

Bergmann ammo was packaged in 16-round packets and held in a chest shelf with seven packets per row of four rows total. The 448 rounds were enough to feed 14 trommel magazines.

Bergmann 'Machine Pistol'

Used by Germany in World War I, this rapid-fire 9mm was the most successful submachine gun of the conflict, and it lived on for many years thereafter. • By Philip Schreier

In 1916 the dark storm clouds of war that had covered Europe stalled with no signs of clearing anytime soon. The armies of the Allies and Central Powers settled down into months of stalemate and watchful waiting. Each side feverishly worked

on plans to gain an upper hand in the fighting, some secret weapon or approach to the fighting that would give them unbroken open field running through the enemy lines.

Deep inside the German war machine, Hugo Schmeisser was

perfecting a new kind of weapon that would eventually revolutionize warfare from its introduction in 1918 through armed conflicts happening today.

Ever since the American Civil War when Dr. Richard Gatling developed a rapid-firing gun,

inventors had been looking for ways to make such repeaters a staple of the infantry's muscle. Hiram Maxim, an American living abroad, invented what we consider the first practical machine gun in the 1880s. It was a heavy, belt-fed weapon that fired standard rifle cartridges at a high cyclic rate and was cooled by a water jacket that trapped and recycled escaping steam. They were heavy guns weighing as much as 136 pounds (62kg) and became a staple of the British Forces (as the Vickers Gun) and the German forces (as the MG.08 Maxim). A lighter, 40-pound (18kg) and considered more mobile version of the MG.08 was introduced in 1915 as the MG.08/15 light machine gun. Still cumbersome and bulky, this weapon was not the intended "light machine gun" that the infantry had hoped for.

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, an Italian army Major named Abiel Betel Revelli began development of a full-auto weapon that would become the world's first "submachine gun." The terms "machine gun" and "submachine gun" indicate a weapon that fires full auto with rifle ammo (MG) or pistol ammo (SMG).

The gun Revelli developed and patented in 1915 fired a 9mm Glisenti pistol round at an astounding rate of 3,000 rounds a minute and was named the Villar Perosa after the area in the Italian province of Turin where it was designed and manufactured. It weighed in at 14 pounds (6½ kg) and had twin barrels and a spade-type grip/trigger group. It did not see much use in the First World War as a light infantry weapon in the manner that subsequent submachine guns would be employed. The Villar Perosa was used behind a bullet shield and in a typically defensive manner. Although it technically dates as the premier SMG, the true first SMG, as we



A young officer stands guard with his MP18.1 in post-war Germany. He has two additional trommel magazines stuffed into his belt. The use of the MP18.1 in post-war Germany was only allowed in the Freikorps, Germany's paramilitary police.

currently view SMGs, fell to the Maschinenpistole 18, I (MP18.I) manufactured by the Theodore Bergmann Weapons Factory in Suhl, Germany, and known today as the Bergmann MP18.

In a strange, yet ironic twist of fate, the Bergmann MP18 was actually designed by Hugo Schmeisser and not Theodore Bergmann, for whom the gun is

named. The gun that more commonly bears Hugo Schmeisser's name, the Schmeisser MP38/40, was actually a design produced by the Erma Factory in Erfurt, Germany. It was based on Heinrich Vollmer's successful Erma EMP (ERMA Maschinen Pistole) introduced in 1930. It is thought that the reason for the misnomer is due to a badly trans-

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A Bergmann MP18.1 showing sling and 32-round trommel magazine.



The rearward sweep of the magazine angle made the MP18.1 slightly awkward and gave it the feeling of being off balance.



The tube-like receiver of the MP18.1 illustrates the rear notch that served as the safety and the simple L-shaped leaf sight that had apertures for 100 and 200 meters.

lated U.S. Army manual.

In 1915 the German Rifle Testing Commission set about trying to find a suitable light sub-machine gun from its headquarters in Spandau. One of its first

attempts was to convert the Mauser 1896 pistol and the P.08 Artillery Luger into full-auto function. Both guns were successfully converted but proved to be too difficult to manage under

full-auto conditions. Both guns were prone to heating up too fast, as well as jamming due to the excessive fouling that gummed up the workings of the low-tolerance mechanisms.

