East and West Berlin, the East German Volkspolizei, (called "The VoPos") have become increasingly prominent in European events. Almost daily in the year and a half of the "Wall's" existence, the major newspapers of the world have headlined their activities. Accompanying newsphotos have shown them to be armed in most instances, but the interesting part is that, until recently, these photos seldom showed a standardization of the weapons with which they were equipped.

The East German forces are not necessarily well equipped troops. Up to about 1958, they were issued, almost without exception, leftover small arms from the Second World War. Many of these were German weapons; bolt-action Mauser K.98k's, Luger and P.38 pistols, MG-42's, etc. Some, such as the PPSH-41, PPS-43, and Degtyarov, were Russian automatic weapons. In fact, just about everything capable of functioning properly and that could be found behind the

Iron Curtain was put into the hands of the "VoPos." Most were entirely satisfactory arms, the best examples of both German and Russian ingenuity throughout World War Two. Some were less desirable, but *all* were capable of performing the task to which they were set. They had killing power.

My first personal contact with a "VoPo" was in the summer of 1956 during a visit to Berlin. While on a U. S. Government guided tour of the Russian "Garden of Sorrow," the huge war memorial situated in East Berlin, I noted that the majority of people on the streets were in uniform. Most of these were "VoPos," though a goodly number of Russian troops were in evidence. The latter were usually in groups of squad strength, being transported hither and yon in light troop-carrying vehicles. At that time, these Soviet troops were armed with their old World War Two weapons: Mossin-Nagant bolt-action rifles, Tokarev pistols, and Nagant revolvers.



Russian Avtomat Kalashnikov (AK), one of the new weapons using the 7.62 x 39 mm round.

Russian PPSH-41 machine pistol of World War Two vintage is one of the standard arms of VoPos. Drum holds 71 rounds of 7.62 mm ammo.

East German Volkspolizei, carrying PPSH-41 machine pistols and backed by Russian armor, halt a Berlin resident at Brandenburg Gate.



VoPos

Upon our arrival at the memorial, I noticed a "VoPo" casually guarding the large central structure. What I noticed most, however, was that he was wearing a typical leather holster for the German Luger pistol. Curious, I approached him and asked him, in German, if it was indeed a Luger, or "Parabellum," which he was wearing. The surprise on his face turned almost immediately to some-



Third Reich Luger in caliber 9 mm is now being re-issued to VoPos in East Germany. Note unusual grips.



Russian Tokarev pistol (TT-33), caliber 7.62, was noted on several of the East German VoPos.



Soviet military double action automatic, the Makarov, Model MP, chambered for cartridge slightly over 9 mm.

thing else and, without a word, he walked away, disappearing around the corner of the edifice.

Later, I saw that almost every guard carried either a Luger or P.38, with one or two Russian Tokarev pistols thrown in. At least, they wore the holsters for those guns—I never did actually see a pistol.

Except for one or two German semi-automatic G-43's, all long arms I saw were Mauser K.98k's. I caught one glimpse of a Russian Degtyarov light machine gun being tended by a pair of "VoPos" as our tour bus was nearing the checkpoint, headed back for West Berlin. And that was about it.

That brief encounter with the Luger-toting "VoPo" at the Russian War Memorial was the bug that bit me, and from that time on I have tried to learn as much as possible about these East German weapons. In the years following my 1956 visit to East Berlin, many rumors reached my ears, some true, others completely false, but all interesting. Probably due to the hush-hush security measures taken by all Soviet dominated peoples, good information concerning the arms and armament of the "VoPos" was quite difficult to come by. This only added to my curiosity. I carefully watched the newspapers and especially the television news-casts for the slightest clue to any change in the ordinary pattern of Luger, Mauser rifle, and other weapons I had already established as being standardized among the East Germans.

