

World War II – American Occupation – Russian Occupation

I spent the last few years of World War II with my mother and sister in my grandparents' house in *Suhl*. This was, together with neighboring *Zella-Mehlis*, the center of German hunting gun makers, but almost everybody was involved with war production. Every day and every night we spent several hours in basements or bomb shelters when American Air Force bombers during the day and British bombers over night were seen or heard as they headed to their targets and again when they returned. *Suhl* was very fortunate that it was never bombed, which can only be explained by the fact that only smaller arms were produced here, while bigger industrial facilities like the SKF ball bearing factories in *Schweinfurt* were much more important.

There are quite a few memories from this time, but one was brought back to mind when I read comments about the years after the war and how hard the first years were for the German population. Among one of the comments, it was stated that it was Eisenhower who wanted to punish the German population, but I can't agree with this opinion. We saw photos that showed Eisenhower visiting a liberated German concentration camp with piles of dead bodies and starving inmates. There is no doubt that he had nothing but hard feelings against Germans that could commit such atrocities, but I can't agree with the statement that it was for this reason that he held up the *Marshall Plan* that indeed put all of Europe back on a path of recovery and included Germany.

The reason for me to know differently is one of the vivid memories I have from these years. My grandmother, one of the kindest persons I met in my life, came from a Jewish family and the future looked dark when Hitler came to power. Because she was married to an "Arian" of the superior German race she was among the very last to be taken to the Concentration Camp *Theresienstadt* that was liberated by Russian troops before they could be taken to the gas chambers. This threat hung over the whole family during the Hitler years. It is an amazing fact that her oldest son, Paul Jaeger who was born in New York City and had returned to America in 1927, had a machine shop and produced war related components. Kurt Jaeger was drafted into the German army, was wounded and survived an American prisoner of war camp under the sky. Erich Jaeger, the youngest, became an engineer and had an important job at the *MAN (Machinenfabrik Augsburg Nürnberg)* where big Diesel engines for ships and submarines were made and the *Snorkel* as an air intake for submarines was developed. When I asked his wife the last time I met her how he could have been in such an important position although he had a Jewish mother, she told me that the top boss had a Jewish wife that lived in Switzerland, and this allowed him to keep his job and it was he who also protected Erich Jaeger from the Nazis.

But now my story of why I knew about the Marshall Plan when I was a teenager. During the Hitler years it was strongly forbidden for anyone to listen to foreign radio broadcasts and

anybody who was caught ended up in a concentration camp. My grandfather being very interested in world history, needed to find out what was going on outside of Germany to keep up the hope that his Jewish wife would survive the Hitler years. In the evening a bean pole with a wire attached to it was brought out from under the sofa and served as an antenna to bring in the BBC in London. My grandfather would sit right next to the radio with his ear touching the speaker so that nobody in the house could hear anything. This kept him informed on how the war was going and it was drilled into us children to tell nobody about it.

It was here that he heard about the *Morgenthau Plan* developed by the *Foreign Secretary* of the *Roosevelt* administration. The plan was to destroy all German industrial sites and convert Germany into an Agrarian Country that never again could be a threat to the world.

My grandfather, having grown up on a farm and being an avid gardener started to experiment with an idea that that would increase the yield of plants in his garden by piling more soil around the stems of plants after they had reached a certain height. When this seemed promising, he designed and built a plow that could do it and dragged it by hand through the rows of shoots in his garden. One day he packed up the plow and took a train to the nearest university that had an agriculture department. He was politely received by the officials and the plow was admired and Franz was listened to when he explained that there would be a great need for his idea because of the *Morgenthau* plan for Germany. But then came the question: “Mr. Jäger, haven’t you heard of the Marshall Plan?” and that ended Franz Jäger’s efforts to help Germany recover.

And this is why I know that Eisenhower had nothing to do with the Marshall Plan and that it was formulated under *President Truman* and named after *George Marshall* who had guided the American forces to victory, was very popular and almost assured that congress would pass this very expensive but most generous and effective effort that put all of Europe back on its feet and would make America a world power. The war ended in 1945, but the Marshall plan went into



The handgun developed by Franz Jäger in 1914

effect only in April 1948. All facts about *Morgenthau* and the *Marshall Plan* can be found on the internet. This in no way diminishes the great leadership of *General* and *President Eisenhower*.