A different route would have to be explored. Hugo Schmeisser, working at the Theodor Bergmann Weapons Factory in Suhl, had been experimenting with the Bergmann pistol in an attempt to convert it to full auto. He eventually designed a short full-auto rifle with a wood stock that was blowback operated and fired full auto only. Prototypes were tested in the fall of 1917 and early 1918.

The gun worked from an open-bolt position, which helped prevent any rounds from "cooking off" while stationary in the gun's breech. The safety was a simple notch cut into the receiver of the gun that was enabled by drawing the hook-shaped bolt handle rearward and pulling up one-quarter turn, resting the bolt handle into the cut-out. It was fed by a 32-round magazine that was currently being produced for use with the P.08 Artillery Luger. Known as the Trommel or drum magazine, it is also known as the "snail drum" magazine. The Trommel magazine was interchangeable with the one manufactured for the Luger, with one exception: The magazine housing on the Bergmann lacked a stopping notch that would keep the magazine from protruding into the breech of the gun. A steel collar was designed that slid down the shaft of the magazine and prevented it from going too far into the receiver. A loading tool



Receiver markings on an MP18.1 are simple and direct: MP18, 1/military acceptance mark/serial number.



Two trommel magazines showing the feed collar needed to keep the magazine from protruding into the feed ramp of the receiver. It was a simple slide-on, slide-off affair.

similar to the one for the P08 Artillery Luger was also designed with a longer shaft than the standard Luger style.

The sights were a simple V-notch flip sight that was sighted in at 100 and 200 meters. A set of sling swivels was mounted on the gun behind the pistol grip on the



A Bergmann MP18.1 and a Bergmann MP28 (MI 34) side-by-side, illustrating their three main differences: the magazines, the rear sights and the auto/semi selector found above the trigger group on the MP28.



MP18.1s are marked "Theodor Bergmann Abt. Waffenbau Suhl" on the left side of the receiver. Despite the markings, the gun was actually designed by Hugo Schmeisser.



The Bergmann assault chest. Designed to be carried by two assistant gunners, this chest held five trommel magazines, one loading tool and 448 rounds of 9mm ammo.

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The MI 34 was a Belgian-made copy of the MP28 made for Germany and other countries during the interwar period. In 1940 the British copied the MP28 and called it the Lanchester submachine gun. All parts and magazines are interchangeable with the German and Belgian originals.



Left side of the MI 34, an identical copy of the MP28. Weighing in at 10 pounds, it was a heavy but sturdy and accurate shooting platform. It has virtually no recoil due to the weight.

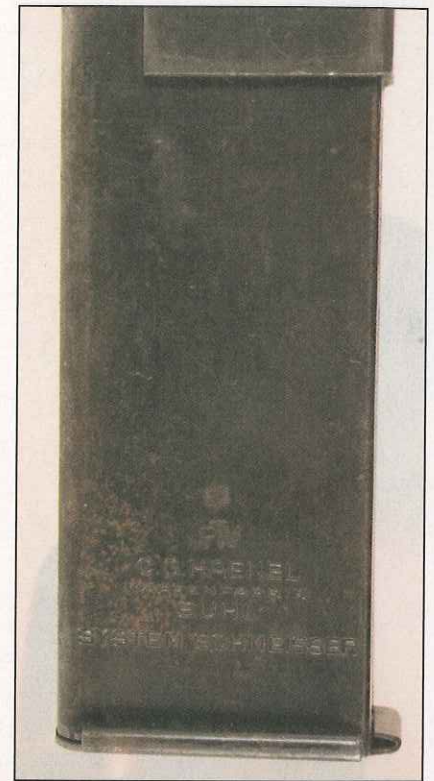


The safety notches were identical on the MP18, MP28 and MI 34. Although it was considered to be sturdy, it could, on rare occasions, discharge if the gun was dropped on its buttstock. The semiauto/full-auto selector switch can be seen above the trigger group.

wood stock and midway along the perforated barrel vent that air-cooled the barrel and prevented the operator from burning his hands on the barrel from the extreme heat generated while firing full auto.

The new weapon was designated the MP18.1 by the Rifle Testing Commission in the spring of 1918.