The rumor which was most difficult to believe, though constantly bandied about, was one which indicated that Luger pistols were being manufactured or assembled from leftover Wartime parts in the Eastern zone of Germany, most probably in the famous arms center of Suhl in the Thuringian forests. But try as I did, these rumors remained just that; rumors. Friends returned from trips to Germany and other European countries always bearing the same old story, and always with the same, monotonous lack of even the slightest shred of evidence. I had pretty well made up my mind that this was wishful thinking on the part of the many hundreds of collectors who would actually like to believe that new Luger pistols were available somewhere in the world, even if it was East Germany. But I had learned that where there is smoke there is almost always fire, and I refused to discount the Luger rumors completely, though not ready to accept them as fact until I had some more tangible proof.

It was about this time that the first of the new Russian family of small arms began to pop up and come increasingly into prominence. A photo in the papers of a guard at the Russian Embassy in East Berlin armed with the first I'd noted of the Avtomat Kalashnikov immediately aroused my interest. Then came photos and newsreels of East Germans with the trim semi-automatic Siminov "SKS-46" rifles and, here and there, the new Russian "RPD" light machine gun. All three of the new arms were chambered for the "new" Russian assault rifle cartridge, the 7.62 x 39 mm Model of 1943, originally introduced in the SKS-46 and later in the Kalashnikov ("AK") and RPD.

It seemed obvious that the Russians were in the process of rearming the East Germans with the latest of Russian weapons—and fine weapons they (*Continued on page 43*)

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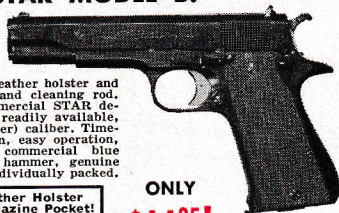
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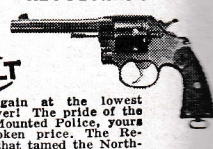


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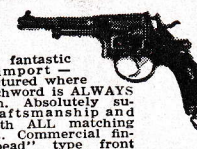


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GUNS OF THE VOPOS

(Continued from page 22)

are. But although photos and newsreels indicated an increasing number of these new Russian "tools" in the hands of the East Germans, it became obvious also that the familiar Lugers, Mauser rifles, etc., were still around, and in decidedly large quantities. The same was true of the old Russian Maxim, the later Russian Degtyarov, the German MG-42 light machine guns, the German MP-44 and MP-40, and the Russian PPSH-41 and PPS-43 machine pistols. The little Russian carbine, Model 1938 and Model 1944 with folding bayonet, both of the Mossin-Nagant bolt-action system were noted quite frequently, too. So were the standard Mossin-Nagant Model 91/30 rifles and a veritable collection of other World War Two arms.

The picture was a pretty confusing one for a while, until it became apparent that the Russians wanted the Western world to believe that the East Germans were armed with all of the latest Russian weapons, whereas the truth was that only first-quality troops were so armed—the ones who had their pictures taken by Western photographers most often. The majority of the troops were still lugging their antiquated Second World War guns. But don't forget—many of these, such as the German MG-42, are still as good as or better than most weapons of their type in the world.

Throughout the late 1950's and into 1960, East Germans might be seen carrying almost any and every type of weapon employed in the days of World War Two. Standardization appeared to be unknown east of the Brandenburg Gate, and yet the new Soviet small arms were ever more prominent, especially the SKS. The interesting part of this was that not one could definitely be attributed to East German manufacture or even East German assembly! And still the old rumors of "new" East German Lugers were repeated—with no proof forthcoming.

Then, in 1960, came the first rather blurred pictures of the "VoPos" armed with a new handgun. This was known to be the new standard Soviet military pistol "Makarov," caliber just over 9 mm, employing a cartridge of a size somewhere between that of

the 9 mm Short (.380") and the 9 mm Luger-Parabellum. From all indications, this "new" pistol gave the appearance of being nothing more than an oversized Walther "PP," and the cartridge was compared to the 9 mm Walther "Ultra," an experimental mid-velocity World War Two failure.

