

The Gustloff Pistle

“A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma”

By Bob Adams



Little has been known about these obscure pistols, and information is almost as rare as the guns. Paraphrasing the famous quote from Winston Churchill, the Gustloff Pistle appears to be “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key.” This is my quest for that key. Little did I suspect where this quest would lead, nor the cast of characters involved.



Thüringer Wald (Thuringia Forest).

The story begins in the beautiful green forests and rolling hills of Thuringia, Germany. Celtic Tribes began settling in the region about 500 BC, seeking iron ore. Thuringia had an abundance of rich iron ore, extensive forests for fuel, and flowing streams for water power. Over the next 2500 years, an industrial region developed. In the Middle Ages Thuringia gradually specialized in the manufacture of all types of arms. In 1500, firearms were being produced in Suhl. In the following 500 years, towns in the region supported and encouraged arms manufacture, including Weimar, Erfurt, Zella-Mehlis, and most importantly, Suhl,



which became known as Die Deutsche Waffenstadt (The German Weapons City).

Famous gun makers had their start in or near Suhl or relocated in the area: Krieghoff, Sauer & Sohn, C.G. Haenel, Schilling, Merkel, Simson, Bergmann, Heym, and Jäger, to mention only a few. Within 5 km were the villages of Zella, St. Blasii, and Mehliis which combined in 1919 to form the town of Zella-Mehlis. This was the home of Walther, Langenhahn, Anschutz, Venus and many others. In the early 20th century, Suhl was considered so remote a local joke goes: “Suhl is so close to the edge of the world, you can see Zella-Mehlis.”

The story continues with Löb and Moses Simson, Jewish brothers, who bought a one-third interest in a hammer forge in Suhl in 1854. Production of charcoal steel soon began and after buying out their partner, the firm Simson & Co. was founded 1856. Following the local tradition, they began producing gun parts and gun barrels, then complete firearms. The company manufactured 150,000 Model 1871 Mauser military rifles and component parts for the German Model 1879 and 1883 Service Revolvers (Reichsrevolvers) from 1872 to 1876. Simson began the manufacture of high quality commercial shotguns and rifles around 1880. When joined by Karl Luck in 1884, the company name was changed to Simson & Luck. Beginning approximately in 1893, they manufactured complete Nagant revolvers for Argentina.

Simson & Luck expanded into the manufacture of steam engines in 1871, bicycles (fahrräder) in 1896, and automobiles in 1907. Karl Luck retired in 1884 and Simson returned to a family-owned business. In 1899 the firm was renamed Simson & Co. By most accounts, they were loyal and patriotic Germans. Continuing this tradition during



Models 1879 and 1883
Reichsrevolvers Bavarian
contract, serial number
1, made in Suhl.



Simson Argentine Model 1893
revolver.

WWI, Simson & Co. manufactured Gewehr 98 rifles and bayonets under contract to the German government.

When Gerson Simson (son of Moses Simson) died in 1904, management of the company was divided between the sons: Max, Leonard, Arthur and Julius. At that time, 1,200 workers were employed which made Simson the largest employer in the area. By 1912, employment had increased to 1,500, and by 1918 Simson had 3,500 employees.

In 1911, the Simsons commissioned a retirement home in Suhl for Jeanette Simson with a noted Berlin architect, Hermann Muthesius. The house was completed in 1912. Some local Suhl residents resented the new house and the location "looking down" on Suhl.



Suhl Firearms Museum (2008) and Simson family home at the upper right.



Simson family home built in 1912.

At the end of the war in 1919, under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was required to disarm and the new army (Reichswehr) was limited to 100,000 men. However, the Freikorps (Free Corps), paramilitary forces consisting primarily of army veterans, was set up in 1919 to unofficially supplement the Reichswehr. Although officially disbanded in 1920, many Freikorps members joined the newly-formed German Workers Party (DAP) which was renamed NSDAP (Nazi Party) in 1920. Former Freikorps members became part of the armed Nazi S.A. (Sturmabteilung - Brownshirts). Later, some would change to the new SS (Schutzstaffel) when formed in 1925.

The Treaty of Versailles severely limited Germany's ability to rearm by restricting manufacture of arms. Military weapons manufacture was banned, even for export. Manufacture of commercial 9mm Parabellum handguns and long-barreled pistols was also prohibited. However, manufacture of new commercial Luger (Parabellum) pistols in 7.65mm was continued by DWM, while new 9mm Luger pistols continued to be made for the Reichswehr and the German Police. Mauser continued to produce the C96 pistol with the original long barrel, but soon converted to the short-barreled Bolo model to comply with the restrictions.

During the 1920s, German gun makers struggled to survive under chaotic economic conditions. Germany experienced serious inflation. From 8 Marks to the dollar (12.5¢) in 1919, the Mark fell to 200 to the dollar in January 1922 (1/2¢). Hyperinflation accelerated until the Mark was virtually worthless. The German Mark was then abandoned and replaced by the interim Rentenmark in 1923 and the permanent Reichsmark in August of 1924. In 1923, 233 German companies were forced into bankruptcy and over 6,000 in 1924. Economic conditions then became more stable, but the Great Depression was just around the corner.



