

# The MP36

## *The Missing Link*

*by Frank Iannamico*



*The revolutionary MP38 machinepistole made its combat debut with the German blitzkrieg invasion of Poland that began on 1 September, 1939. Other than some self-inflicted casualties on the German troops from the MP38's marginal safety system, the weapon was a huge success.*

The Germans began using the submachine gun, or maschinenpistole, near the end of WWI when they developed and adopted the full automatic 9mm MP18.I. They felt the submachine gun would have great value in the close quarter combat situations encountered when the trenches were overrun. While the defenders of the trenches would be attempting to protect themselves with their limited capacity bolt action rifles and bayonets the Germans would be spraying them with submachine gun fire at 500 rounds per minute! The German MP18.I was the first weapon to use the soon to be common open bolt system. It was also the first of many German submachine gun designs.

World War One ended with the German surrender in November 1918. The Allies drew up an agreement called the Treaty of Versailles; the treaty was extremely harsh and restrictive. The Germans had little choice but to sign it. The treaty would cause much unrest among the German people and plant the seeds for WWII.

The Treaty of Versailles prohibited the Germans from developing or testing any type of military weapons. All existing WWI weapons were ordered destroyed by the Inter Allied Control Commission. Although the Germans were allowed a 100,000 man self defense force, the *Reichswehr*, they were restricted to the type of weapons they could issue. Submachine guns were prohibited, except for limited use by the German police departments. The police issued the MP18.I.

Despite the harsh restrictions, the Germans secretly continued to develop and test many new weapon designs for the war they knew was coming. Rather than manufacture and stockpile existing designs, they wanted to continually develop new weapons so when war did come, they would be equipped with the most advanced weapons available. While most of the Allies of WWI were enjoying peace, the Germans were secretly preparing for war.

Most of the submachine guns the Germans developed between the wars were all very similar to the MP18.I model. They all looked like short barreled carbines. Except for a few minor variances they all functioned pretty much the same. The MP38 was the first German production weapon that was different.

In January 1938 the German Heereswaffenamt (Army Weapons Office) requested a lightweight, compact, rapid firing 9mm weapon for paratroopers and armored crews. The development time to the resulting MP38 in August of that same year was extraordinarily brief. The reason for the seemingly rapid development of the

weapon was due in part to the model Erma Werk already had under development. One prototype was the MP36. The MP36 was virtually unknown for many years, due to extreme rarity of surviving examples.



**The Only markings on the MP36 are located under the weapons foregrip. They read "EMP36" Erma Erfurt. Note serrated butt stock and disassembly knob.**

Although the MP36 is similar to the MP38 there are some notable differences. The MP36 is selectfire, it has a fire mode selector located above the trigger housing. The fire selector is remarkably similar to that on the Haenel MP41 model. All of the MP36's components are manufactured from machined steel stock.

The MP36 has wood furniture instead of plastic as used on the MP38/40. The pistol grip panels are also finely checkered wood. The folding metal stock of the MP36 is very similar to that of the later production design, except there are no springs, detents or release buttons. The stock folds and extends under the friction of the snug fitting parts. The butt plate has machined grooves instead of being smooth.

The front sling swivel can be easily rotated to either side. The magazine catch is the latch type similar to those used in earlier designs, rather than the button release of the MP38/40 design. The magazine release lever is located at the rear of the housing.

The bolt assembly is similar to the MP38/40 except that the front portion of MP36 bolt is a separate piece, and is attached by a locking screw. The front sight is a driftable unprotected design. The rear sight is similar to the MP38/40. The MP36 is devoid of any identification markings except for the underside of the wooden foregrip. This area is marked "ERMA ERFURT" "EMP 36", the EMP designation is for Erma Machine Pistol.