With extremely favorable reports of the high quality and desirability of the AK, SKS, and RPD pouring in from all sources, why would the Russians choose such an antiquated and completely unoriginal design for their latest in handguns? It was completely incongruous. But on came the Makarovs, nevertheless, by the thousands and the tens of thousands. For some time, there was nothing else to believe except that the Soviets had goofed. This pistol was an obvious joke, made even more ridiculous by irrefutable evidence that the SKS was a fine semi-automatic rifle, the AK was probably the best assault rifle in the world, and that the RPD was revolutionary in design and thought. The Makarov was chalked up as being the weak link in the strong chain of Russia's new family of small arms.

The erection of the "Wall of Shame" which has divided the Eastern and Western portions of the city of Berlin since the summer of 1961 literally transformed the occidental portion of that metropolis into an armed camp. While the old standby World War Two weapons were still to be seen on every side, even the SKS became relegated to "obsolete" and second-rate category. Now the "VoPos" were proudly displaying large quantities of the highly desirable Avtomat Kalashnikovs, but no longer the full wooded stocked type. Paratrooper versions with folding metal stocks were everywhere. Intelligence indicated that variations were beginning to appear, and it soon became quite obvious that the East Germans were finally producing weapons, probably in Suhl. Workmanship on these East German arms was found to be of the very high pre-War and Wartime standards set by the Germans from the times when weapons were first produced in that Thuringian area hundreds of years ago. They were superior to the original Russian manu-



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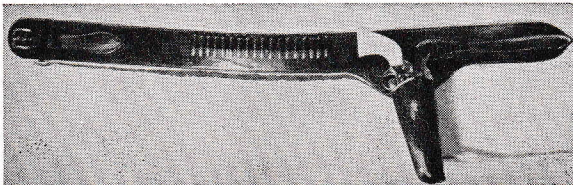
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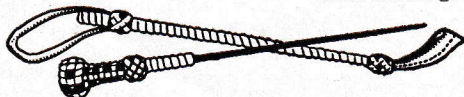
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factured weapons by a fair degree, and manufacturing variations appeared to further set them apart from the original Soviet-made examples.

Not only were the Kalashnikovs pouring from the factories in Suhl, but now came SKS rifles; and now rumors were accompanied by proof (of sorts) that these arms were being produced in East Germany. The Makarov, too, was reportedly being manufactured in Suhl. Apparently, the RPD of German make is a reality.

It was not until the late summer of 1962 that all of my deductions, conjectures, and suspicions were confirmed as to exactly what was standard with the forces of the East Germans. At that time, I not only had very precise reports from friends travelling the Continent, but a small book fell into my hands—a book entitled "Handbuch fuer den Kaempfer" (Handbook for the Fighter) and dated "1962." In it were listed all of the small arms which were considered "standard" with the "VoPo's!"

First comes the old German Mauser Karabiner '98k bolt-action rifle. Examples noted are of very late World War Two manufacture, but a few have been seen which bear dates of "1943" and "1944." None, however, unless assembled, were produced in the German Democratic Republic. There is no way to identify one of these Mausers as definitely being of East German origin, as none that I have seen has proofs or other markings other than those of the Third Reich.

Next, we find the Russian Mossin-Nagant Carbine, Model 1944, with folding bayonet. This, too, is strictly a weapon left over from World War Two. It is exactly the same as

those encountered during the War and in Korea during the "Police Action." The standard rifle-length Mossin-Nagant is not mentioned in the book, nor are any other rifles of Soviet or German origin.