An order for 50,000 was placed with the Bergmann factory in hopes that every officer and one in 10 men of each squad would be armed with the gun. Special ammo boxes were designed, and assistant gunners were selected as ammo bearers with reserves of 2,500 rounds per squad.



These markings are found on a C.G. Haenel magazine. The 20- and 32-round "stick" magazines were found to be less expensive and far superior to the trommel magazines issued with the MP18.1.



Receiver markings on a MI 34, which was made under license by the Pieper factory in Herstal, Belgium.

The gun was not just seen as an advancement in weapons technology. It was seen as an advancement in battlefield tactics by the German High Command. It was never meant to be employed just



Unit markings found on the reverse of the C.G. Haenel magazine. Bergmann magazines are interchangeable with those later manufactured for the British STEN and Lanchester submachine guns.

as another super weapon like so many others that had been developed. With the deployment of the gun came an entirely new way of looking at offensive warfare.

World War I

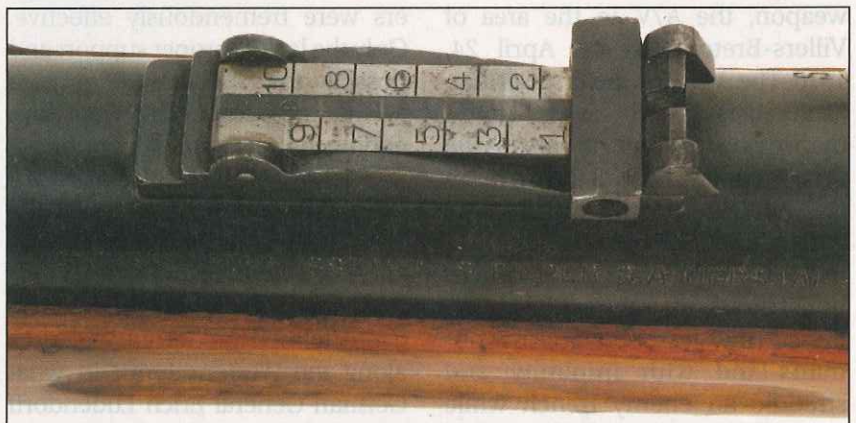
The German High Command envisioned the MP18.I in the hands of a new breed of infantryman called the Stosstruppen, or Storm Troops. Their role in combat would be to shock the enemy, storm and overrun their initial defenses and bypass strong points by isolating them and cutting them off from the rear. The debut of this new type of infantry tactic was on March 21, 1918, when Operation Michael was commenced. The attacking Germans initially caused the entire British 5th Army and elements of the 3rd Army to retreat and caused more than 250,000 casualties on both sides within a matter of days.



Both the MP28 and the MI 34 have only 65 parts, and breakdown is quite simple, making it easy to clean and repair. It is a standard blowback system with a heavy bolt that kept the cyclic rate to 600 rounds per minute.



Manufacturing markings found on an MI 34. Thousands were sold to the German SS in violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