1925 Simson Supra Typ SO. (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia, Thomas Doerfer).

To survive, gun manufacturers sought additional products for the commercial market. Walther and Mauser developed and introduced adding machines. Simson continued the manufacture of commercial rifles, shotguns, automobiles and bicycles, and looked for additional products to keep the firm solvent.

Simson began to develop commercial handguns. A new Model I (Model 1922 in the United States) .25 blowback auto pistol was introduced, followed by an updated version called the Model II (Model 1927 in the United States).

On October 19, 1922, the Prussian Ministry of the Interior ordered major repair of military small arms to be handled by Simson and Co.¹ to supersede Spandau Arsenal which was being converted to commercial use. Ordnance machinery for the manufacture of Gewehr 98 rifles and P.08 (Luger) pistols from the Royal Arsenal at Erfurt was purchased by Simson for 821,000 Marks² and moved 68 kilometers to Suhl.



Simson .25 Model 1 pistol (1922).



Simson .25 Model 2 pistol (1927).

In 1925, the Reichswehrministerium (Ministry of the Defense of the Reich) solicited bids for new small arms, including manufacture of P.08 (Luger) pistols for the Army. Unlikely as it appeared; the large gun companies (Mauser, DWM [later BKIWI]) reportedly had little interest in such a small contract,³ and failed to bid. As a result, the relatively small Simson & Co. won the bid and was selected as the exclusive manufacturer and supplier of military rifles (Gewehr 98), 9mm pistols (P.08 Lugers) and machine guns to the German military in a contract dated May 25, 1925. Interestingly, it was retroactive to April 1, 1924 and concluded on March 31, 1934. Using the machinery from Erfurt, Simson set up a production line and provided new Luger pistols (and other arms) to the Army.



Simson P.08 (Luger) pistol.



Simson Luger marking.

Once it proved to be profitable, this exclusive military contract to a Jewish company angered other arms makers, and offended leaders of the emerging NSDAP (Nazi party). The German Weimar Republic was especially affected as the Great Depression began. In 1928, unemployment rose to 8.4%. By 1932, it had soared to over 30% with 6 million people without jobs. Wages dropped and many employees were forced into part-time work.

Even with the profitable military contract, Simson & Co. also suffered during the Depression. Much of their production had been shut down, and in 1932 two-thirds of the work force had become redundant. In 1933, however, as the Nazi Party came into power, Simson & Co. began to recover, and the workforce was increased to 2,050 employees.

German gun makers experienced severe economic conditions, and it was reported that in March 1933, the Association of Zella-Mehlis Gun Manufacturers, led by Fritz Walther, sent a letter to Hitler complaining that Simson had a monopoly which was forcing other gun companies out of business. As Michael Thad Allen stated in *The Business of Genocide*, "That Jews should be entrusted with defense contracts, of course, enraged the Nazis. The national press had pilloried the Simsons since the 1920s, accusing them of embezzlement and demonizing them as the spearhead of a world Jewish conspiracy to emasculate the German armed forces."⁴

In Weimar, Fritz Sauckel dropped out of school at fifteen to join the merchant marine, and later studied engineering. He joined the Nazi Party in 1923, and in 1927 became the Nazi Gauleiter (regional party leader) of Thüringia. In 1929, he became a member of the regional government, was promoted to Reich Regent of Thüringia in 1933, and received the honorary rank of Obergruppenfuehrer in the SA (Sturmabteilung). As early as 1927, he started attacks on Simson & Co., and began attempts to "aryanize" the company.

Hellmuth Gommlich, a policeman and Nazi sympathizer in Thüringia, became Chief of Police in Zella-Mehlis (home of Walther) in 1930, and formally joined the Nazi Party in 1931. Under a secret order from Sauckel in the spring of 1933, Gommlich began a special investigation of the Simsons. However, in June/July of that same year, the Simsons were vindicated when the courts found no deficiencies in the contract with the Heereswaffenamt (Army Weapons Office). Nevertheless, Gommlich devotedly continued his investigation for the next fourteen months. In September 1933, he searched the offices of Dr. Julius Simson. According to Dr. Erich Buchman (head of Sauckel's Weimar office), during the course of the investigation, Gommlich reportedly examined some 52,000 documents and interviewed over 100 witnesses.

By this time, the Simsons obviously realized their name and company was an affront to the Nazi Party and in the fall

of 1933 under severe pressure from the Nazis began a separation of the firm from the family. Ultimately, Simson & Co. was renamed Berlin-Suhler-Waffen- und Fahrzeugwerke Simson & Co. (BSW) in 1934, with the Simson family as a limited partner. This new limited partnership, according to Dr. Buchmann (clearly a biased source), effectively separated the Simson influence over the firm, which satisfied Sauckel, the Prussian and Thüringen governments, the Heereswaffenamt and other government entities. Dr. Herbert Hoffmann was named Trustee, and Karl Beckurts became Betriebsführer (Chief of Operations). Automobile production was discontinued, but business was improving and employment rose to 3,460 employees.