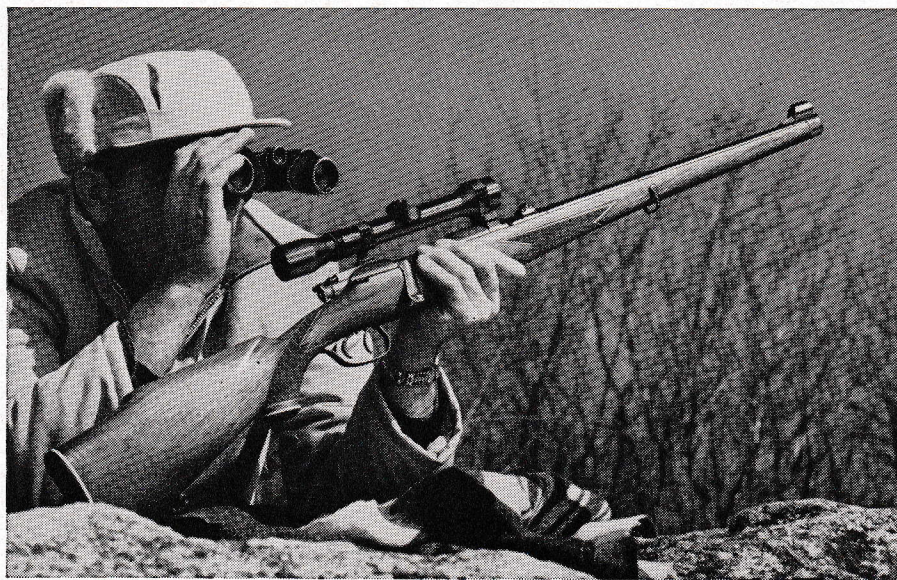
Under machine pistols we find the normal and quite frequently encountered Soviet Shpagin PPSH-41 with 71-round drum magazine and wood stock. These relatively crude but usable weapons are encountered quite often in Austria also, as the Russians sold or gave a large number of them to that country after the Soviet withdrawal in the 1950's. These, too, without exception, are of World War Two manufacture. The only other machine pistol listed is the German MP-44, the original "Sturmgewehr" or Assault rifle of World War Two. It is evident that many thousands of these weapons were left behind the Iron Curtain after the partitioning of Germany at the close of the War.

The pistols found in the handbook are interesting but not unusual. They consist of the Russian Tokarev "TT-33," which is in reality the variation of 1935 and a relative Browning design known to most weapons enthusiasts. These pistols are no longer manufactured in the Soviet Union, but are probably still made in Poland, Rumania, Communist China, and North Korea. It is extremely doubtful that they were ever produced in the D.D.R.

Next we come upon one of the finest handguns ever used anywhere at any time, the Luger-Parabellum. The photos in the handbook are a bit misleading, as they show unusual grips upon what appears to be (and is) a standard "P.08" of World War Two vintage. All of these pistols I have seen have been made prior to the end of the War. The grips, however, are undoubtedly of post-War, East German manufacture. They are of a dark brown plastic, and bear a design imbedded into the upper middle portion which resembles a round "bullseye." Otherwise the grips are unmarked.

The pistols themselves are mostly P.08's of World War Two manufacture, with a few of First World War or "in-between War" production. They are almost always reworked, but not necessarily refinished. In many instances, the serial numbers have been changed and parts added or replaced. All bear markings, undoubtedly of East German origin, which are believed to be inspector's markings to indicate that the weapons have been completely checked over and passed for issuance and use by the forces. These markings vary, but the "standard" seems to be a number such as "12," "31," "39," which is surrounded by a rectangle, circle, or shield, and the whole surrounded by a wreath. It is assumed that these numbers indicate the specific inspector or area of inspection where that task was accomplished.

Some of these pistols bear more than one



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marking which are not identical. The markings are usually found on the frame just forward of the slide plate. They may also appear on the left side of the frame just above the top of the left grip, on the backstrap just above the stock lug, on the left front of the receiver (barrel extension), and possibly other places. These are the only marks, except for the easily spotted plastic grips, which indicate the East German Luger-Parabellum pistols. So, all of you Luger collectors, keep your eyes open! In all probability, not too many of these will be forthcoming, as they are not easy to come by even in Berlin.