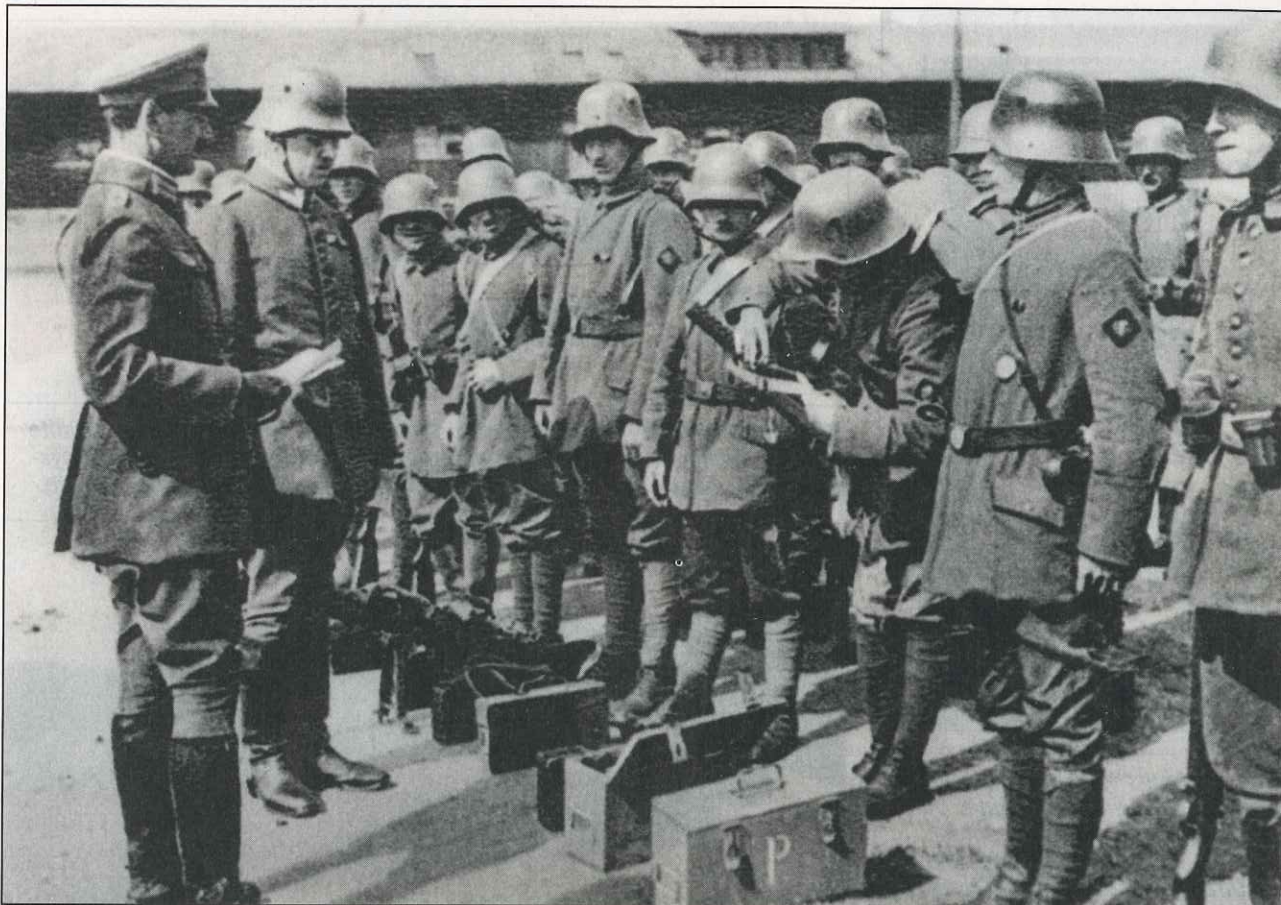


Detail of the rear sight with graduations of 100 to 1,000 meters. Although highly accurate, a 9mm pistol round has an effective range of only 400 meters.

The initial German advances were poorly supported, and just as Sir Douglas Haig made his "our backs against the wall" order, the German effort lost steam and fal-

tered. A last-ditch attempt to take the offensive and end the war before the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was up to combat strength failed.

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A squad of German shock troops prepares for an inspection while a soldier in the front rank adjusts the sling of his MP18.1. Note the ammo chests for supplying the MP18.1 with much-needed 9mm.

As follow-up attacks continued on into the spring of 1918, the Germans unleashed another new weapon, the A7V, in the area of Villers-Bretonneux on April 24, 1918. The A7V was the first German armored tank and was the largest man-made machine on earth at the time. Weighing in at 33 tons, it had a crew of 18 men, six Maxim machine guns and one 37mm cannon.

It was developed as a mobile, bulletproof assault vehicle. The behemoth tank could cross no-man's-land with impunity and straddle an enemy trench while pouring devastating fire down onto the defenders on both sides of the trench. The side doors of the tank would then open as 14 men would descend into the enemy position wearing steel helmets ("stahlhelms") and gas masks. The deploying infantry squad would

clean up the survivors and then press forward. On paper and in actual deed, the new storm troopers were tremendously effective. Only the lack of proper support and possibly the use of the Bergmann MP18.1 prevented the war from ending in their favor that spring.