Along with persecution of the Simsons, significant political events took place during 1933-35. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany by President Paul von Hindenburg. In March 1933, the first Nazi concentration camp was established by the SA (Sturmabteilung) at Nohra, Thüringia. On April 1, 1933, the Nazis organized a one-day boycott of Jewish shops, doctors and lawyers throughout Germany. Six days later, a law was passed prohibiting Jews from employment in civil service and from higher-level positions in commercial companies. Additional restrictions were implemented over the following months. The Gestapo (Secret Police) was created in April 1933. The largest publisher in Germany, the Jewish-owned Ullstein Press, was coerced into selling to the Nazi Party in 1934. All police forces (including the Gestapo) were consolidated under Himmler in April 1934. In June 1934, to consolidate Hitler's control, the Nazi S.A. leadership was purged (killed) during the "Night of the Long Knives". Upon Hindenburg's death in August 1934, Hitler assumed total control of Germany. On September 15, 1935, the German Reichstag passed the infamous anti-Jewish "Nuremberg Laws".

Gommlich, already a member of the police, joined the newly-formed Gestapo, and built up the force in Zella-Mehlis. As a result, he gained considerable additional power. In 1933, both Sauckel and Gommlich may have been involved in creating the first Nazi concentration camp in Nohra, just outside Weimar. Later, both were instrumental in the creation of Buchenwald Concentration Camp in 1937.

In recognition of Gommlich's 'exemplary' service, he was transferred to Weimar for a police special project under Himmler and Sauckel. There, with a staff of 8-10 and the assistance of Sauckel's office manager, attorney Dr. Erich Buchmann, they urgently worked on their project—the expropriation of the Simson factory in Suhl.

Spurious new legal charges were then brought against the owners of Simson and top employees. In April, 1935, Arthur Simson, Dr. Ewald Mayer (nephew and successor), and Georg Mayer (brother to Ewald), were arrested by the new Gestapo and imprisoned.

While in prison, the Simsons were coerced by Dr. Buchmann and Gommlich into signing over their interest in Simson & Co. to the Nazis on November 27/28, 1935 and paying “restitution” of 1.75 million Reichsmarks, which secured their release. Seeing the handwriting on the wall (and to escape additional legal charges), the Simsons promptly fled to Switzerland early in 1936 (without a passport, according to Dr. Buchmann) and thus avoided the main thrust of the Holocaust and the Nazi “Final Solution”. The Mayer brothers (Simson nephews) were then tried and convicted for treason. They were sentenced to prison and assessed a high fine. While out on bail, they, too, crossed the border to safety in Switzerland.

Arthur Simson, Julius Simson and the Mayers immigrated to the United States in 1937, where they lived the remainder of their lives. The net effect was that Simson & Co. was seized and expropriated for the benefit of the Nazi Party, and the Simsons were driven from their homeland. They were not alone. Other Jewish firms were expropriated with owners far less fortunate than the Simsons—some went to the concentration camps. Gommlich and Sauckel were honored, promoted and rewarded by the Nazi Party with added responsibilities. In 1944, Dr. Buchmann admitted their method of expropriation of Simson & Co. became an archetype for future takeovers of other Jewish firms. Amazingly, up until his death in 1944, Dr. Buchmann maintained that the expropriation was perfectly legal and correct according to German civil law.

Once the Simsons relinquished control of their company, BSW (Simson & Co.) became part of a ‘Nazi Industrial Bequest’ (Foundation) in 1935 under the personal control of Fritz Sauckel. To many employees and others who weren’t too fond of Hitler and the Third Reich, the abbreviation “BSW” was known as “Bis Simson Wiederkommt” (until Simson returns).

Manufacture of commercial and military products at BSW continued with little change. Fritz Sauckel had ambitions to build the ‘Bequest’ into a massive Nazi industrial combine and intended it to be a model industry for National Socialist Germany. Employees were well-treated, company houses and apartments were provided, a company kindergarten was furnished, athletic fields, old-age, retirement, disability and survivor pension benefits established, and other social programs were available (for those of pure Aryan blood, of course). Baby carriages were added to the product line. Employment rose to 4,430 employees.

Strangely, although the machinery, personnel and production line was in place at BSW, manufacture of P.08 (Luger) pistols ceased. The machinery and tooling may (or may not) have been transferred to Krieghoff, only a couple of kilometers away in Suhl. Regardless, as manufacture of

Simson Lugers ceased, manufacture of Krieghoff Lugers began.

Manufacture of Simson Model 98 military rifles had apparently ceased some time earlier. The proposed new German K98k rifles were introduced and produced at Sauer (just down the street from BSW) and Mauser in 1934. Although BSW had the original Simson machinery, personnel and production line, they didn’t tool up and begin manufacture until 1937—well after the design was standardized.

