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THE ERFURT K98k

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ERMA B GEIPEL Gmbh was assigned the code "S/27" in late 1934 but they didn't begin producing K98k rifles until 1935. ERMA continued to use this code until 1938 when it was changed to "27" and then again in mid 1940 when the code of "27" was replaced with "ax". The wartime German manufacturer's codebook, however, lists the "ax" code as belonging to FEINMECHANISCHE WERKE and not to ERMA. So the question is: was ERMA bought out by, merged with, or in some other way acquired by FEINMECHANISCHE WERKE, or did ERMA change its name. Whatever the case might have been, it can be demonstrated that there was unbroken use of both the Waffenamts and serial numbers at the time of change. This supports the contention that only one manufacturer produced these rifles in 1940.

Erma rifles produced in 1935 have solid wood stocks and handguards with flat buttplates, milled and numbered metal parts, a high gloss commercial blue finish, a 10 inch cleaning rod, and Weimar style eagles for proofing. The Stocks were branch of service marked and all seem to have gone to the Army (H). However, a small number of "S/27G" rifles can be found with R.F.V. stampings on the buttplates. "S/27/G" rifles lack the Mod.98 marking on the siderail. The known serial number range for 1935 is from 1558 to 3456 with an estimated production run of 5,000 rifles. Waffenamts numbers found on these rifles are "WaA280", "WaA132", and "WaA114".



1936 saw the introduction of the "Mod.98" siderail marking (using Gothic style letters in place of the block letters that were used by other manufacturers). Stocks and handguards continued to be solid walnut that were both internally and externally proofed and numbered. All metal parts were milled, numbered, and proofed. Weimar style eagles were used and a Waffenamts "280" was used on all parts. Flat buttplates and 10 inch cleaning rods were retained. The known serial number range is from 2695 to 4449b with an estimated production run of 30,000 rifles. All known examples went to the Army.

1937 production continued using the 1936 standard for stocks, handguards, and metal parts. Waffenamts remained exclusively "280" and again all went to the Army. The only significant change in 1937 was the replacement of the Weimar style eagles with the style known among collectors as the 'stick wing' or "straight wing" eagles. The known serial number range is from 1803 to 9242i, with an estimated production run of 100,000 rifles.

In 1938 ERMA's code was changed from "S/27" to "27", and Waffenamts "280" was replaced with Waffenamts "77". The use of the stick wing eagles continued but Nazi style eagles began to appear with them in the "a" serial number range. Laminate handguards and stocks became the standard, and retained both internal and external numbers and proofs. Metal parts continued to be milled, proofed, and numbered. The known serial range of the 1938 "S/27" rifle was from 7937a to 6650i with an estimated production run of 90,000 rifles. The known serial number range of the 1938 "27" coded rifle was from 7937g to 8355q, with an estimated production run of 90,000 rifles. There was an overlap ("S27 vs "27") of serial number letter suffixes in the "g", "h", and "i" serial number ranges. In 1938 Erfurt made K98k's were issued to the Luftwaffe with a service branch marked of "L" on the rear right side of the stock.



1939 saw the replacement of the stick-wing eagle with the Nazi style eagles by "k" serial number range. Laminate handguards and stocks remained the standard, and retained both internal and external numbers and proofs. Metal parts continued to be milled, proofed, and numbered. Waffenamts "280" returned to the ERMA plant and Waffenamts "77" went to the newly overrun Polish arsenals at Radom. The Gothic siderail marking remained in use and all known production went to the Army. The known serial number range is from 127 to 5722n, with an estimated production run of 150,000 rifles.



1940 saw the replacement of ERMA's "27" code to the FEINMECHANISCHE WERKE's "ax" code. All proofing, and manufacturing features remained unchanged, even the serial numbers continued without interruption. The carryover appears to have happened in the "f" serial number range. There is nothing in the appearance, proofing, or numbering of the rifles produced to indicate any break in the manufacturing process when the change occurred. This suggests that the change was in fact only a change to the company's name. The change was the same as the change, which occurred earlier when "S/27" became "27". The "27" coded rifles produced in this year were identical in all respects to 1939 production. Stocks and handguards were laminate with flat buttplates, stocks were externally numbered and proofed on the bottom spine, 10 inch cleaning rods, all milled and numbered parts, Waffenamt number was "280" on all parts, and the Gothic style "Mod. 98" were used. Only Army issue rifles have been noted. The known serial number range is from 2909 to 7434e with an estimated production run of 70,000 rifles. The "ax" coded rifle differed only in the change of manufacturer's code. The known serial number range is from 1300g to 1287n, with an estimated production run of 75,000 rifles. (Even though the production figures, as indicated by verified serial numbers, show that the "27" code and the "ax" code K98k rifles made were made in approximately the same numbers, even though ax-coded examples are much rarer).