The other pistol in the handbook is, of course, the Russian Makarov, listed as the "Pistole Makarov" or "PM." It is listed as "9mm," although the cartridge actually measures about 9.2 mm. This is a double-action pistol of the Walther "PP" type, a straight blowback of rugged, sturdy construction. The double-action mechanism is quite smooth, almost equal to that on some of the best American revolvers. The single-action pull varies with the weapon, but is far from being "undesirable." Being larger over-all than the Walther, it fits the average hand much better. The velocity is listed as 315 m.s. or about 1033 f.p.s.—not to be considered "underpowered," but not up to that of the Luger-Parabellum and 7.62 mm Tokarev. It is listed in the handbook as being for use in areas up to 50 meters from the shooter. East German factories are now producing the Makarov, and the workmanship is equal to that of any pistol ever produced in the forests of Thuringia, including that of the pre-War Walther pistols!

Strangely enough, the handbook lists the old water-cooled Maxim machine gun, Model 1910, but does not list the Degtyarov Model "DP," most common of all later Soviet light machine guns. It does, however, list the Model "DTM" (Degtyarov Tank Modified), undoubtedly for use on light armored vehicles, scout cars, and jeeps. Included among the machine guns is the heavy machine gun of caliber 12.7 mm, which has been a standard weapon in the Russian army since 1943. Completing the weapons pictured are the 82 mm mortar, and the 45 mm light anti-tank gun, both of Russian origin.

All of the weapons listed in the handbook are the "official" weapons of the "VoPos," but are not necessarily all which they utilize. The Degtyarov Model "DP," the P.38 pistol, the German Schmeisser MP-40 machine pistol, the Russian PPS-43 machine pistol, and many other common (and a few uncommon) weapons of World War Two are encountered frequently in the hands of the forces of the D.D.R. (*Deutsche Demokratik Republik*), the (East) German Democratic Republic. One in particular is an exact copy of the Walther "PP" of pre-War and Wartime manufacture. An example of this pistol which I examined could have been made from scratch by the East Germans, or could have been assembled from parts taken from Walther's former plant in Zella-Mehlis, Thuringia. It could also

be a reworked Wartime pistol. The markings on the slide are probably some sort of manufacturer's code or model number, as no name appears on the pistol. The proof marks are interesting in that one is the same as the old pre-Nazi commercial proof (Crown over "N"), whereas the second is a strange sort of eagle never before encountered on any weapon I have seen. The magazine is almost definitely of recent manufacture, as are the plastic grips. The rest? Who can say? A serial number in the "teen" thousands indicates a fair-sized production, but very few of these East German Walthers have appeared. Also seen have been a couple of "Easternized" P.38's, bearing heavy metal grips and a "Russian-type" 5-pointed star; but these are not often come by either.

So there is the picture as it stands today: a complete conglomeration which would give logisticians nightmares. The cartridges needed for the "official" weapons include the 7.62 mm Tokarev pistol, 7.62 mm rimmed Russian rifle, 9 mm Makarov, 9 mm Luger-Parabellum, 7.92 mm German "Kurz," 7.92 mm German rifle, and 12.7 mm Russian machine gun rounds. We know for a fact, however, that even though not included in the "official" listings, the SKS, AK and RPD all require still another cartridge, the 7.62 x 39 mm Russian Short; and the Walther "PP" is chambered for the 7.65 mm Browning (.32 ACP). It is more than likely that there are some of the old .25 and .380 pocket pistols such as the little Russian Tula-Korovin and Walthers or other popular pistols in the latter size around somewhere. As a matter of fact, I have a Russian .380 cartridge dated "1959" in my junk box; an empty case picked up on a German shooting range.

What other arms of still other calibers are the "VoPos" using? Probably a good guess would be—almost anything! The only weapon they *don't* seem to have is the new Russian Stechkin machine pistol, a pistol with a wooden holster-stock and a change lever with a 20-shot magazine. That seems to be one weapon the Russians are keeping entirely to themselves!

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