Wilhelm Gustloff, a German by birth, and an early member (1923) of the Nazi Party, was the founder and Gauleiter of the Swiss Nazi Party. He was assassinated on February 4, 1936 by David Frankfurter (a Croatian Jewish medical student). Gustloff was given a state funeral in Germany, and treated as a hero and martyr by the Nazi Party. Hitler personally delivered the eulogy at the funeral. Among many other Nazi honors, Hitler directed the Foundation to be reorganized into a model National Socialist non-profit foundation called “Wilhelm Gustloff Stiftung” to serve “the good of the German people”. Additional Jewish firms were seized and included under the Gustloff Stiftung.

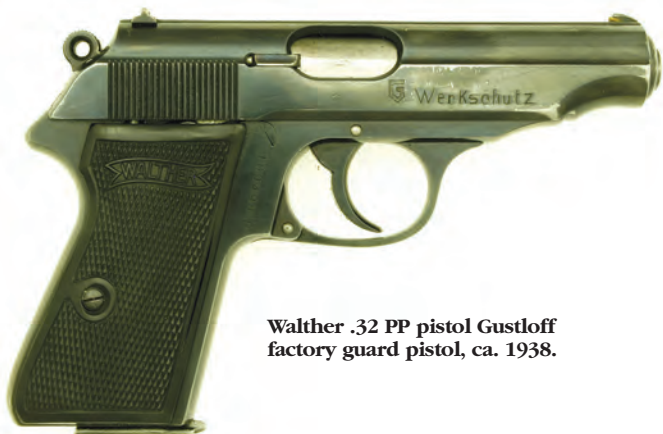
With Fritz Sauckel now in total control of BSW, he directed (or encouraged) development of new handguns for the German military and police. BSW submitted several patents relating to handguns in the 1930’s.

About 1936-1937, an innovative BSW design in 9mm Parabellum was submitted to the German military for consideration as a replacement for the aging P.08 (Luger) pistol. However, the P.38 submitted by Walther (6 km away in Zella-Mehlis) was adopted instead. Walther must have been a friendly competitor, for Sauckel presented several engraved Walther pistols from the Gustloff Stiftung, and Walther pistols were issued for Gustloff factory guards in 1938.

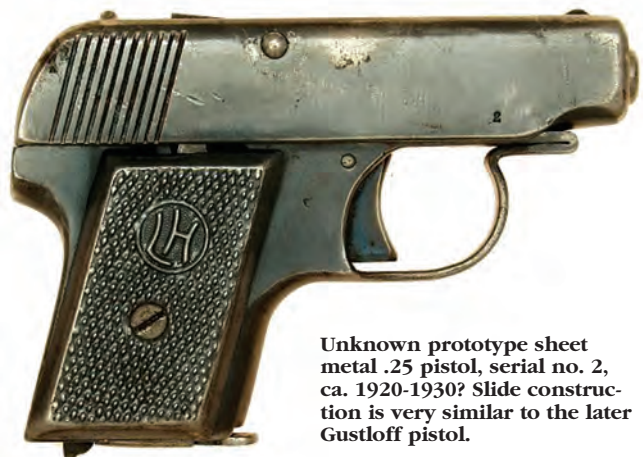


Prototype BSW 9mm Locked-Breech pistol ca. 1937 (Photo courtesy Dr. Leonardo M. Antaris).

During the 1920s and early 1930s, many German gun manufacturers had brought out new .32 pocket pistols. DWM produced a Model 1920 pocket pistol, Walther introduced the PP in 1929 and PPK shortly afterward, Mauser



Walther .32 PP pistol Gustloff factory guard pistol, ca. 1938.



Unknown prototype sheet metal .25 pistol, serial no. 2, ca. 1920-1930? Slide construction is very similar to the later Gustloff pistol.

introduced a Model 1934, and Sauer developed a Model 1936, which became the famous Model 38(h).

BSW also began development of a new .32 pocket pistol. The yet unnamed Gustloff Pistole was developed by BSW in Suhl, during the mid to late 1930s. Several innovative and cost-saving design features were utilized, such as an unusual, innovative safety, a formed sheet-metal slide (a feature first used during the 1920s and much later in the post-war H&K Model 4 .32 pistol introduced in 1967).

In 1938, Johannes Schwarz of Berlin filed an application for a patent on a cast zinc frame. A few prototypes were made for Luger pistols, but were not successful and only two are known to have survived. Some Erma .22 target pistols (made in Erfurt) were equipped with zinc frames and commercially sold in the late 1930s. Zinc technology wasn't perfected and some frames later crumbled. Since steel was a critical war material subject to centralized allocation, zinc remained a desirable alternative. As technology improved, zinc was successfully used for German military flare pistols starting in 1942 by Erma (Erfurt) and Walther (Zella-Mehlis). By February 1944, Gustloff pistols were redesigned to be fitted with injection-cast zinc frames as a cost and steel-saving measure.



Experimental zinc frame for the Luger pistol.