1941-code "ax" changes included the use a two-digit date in place of a four-digit date on the receiver. The introduction of a 12 1/2' cleaning rod, a cupped buttplate, and the deletion of external proofing and numbering of the stock (rifles continued to use flat buttplates into the 6000 "a" serial number range). Finally, a front sight-hood was used. All metal parts continued to be milled, proofed, and numbered. Waffenamt "280" was used on all parts. The known serial number range is from 3 to 3808i for an estimated production run of 95,000 rifles.

The Erfurt made K98k is among the most "pure" of all other K98k's. Very few subcontracted Parts can be found on any Erfurt made rifle. A few Waffenamt "63" rear sight parts are found on early rifles and a very few Waffenamt "37" floorplates on late examples can be found. Erfurt made ALL their own parts for their rifles. It is assumed that this is because the factories at Erfurt were located, for the most part, in the same buildings, and used many of the same workers who had made thousands of Gew. 98's, P.08's, bayonets, and artillery pieces for the Imperial German government before and during World War I, and had been entirely equipped, experienced, and prepared to manufacture complete rifles. At the end of the First World War the Imperial government's factories had been bought by ERMA, and had continued to manufacture civilian goods and commercial weapons. This is most likely why Erfurt was chosen as one of the earliest makers of the K98k by the Nazi government. The single known variation is the 1941 "ax" coded rifles, which were built on a receiver made by Sauer. It can be identified by the presence of a single Waffenamt "37" proof on the right side of the receiver ring followed by two Waffenamt "280" proofs. The first eagle on the far left of the right side of the receiver ring is that which was applied on the initial inspection when the receiver had completed its construction and was checked to be certain it passed all quality control requirements. The two eagle "280" proofs were applied at Erfurt later in the assembly process. These rifles also have the block letter "Mod. 98" marking on the siderail in place of the Erfurt scripted style. These rifles have been found only in the "a" and "b" serial number range.

ERMA ceased producing K98k's in 1941 when World War II was reaching its peak in Europe. The reason given for the ending of K98k production is that ERMA was the developer and principal manufacturer of the MP.38 and later the MP.40 submachine gun. Millions of these weapons bearing the "27" and "ayf" codes of ERMA were made between 1940 and 1944. It is assumed that when K98k production was stopped at Erfurt the entire rifle production line including tools, gauges, and jigs, were shipped to Gustloff in 1942. This has been offered as an explanation for the tremendous expansion of K98k production at Gustloff (from 170,000 rifles in 1942 to 325,000 rifles in 1943). While it is probably true that such a transfer took place we also know that Erfurt continued to make replacement parts and receivers for the K98k until the war ended. Barrel bands, floorplates, followers, bolt parts, rear sight parts, and receivers with Waffenamt "280" proofs can be found on K98k rifles dated 42, 43, and 44 which were assembled by other makers. In most cases these parts are numbered to match the rifles that they are a part of but many unnumbered Waffenamt "280" proofed parts have been noted. These are spare parts and were issued as replacement parts to unit ordnance personnel and to small arms repair depots throughout the German army. Although Erfurt ceased production and assembly of complete K98k rifles after 1941 they most certainly continued to be an active contributor to the story of the K98k in subsequent years.

ERMA is well known as the manufacturer of .22 cal conversion units for both the K98k rifle and the P.08 pistol. Rifle conversion units are of two kinds: single shot and clip fed five shot capacities. The conversion kit was issued with a neat fitted wooden storage box. The .22 conversion kit was used for training and enabled the K98k to be adapted to a small caliber while retaining the feel and action of the full caliber weapon. They are nice accessories for the K98k collector.