

The Modified Gew.98
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The post-WW I modified Gew.98 rifle has not been given proper attention by German military rifle collectors. While it is common knowledge that a Gew.98 with a K98k style rear sight is a post war conversion, other changes have gone unnoticed. This article describes changes that identify Gew.98 reworks, and attempts to correct some misconceptions about them.

The Germans continued to use the Gew.98 designation for these rifles well past the time that the wholesale modifications were made. In a few instances period German documents refer to these reworked rifles as the *Gew.98 mit s. S. Visiere*, or Gew. 98 with sights for the 7,9mm heavy ball cartridge (the original *Lange* rear sight was calibrated for the lighter flat—base S ball round).

Some collectors incorrectly refer to the modified Gew.98 as a “*Karabiner 98b*”. This is incorrect since all Kar.98b have side-mounted slings and turned-down bolts. Nearly all Kar.98b rifles were new rifles produced by Simson in the 1920s and early 1930s, and were not modified Gew.98 rifles.

Converted Gew.98 rifles took several different forms, depending on where and when they were reworked, as well as who carried out the modifications. The simplest conversions have only a replaced rear sight assembly, while the most extensively reworked rifles will have all or some of the modifications listed below.

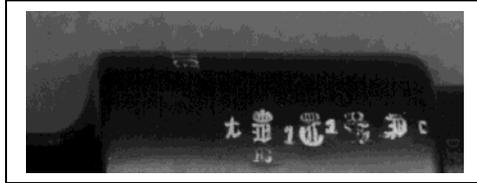
Front Sight Base: Occasionally a modified Gew.98 will be encountered with the original front sight base cut for the Kar.98k front sight hood. This modification indicates that the rifle was reworked after 1940. Many rifles will show multiple modifications that were made over time as changes were either dictated or replacement parts were available. A Gew.98 with cuts for the sight hood is uncommon but these rifles do exist. Reworks are sometimes seen with the last two digits of the serial number on the side of the front sight base, presumably done to ensure the part was mated back to the same rifle after the rear sight assembly was replaced.

Rear Sight Assembly: The most common Gew.98 modification is the replacement of the Lange sight with a Kar.98k type rear sight assembly (“Type” is emphasized, because they are not identical). These rear sight ramps have a different curve due to the ballistics of the s.S. Heavy ball round in the longer barrel. Modified Gew.98 rifles are commonly found with a “K” marked rear sight ramp that is serial numbered to the rifle. Many of the modified rear sight bases will bear a “S/42K” or a “S/42G” marking. These marks indicate that Mauser was the prime manufacturer of the new rear sight assemblies, which makes sense given the fact that Mauser was already producing them for *Standard-Modell* and Kar.98k. It is unlikely that Mauser made modifications to the Gew.98. Mauser was at the time fully occupied with new production, and many of these conversions bear rework markings indicating modification by various *Heereszeugamter*, the base depots for their respective Army Corps. A few early sights can be found with imperial crowned letters or early Weimar eagle inspection marks. These bases almost always have the cutout on the bottom of the sight base as on the original Gew.98.

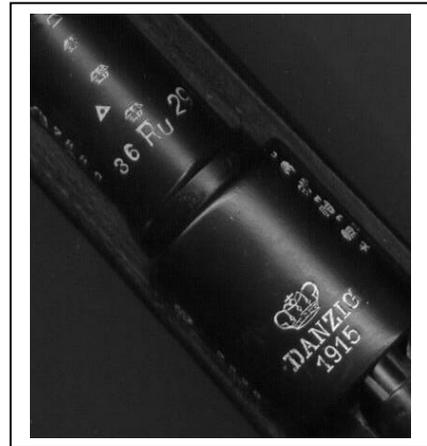
Lower Stock Bands: Most converted Gew.98 have a replacement lower stock band, which is wider (18mm) than the original lower stock band (10mm). The wider band has a larger bearing surface, and eliminates movement between the band and the stock. The wider band retains the bottom-mounted sling swivel. The wider bands were fitted to the stock in two ways; the most common involved cutting back the original band spring to form a new stop. You can also find rifles where the spring is not modified, but the wood has been cut back by 8mm on both the stock and handguard to accommodate the wider band. Most replacement lower stock bands have “Su” inspector’s marks in association with “SuWw” over a date, usually 1935 to 1938. It is believed that the modified bands were manufactured primarily by one source and supplied to the various rework facilities for installation. Some replacement bands can be found with crowned letter inspector’s marks (these may be of earlier manufacture or produced by a different maker).