A German patent (D.R.P. No. 726624) was submitted for the unique safety on July 23, 1937 by Karl Barnitzke (Born Nov. 10, 1894, died Feb. 17, 1977 in East Berlin) and Erich Ladicke. Barnitzke was head of the department responsible for design of small-arms and handguns at Simson/BSW/Gustloff (later Chief Designer), while Ladicke was an engineer specializing in welded and stamped sheet metal, who worked under Barnitzke.

The safety consisted of a lever which could apply or release spring pressure on the hammer with the hammer cocked or at rest. When spring pressure was released, the pistol was completely safe and could not accidentally discharge. Reversing the lever re-applied spring pressure to the hammer, and the pistol was ready to be fired—either single or double-action on the original design. Later pistols were single-action only.

BSW continued to expand and produce fine-quality sporting and military firearms throughout the remainder of the 1930s. In 1939, all the companies under the Gustloff

Stiftung were dissolved and reorganized as Gustloff-Werke. Employment rose to 6,000 employees.

Development continued on the new pocket pistol. Prototypes were produced and evaluated, and the design was finalized by 1939-40. In 1940 several toolroom examples were made in Suhl to promote the new pistol and the "first" example was presented to Adolph Hitler (see illustration). For the next few years, considerable correspondence was exchanged between Sauckel and Himmler as Sauckel tried to get the pistol adopted by the SS as a police pistol. An order for 1,000 pistols was eventually approved by Himmler, and a much-needed allocation of steel provided, but it appears Gustloff-Werke was too occupied with war production of other ordnance products and no longer had the production capacity. An alternate plan was needed.

In February/March 1942, the SS and Albert Speer's Ministry of Armament and Ammunition came to an agreement (with the approval of Hitler) to take advantage of cheap underutilized labor available in concentration camps. On March 21, 1942, Fritz Sauckel was appointed Plenipotentiary of Labor for Germany, and his responsibilities included concentration camp labor as well as volunteer and impressed foreign workers.



Buchenwald concentration camp (April 1945). (Photo courtesy Gedenkstätte Buchenwald).



Buchenwald concentration camp (2008).

In July 1942, construction of a new factory (Gustloff-Werke II) was begun just outside Buchenwald Concentration Camp, a few kilometers from another Gustloff factory in Weimar (Fritz Sauckel Werke), established in 1936. Coerced labor was to be provided by the SS from among the Camp inmates. On March 1, 1943, construction was complete, and production of military rifles (K.98 and G/K.43), and V-2 Rocket components begun.



Aerial photo of Buchenwald (23 Dec 1943) Gustloff-Werke II at arrow. (Photo courtesy United States Archives).



Gustloff-Werke II factory at Buchenwald. (Photo courtesy Stiftung Gedenkstätte Buchenwald).



Gustloff-Werke II factory at Buchenwald. (Photo courtesy Stiftung Gedenkstätte Buchenwald).

Contrary to some reports, Buchenwald was not an extermination camp, although thousands died there. It originated as a place to separate and isolate “undesirables” from the German population, which included Jews, Gypsies, political dissidents (real or imagined), communists, homosexuals, disabled, habitual or professional criminals, asocial (“work shy”) and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Later, additional inmates were brought in from occupied countries. Prisoners of War (POWs) were also confined, including some American flyers captured in France.

Although begun by the SA, concentration camps were administered by the SS. As time progressed, while some other camps evolved into extermination camps, Buchenwald evolved into a labor camp, with inmates being “rented” to German industry—with high profits going to the SS. Inmates not suitable for work were moved to other camps. Inmate workers, especially if skilled, received marginally better treatment in the camp, and were paid a small stipend in Buchenwald script to buy extra food and other items in the overpriced camp Kantine—run by the SS and staffed by Kapos.

Throughout the ranks, the camp and SS were rife with corruption. With high profits flowing from inmate labor and little oversight, corruption became a way of life for many in the SS. Reportedly, sufficient food and funds were allocated



Buchenwald Script 2 Reichsmarks.



Prisoners working on the rail line, SS officers supervising. (Photo courtesy Stiftung Gedenkstätte Buchenwald).

to the camp to keep the inmates healthy enough to work. However, the SS quickly realized by diverting prisoner rations, the remainder could be bartered or sold on the black market. Consequently, the inmates received barely enough nutrition to survive. Likewise, building and raw materials intended for the factories were diverted to the SS.

As soon as the factory was completed, Heinrich Himmler ordered construction of a 13 km railroad spur from Weimar to expedite shipment of ordnance products from Gustloff-Werke II. Prisoners were forced to labor 12-hour shifts, night and day, to “officially” complete the line by June 20, 1943.

On June 21, an official “First Ride to Buchenwald” train, gaily decorated with garlands, with impressive ceremony, carried high-ranking officers and officials from Weimar to



First ride to Buchenwald. (Photo courtesy Stiftung Gedenkstätte Buchenwald).

Buchenwald. The SS was not noted for engineering skills and inmates were not highly motivated, so the line was poorly constructed and unstable. Consequently, it had to be immediately rebuilt.