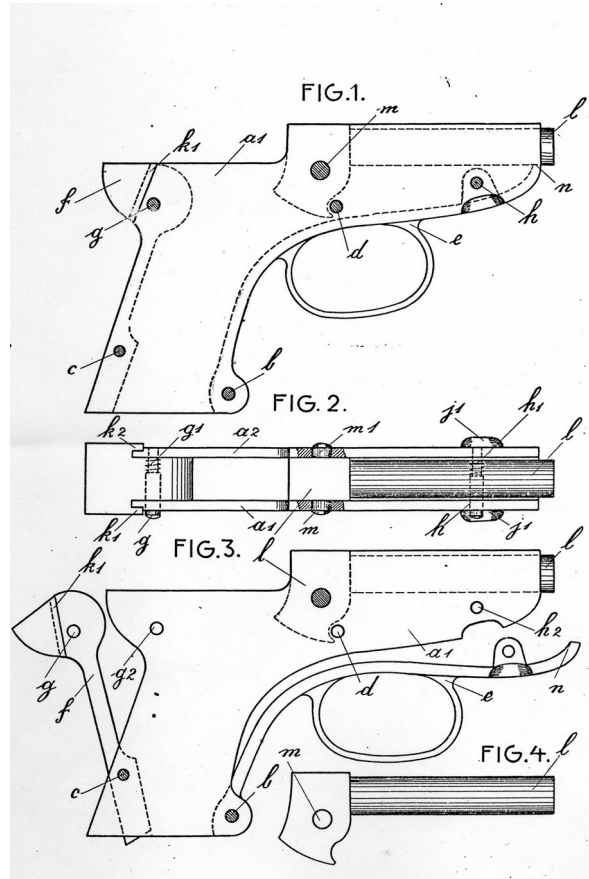
p.s. Some of the pistol collectors may know of the Jaeger pistol that was written about in a few American gun magazines. It was the same Franz Jaeger who at the beginning of World War I designed and made a prototype of a pistol in one long weekend because the German government brought out the order that all major German gun makers had to produce guns and components for the army and were no

longer allowed to make hunting guns.

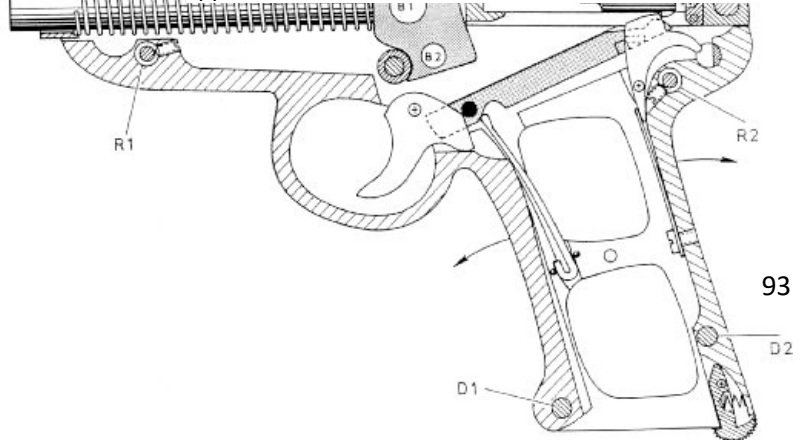
At the time Franz Jaeger employed 50 men in his gun making operation that were all talented gun makers and had to find approved work for the older men among them. Most the younger men were drafted into the army or volunteered to serve in the army.

Among them was Paul Jaeger, a younger brother of Franz Jaeger (not the son that came to America) who had just become a master gunsmith was drafted into the Army and died in November 1914 at the front in Flanders. His masterpiece was a Drilling with the “*Jaeger Vertikal-Blockverschluss*”, Franz Jaegers best patent. The gun was nicely engraved in his honor and included an inscription with the date of his death. Only about a year ago was this gun offered for sale in Russia for a very steep price. I became aware of this when an article with good photos appeared in a Russian magazine. I have a copy of this article but unfortunately can't read it. No family member is still alive who could reveal who had owned this gun and is not known how the gun came to Russia.

During the war the pistol was produced and sold mostly to officers as their personal gun.



The Drawing Franz Jager submitted with his Patent application.



A cross sectional drawing of Franz Jäger's handgun

The army rejected it with the one word “Blech” the German word for sheet metal. The Patent Office rejected it with the comment that a patent could not be issued because the pistol consisted of two sheets of sheet metal. What would they have done had they seen today’s guns with many parts of synthetic materials? Too bad that I did not save a letter from the famous pistol maker Carl Walther who recognized and told my grandfather how important his invention was and that it was way ahead of its time.