The MP18.1, unfortunately for the Germans, did not reach the front-line troops until August 1918. On August 8, 1918, the Allies, along with fresh elements of the AEF, overwhelmed the German defenses along the Western Front in what German General Erich Ludendorff would call *der schwarzer tag* (the black day). By the time it was employed against the Allies, overwhelming numbers and resources were no match for the MP18.1. By Armistice Day (November 11, 1918) it is estimated that only 10,000 Bergmann MP18.1s of 35,000 man-

ufactured had found their way to the front lines. As Churchill once said at the conclusion of the Dardanelles campaign, "...And now the terrible ifs accumulate"; one of the great ifs of the Great War will always be What if the attacking troops of Operation Michael had the Bergmann five months earlier? Would the ultimate outcome have been any different?

Post-War Developments

The Treaty of Versailles prevented the Weimar army of Germany from having or manufacturing any Bergmann MP18.1s. A provision was allowed to equip police units with the weapon, and many will be found today with a 1920 overstamp similar to those found on Weimar Lugers. Hugo Schmeisser continued to tinker with the design of the MP18.1 once he became a stock-



A German NCO advances along the front armed with an MP28 in the early years of the Second World War. When used as a single-shot rifle, the MP28 has distinct advantages over the MP38 due to the stability of the wood stock vs. the MP38's collapsible stock.

holder and designer at the C.G. Haenel factory in Suhl in the 1920s.

Existing MP18.Is were converted to fire a straight-stick magazine of initially 20- or 32-round magazines. The magazine housing unit was at a 90-degree angle to the barrel and stock of the gun, eliminating the awkward angle and loading problems that the trommel magazine presented to its users. Other changes included a change to the limited sight arrangement by replacing the rear sights with a tangent-style sight graduated from 100 to 1,000 meters (although the effective range of a 9mm round is at most 400 meters). The most dramatic change, aside from the magazine housing, was the fact that the new design was capable of firing in

both semiauto and full-auto modes. A push-button switch above the trigger changed the selection from "D" (full auto) to "E" (semiauto) and enabled the shooter to use the gun as a highly accurate, albeit small-caliber, rifle. The new model was designated the MP28.II, and some were even equipped with a bayonet lug for defensive use.

The Versailles treaty prevented the gun from being made in Germany, so C.G. Haenel and Hugo Schmeisser licensed the manufacture of the MP28.II to the firm of Anciens Etablissement Pieper S.A. in Herstal, Belgium. Thousands were produced and sold to Bolivia, China (where some copies were made by the Chinese), Japan and Spain. It received its greatest combat use in Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). A model in the author's collection is marked "MI 34/Schmeisser/Bayard" with a "crown L" for King Leopold of Belgium and "Schmeisser's Patent" stamped on the receiver, indicating use by the Belgian army in the mid-1930s. It differs from an MP28.II by the fact that it does not have the "D" and "E" push-button selector switch, but one marked "C" and "A."

Although Hugo Schmeisser's contribution to the German efforts of World War I was five months late in possibly making a huge difference in the outcome of the hostilities, his continuing work on sub-machine-gun development in the interwar years resulted in elements of his Bergmann machine pistol being used in the development of numerous other designs that would ultimately culminate in the adoption of the MP38 and MP40 by Germany prior to and during World War II. Following the end of World War II, Schmeisser was somewhat forcibly relocated to Izhevsk in the southern Ural Mountains of the USSR to aid in Russian firearms development. He returned to his native Germany in 1952 and died

MP28.II

Caliber:.....9mm

System Type: ..Blowback

Operation:Semiauto and full auto

Rate of Fire:....500 rpm

Overall Length: 32 inches

Barrel Length: 7.8 inches

Unloaded Weight: 8.82 pounds

Magazine:20- or 32-round stick mags

Rifling (RHT): Six lands and grooves

Sights: Tangent open adjustable, 100 to 1,000 meters

Muzzle Velocity: 1,250 fps

MP18.I

Caliber:.....9mm

System Type: ..Blowback

Operation:Full-auto

Rate of Fire:....350 to 450 rpm

Overall Length: 32 inches

Barrel Length: 7.8 inches

Unloaded Weight: 9.2 pounds

Magazine:32-round trommel

Rifling (RHT): Six lands and grooves

Sights: L-notch flip sight, 100 and 200 meters

Muzzle Velocity: 1,250 fps

there a year later in December 1953. ©

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