At Gustloff-Werke II, a separate building called the 'Suhler Halle', staffed with civilian workers (and some inmates), was dedicated to sub-contracting for Gustloff-Werke I (Fritz Sauckel Werke in Weimar), and production of pistols. From my research, it appears that all production Gustloff pistols were made or assembled here. Recently, I found Gustloff factory production figures in Weimar and Buchenwald in an official United States Strategic Bombing Report of 1945. Total official Gustloff production was reported as only 262 pistols in 1944.

Only a year after the factory was completed, it was attacked on August 24, 1944 by U.S. and British bombers and mostly destroyed. The SS refused to allow the prisoners to take shelter and some 2,000 inmates were injured and nearly 400 died. Over 100 SS and members of their families were also killed.

Although documented efforts were made to resume production, it appears that little (if any) progress was made before American forces liberated Buchenwald on April 11, 1945. Close examination of an aerial photo of Buchenwald taken in June, 1945 shows the 'Suhler Halle' roof to be intact. Some pistols may have been assembled there after the bombing, but this is unconfirmed.



Aerial photo of bombing, August 24, 1944. (Photo courtesy of United States Archives).

On February 9, 1945, Gustloff's Fritz Sauckel Werke in Weimar was also bombed causing major destruction and loss of life. As a "target of opportunity", additional bombs were dropped on February 23 and March 31. Gustloff war production in the Weimar area was effectively halted.

On April 3, 1945, Suhl was captured by American forces and Buchenwald was liberated eight days later on April 11. Although the Wehrmacht would fight on until the general surrender on May 8, for Gustloff-Werke the war was over.

After the 1945 liberation, Buchenwald fell within the Soviet Occupation Zone, and was used as a Soviet NKVD confinement camp (Special Camp No. 2) until 1950. Under Soviet control, 28,455 prisoners were incarcerated and 7,113 died. The Soviets used Buchenwald primarily to isolate and incarcerate former Nazis, minor officials and Hitler Youth, although many women and children were imprisoned as well. Some opponents of the Soviet system were also incarcerated. Most prisoners were released in 1948, with the remainder in 1950. The remaining Gustloff Werke II factory buildings were razed when the site was turned over to the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in 1950.



Fritz Sauckel Werke, Weimar, June 1945. (Photo Courtesy United States Archives).

A far more interesting fate was destined for the Gustloff factory in Suhl, which was also within the Soviet Zone. In July 1945, the Americans left and the Soviets moved in. Several Thüringen gun companies left with the Americans. Walther, Sauer, Krieghoff, and Anschutz, to name a few, resettled in the West. Machinery from the factories was taken to the Soviet Union as war reparations.

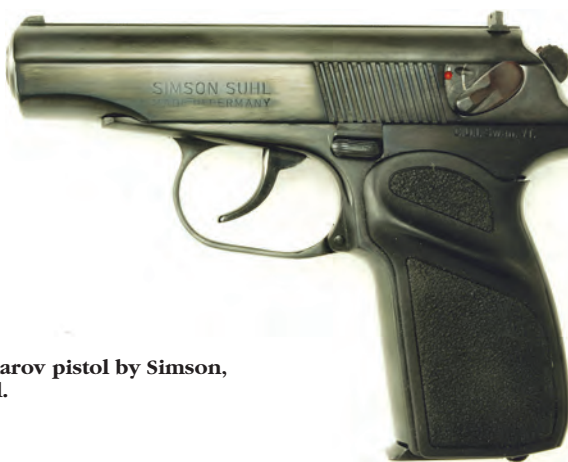
Local gun companies, including Gustloff, were nationalized as Soviet companies and consolidated in Suhl. At some point the Ernst Thälmann Werk was established, which manufactured a few test copies of Walther P.38 and Luger pistols. Manufacture of a copy of the Walther PP was implemented and widely issued in East Germany, with some commercial examples being sold. Production of Haenel target and sporting rifles was continued with Ernst Thälmann Werk markings, and a German version of the Soviet Makarov pistol was manufactured.

The Gustloff chief designer, Karl Barnitzke, along with his friend and colleague Hugo Schmeisser and other engineers, was relocated by the Soviets (probably not by choice) to the Soviet Union to work as firearm designers. They didn't return to East Germany until the early 1950s.

The name Simson & Co. was re-established in August 1945 as a Soviet company and the production of Simson sporting arms began again. Over the next few years, several name changes were made, and in 1947, the name Simson disappeared—only to reappear in 1952. Production of firearms, bicycles, motorcycles and automobiles continued at Simson under the German Democratic Republic (DDR) with large war reparation payments sent to the Soviet Union.

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. The people in East Germany had built up a deep-seated hatred for the Stasi (East German Secret Police), and Stasi offices were ransacked throughout East Germany. Suhl residents may have risked their lives when they stormed and occupied the local Stasi headquarters in November/December 1989. As a result, the local Stasi boss committed suicide. After 45 years of Communism, East German communist rule ceased in 1990. Reunification with West Germany immediately followed, and German communist companies had to make the transition to a commercial market.