Followers: A common modification to the follower was the addition of a cut on the left rear of the follower. This allowed the follower to block the bolt when the magazine was empty. Modified followers will have both the original bevel of the Gew.98 follower and the added relief cut. Replacement followers will not have the Gew.98 bevel. The modified followers are almost always blued, but occasionally one will be found that remains polished steel.

Receiver & Bolt Assembly: A Post-WW I modified Gew.98 will almost always have a blued receiver and bolt assembly in place of the polished steel finish of the imperial Gew98 rifles. Sometimes this is the only clue that a rifle saw service after



WW I. Bayonet lugs and sears may also be blued, showing additional evidence of postwar reworking. Look for Weimar eagle acceptance marks or small numerals to the right of the original imperial proofs.



Guard & Lock Screws: Reworked Gew. 98 rifles will often have the original single-cut guard screws replaced with later three-cut screws. Some imperial screws have been noted with added cuts to make them three-cut screws. Lock screws are frequently the original imperial ones, but later replacements are also common, and occasionally no-cut lock screws are found in modified Gew.98 which appears to be original late replacements, and not collector additions.

Bolt Dismounting Washers: Modified early Gew.98 will often have added bolt dismounting washers if the stock did not originally have them, which was the case until about late 1916. The added stock washers are aligned with the hole left by the removal of the marking disk, and will often have inspector's stamps or rework facility markings of the later period.

Markings: Each reworked rifle is practically unique since any number of markings is possible, as. Added parts will normally have inspection markings different than the original imperial German crowned letter inspector's stamps. There are an almost infinite number of rework markings, most will take the form of a either a down-wing eagle if done before about 1938, or straight-wing eagle if the modifications were done later. Both eagles will have letters and/or numbers associated with them. For the individual who is interested in proof marks, these reworked rifles offer a wealth of unusual markings not found on factory-original arms. While marks on production rifles relatively well known and predictable, the area of rework markings still yields new marks to decipher and new mysteries to explore. Since Barrels were often more often then stocks, they will have later markings, then rifle stocks.

A distinction should be made between the rework markings on parts, which are later inspection stamps indicating acceptance of the part, and rework facility acceptance markings, indicating acceptance of the reworked arm for service. The latter are normally *HZA* marks, and are usually found in three locations: the pistol grip area of the stock (most often), the right side of the stock below the original three imperial stock stamps (common), and the center of the buttplate (seldom). The typical mark is an eagle with associated letter/number group. Mention also needs be made of the 1920 stamp, which was applied according to regulations to the top of the receiver and left side of the buttstock. The 1920 mark was added to distinguish Government property from the thousands of other WW I rifles that were in civilian hands.

Keep in mind that many levels of repair and reworking that may be encountered. Technically, a "rework" can range from a replaced safety or repaired buttstock "toe" to a rifle rebuilt on a stripped receiver from a battle-damaged rifle. Everything in-between can be found. Arms were repaired and modified at every level from the field armorer to a main *HZA* depot. Depending on the time frame and circumstances, replaced parts can be both carefully fitted and renumbered to match, or can be used or replacement parts simply thrown onto the rifle to make it serviceable. While mismatched parts are always suspect, "righteous" rifles can be found with mismatched parts, and such examples will always be worth about the same as a normal mismatch of uncertain parentage.

The collector fraternity has in the past largely ignored modified Gew.98. The WW II collectors have focused on the Kar.98k, and the WW I collectors want unaltered Gew.98 for their collections. The modified rifles are certainly worthy of more interest than they receive. Photos of the invasions of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, the Low Countries, and France will show the modified Gew.98 was a mainstay weapon in these operations, as supplies of Kar.98k had not kept up with the rapid expansion and deployment of the *Wehrmacht*. Most prewar parade photos show troops carrying the long rifles. In addition to their prominent use in WW II, these rifles also survived the turbulent history of the between the war years and witnessed the rise of the Third Reich, training many of the soldiers who were later to participate in the early campaigns. They're earlier service in WW I also should not be overlooked. Due to their long service, surviving examples in collectable condition are getting scarce.