The MP36 cocking handle like the MP38/40 is located on the receiver's left side. This was the very first German weapon to feature this. The idea behind the left side cocking handle was that it allowed the shooters hand to remain on the pistol grip (and finger near the trigger), allowing him to easily cock the weapon with his weak hand. It was thought that this would make for a more rapid magazine change, saving seconds and perhaps the shooter's life. The knob is similar to that on the earlier Erma EMP weapons. The magazine housing is unique in that it is slightly canted approximately 30 degrees to the left. The magazine is different, and not interchangeable with that of the MP38/40. When this weapon was captured there was no magazine in it. An MP40 magazine was adapted to fit. No original MP36 magazine has ever been located or documented. The MP36 field stripping procedures are very similar to those of the MP38/40.



**Great room in Karinhall where the MP36 s/n 014 was believed to be kept by Göring.**

This particular MP36 is serial number 014, and is a very well made piece. The finish is a very fine, highly polished commercial blue. The wood is made of fine sculptured walnut. Virtually every part is stamped with the weapon's serial number, even the heads of the screws. The weapon is obviously a presentation piece, the type often presented to high ranking officials by the weapons manufacturers.

This particular MP36 has a very colorful story of how it was obtained during WWII. In 1943 a group of volunteers was organized to go on a top secret covert mission. The mission's objective was to assassinate Hitler's Reichmarshall and head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring. The attempt on Göring's life was planned to take place at Karinhall located some 40 miles northeast of Berlin. Allied intelligence sources had reported that Göring would be present at Karinhall and that the grounds would be lightly guarded. Karinhall was one of Göring's many extravagant residences. It was named after his late wife who had died prematurely in 1931.

The Allied team quietly parachuted into the area at night virtually undetected. Once they reached the grounds surrounding Karinhall they soon discovered that the mansion was being guarded by a private army of Göring's elite Fallschirmjäger troops, all well trained and heavily armed. After the German troops discovered the team, a fierce firefight was soon underway.



**Right side view of the canted magazine housing and release lever.**

During the confusion a particular U.S major managed to slip into the main building to search for Göring. While he was looking around the main hall he spotted a strange, unfamiliar weapon hanging on the wall. Thinking it may be of interest to U.S. intelligence, he removed it and placed it in his pack. He then decided that the mission was failing, and decided to try fighting his way out of a rapidly deteriorating situation. He and a very small portion of the original Allied team managed to escape and make their way back to safety.

The weapon remained in the major's possession for the remainder of the war. In 1945 when he returned to the United States he brought the MP36 home as a war souvenir. He stored the gun away and went on with his post war life. The major was unaware of just what a rare piece he had in his possession.

Eventually the weapon was sold and changed hands a few times in subsequent years. Today this unique weapon is in the fine collection of German weapons collector Lou Pacilla. It is the only transferable MP36 in the world. There is only one other example of the MP36 known to exist. That MP36 is serial number 001, and is in

the possession of a military museum in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Reportedly the condition of that weapon is also excellent.

Hitler eventually ordered the Fallschirmjäger troops that were assigned to defend Göring's Karinhall into the line defending Berlin from the invading Russian troops in 1945. The Russians took prisoner the troops who weren't killed.

Göring ordered his engineers to destroy Karinhall as the Russians were sighted approaching the Schorfheide forest surrounding the estate in 1945. Although it was his favorite mansion, he did not want it to fall into Russian hands intact.



**Right side view of the trigger area. Fire selector button is shown just above trigger.**

The Allied forces eventually captured Hermann Göring, and he was placed on trial along with the other remaining Nazi leaders at Nuremberg. He was convicted of various war crimes and sentenced to death by hanging. His request for an "honorable" death before a military firing squad was denied. Göring committed suicide by swallowing a cyanide capsule before his sentence could be carried out.

The US Army Major who participated in the raid on Karinhall passed away recently after retiring from a very successful career in law enforcement.

The Erma MP36 serial number 014 has survived the past 50 plus odd years in the same immaculate condition as the day it was liberated from Hermann Göring's mansion. The official version of the mission is still classified.