To survive in this new market, the Simson Company continued production of firearms and motorcycles. The company experienced serious financial difficulties over the next few years with more than one bankruptcy. Somehow, it was able to continue operations and began manufacture of a commercial version of the Makarov pistol as well as a match version of the Colt 1911A1. Ruger and the remaining Simson family in the United States attempted to regain control of the company, but the deal fell through. Simson & Co. was burdened with obsolete equipment and methods, and wasn't



Makarov pistol by Simson, Suhl.

financially viable, so a final bankruptcy followed. The assets were sold at auction in 2003. Efforts are still underway to resume manufacture of Simson motorcycles, which have achieved a cult following.

What was the fate of those who persecuted the Simsons? Hellmuth Gommlich's entire family committed suicide on April 1, 1945, just before the arrival of American troops. Fritz Sauckel was convicted at the Nuremberg trials, and sentenced to hang on October 16, 1946.

Arthur Simson died in Los Angeles, California in 1969, and Julius died in New York City in 1953.

THE PISTOLS

Thus far, in summary, the author has identified five main categories of Gustloff pistols:

- I. Development Prototypes (none known)
- II. Toolroom Pistols (3 identified)
- III. Preproduction Pistols (3 identified)
- IV. Production Pistols (several known)
- V. Final Assembly (several known)

I. Developmental Prototypes

In a *Gun Digest* article, Dr. Bruno Brukner reported perhaps five design prototype variations were constructed. None are known to survive and no pictures have been located.

II. Toolroom Pistols (Suhl)

Three examples have been positively identified. Some of these special pistols have hand-engraved slide legends with minor variations, and checkered or grooved safety levers. Some are proofed. Unproofed pistols indicate they remained in the factory.

Presentation Pistols

Probably Toolroom Pistols produced at Suhl, Hitler was presented with the "first" Gustloff pistol by Fritz Sauckel for



Toolroom pistol, serial 1031.

Ein Geburtstagsgeschenk für den Führer



Fransz Göt. Der Führer hat sich über das Geschenk sehr gefreut und offen an der Herstellung Beteiligten seinen herzlichsten Dank durch den Stichtungsführer ausdrücken lassen.

Dem Führer wurde an seinem Geburtstage, am 20. April d. J., durch unseren Stichtungsführer, Gauleiter und Reichstagsabgeordneten Sauckel, als Geschenk der Gustloff-Werke eine Pistole überreicht. Die Waffe wurde im Waffenwerk Suhl vom Konstruktionsbüro W II konstruiert, von der Versuchswerkstatt II mit Hilfe anderer Werkstätten gebaut und nach Entwürfen des Architekten W. B. B. (Händchen) von den Graveurmeister Franz und Richard Schilling in Suhl graviert. Die

Hitler's presentation pistol article from Gustloff employee publication.

his 51st Birthday, on 20 April 1940. The published illustrations show a fully engraved example in a factory case with spare magazine. This pistol has never been located.

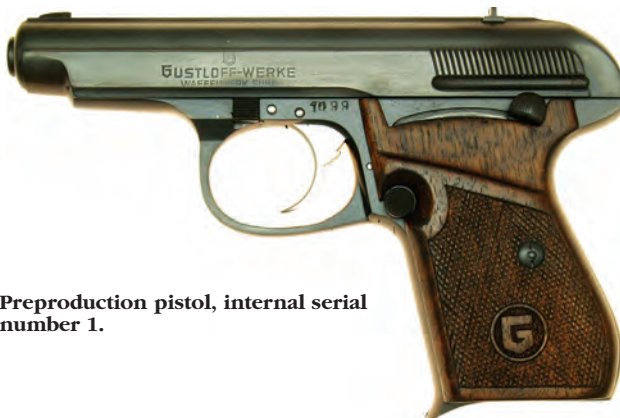
A second pistol was presented to Benito Mussolini. The third documented presentation pistol was given to Hauptmann Engle, Hitler's adjutant to the Armed Forces. Hauptmann Engle had admired Hitler's pistol and asked if he could also get one. Heinrich Himmler also expressed interest. However, Himmler didn't receive his (the fourth) presentation pistol until July, 1941—over one year later. Sauckel used this opportunity to lobby Himmler for an allocation of steel sufficient to produce 100 pistols.

Dr. Brukner reported additional pistols presented to Sauckel, Bormann, and others. Karl Barnitzke also received an engraved example. Serial numbers of the Presentation Pistols are unknown, and none of the documented presentation pistols are known to have survived.

Serial numbers of Toolroom Pistols appear to begin at 1,000:

Observed examples:

- 1019 Checkered lever Proofed. Factory photo.
- 1021 Checkered lever Proofed. Private collection, USA (Shown in 1943 instruction manual)
- 1031 Grooved lever No proof. Author's collection (Hand-engraved slide legend)



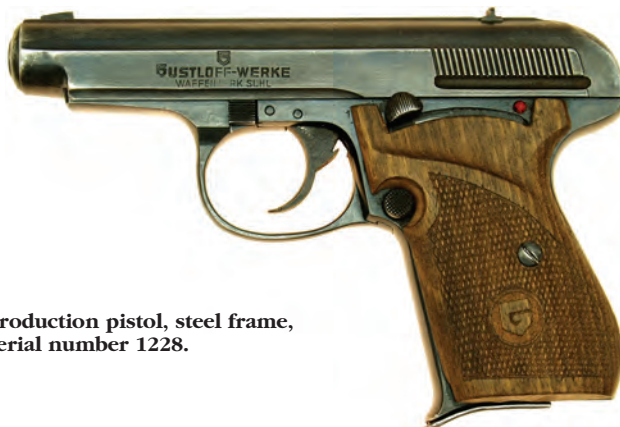
Preproduction pistol, internal serial number 1.

III. Preproduction Pistols (Suhl)

Three examples have been identified. These have internal serial numbers (or no number), a better finish compared to later pistols, and smooth walnut or personalized grips. All examples found have single digit internal serials.

Observed examples:

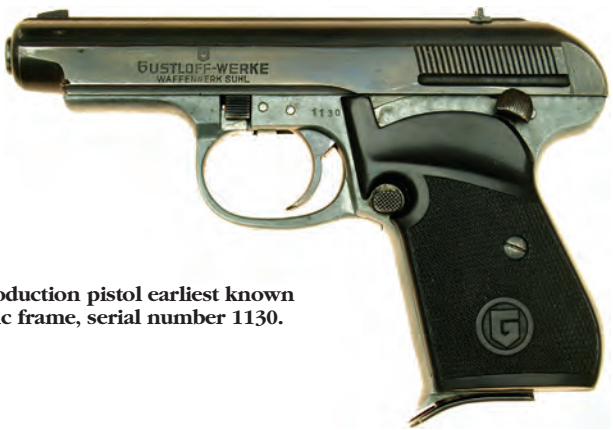
- nvn Private collection - Germany
Smooth wood grips
- 1 Author's collection Personalized grips
Second serial of 1099 added (from toolroom series)
- 7 Private collection - Germany Personalized grips



Production pistol, steel frame, serial number 1228.

IV. Production Pistols (Buchenwald?)

Several examples are known. Serial range 1100-1340 with slightly higher numbers reported but not verified. Production began with milled steel frames with wood grips.



Production pistol earliest known zinc frame, serial number 1130.



Early final Assembly Pistol, serial number 21.

One steel frame pistol has been observed with Bakelite grips (replacement?). Injection cast zinc frames with Bakelite grips appeared shortly thereafter. One observed zinc frame pistol has been fitted with replacement wood grips. Steel frames were quickly phased out and all late examples have zinc frames. All observed examples have Eagle/N proofing indicating formal release from the factory or commercial sale. One sheet metal frame has been reported (no details). Several presentation/ personalized examples are known. Based upon dates from the Bearbeitungsplan (Work Plan), and production figures from the 1945 Strategic Bombing Report, it's probable all production pistols were assembled at Gustloff-Werke II at Buchenwald.

Based on observed serial numbers (1100-1340), then perhaps 240 production pistols were produced. From the *United States Strategic Bombing Report of 1945*, total pistol production was listed as 262 in 1944. This fits closely with the observed serial range of Production Pistols.

1. Steel Frame. Serial range 1100-1228
2. Zinc Frame. Serial range 1130-1340 (overlapping serial numbers)
3. Sheet Metal Frame. One reported. No details known.

V. Final Assembly Pistols

This unusual grouping is in a separate observed serial number range of 1-144, stamped on the underside of the frame, just behind the magazine well. These are all zinc frame pistols and appear to be made or assembled later than the Production Pistols. In general, they are more crude than earlier pistols, usually have mismatched internal numbers and frequently have unfinished or missing parts. None are proofed. The last known example lacks the slide legend, is simply etched "CAL. 7.65 .32 AUTO", has a pinned extractor rather than a fitted one, is missing the front sight, and shows exceptionally crude workmanship.

Final Assembly pistols appear to be put together from leftover, unfinished or salvaged parts—most likely at Buchenwald, or during the American occupation of Suhl. Workmen at Gustloff in Suhl may have assembled these as



Late final Assembly Pistol, serial number 144.

souvenirs for American GIs. No other explanation appears to fit. Assembly of pistols for American GIs was a common practice by other manufacturers in the immediate area. Krieghoff and Sauer (both just down the street) and Walther (6 km away) all assembled souvenir pistols for the GIs. By the time the Soviets arrived in July, few guns remained in Suhl.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Meiningen, Germany

Dr. Norbert Moczarski, Oberarchivrat,

Frau Yvonne Hörnlein, Archivassistentin

The helpful staff at Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Suhl

Dr. Richard Preuss, Germany

Dr. Leonardo M. Antaris, USA

Dr. Geoffrey Sturgess, Switzerland

Dr. Hans-Jürgen Fritze, Germany

Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Leipzig, Germany

Birgit Honeit

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