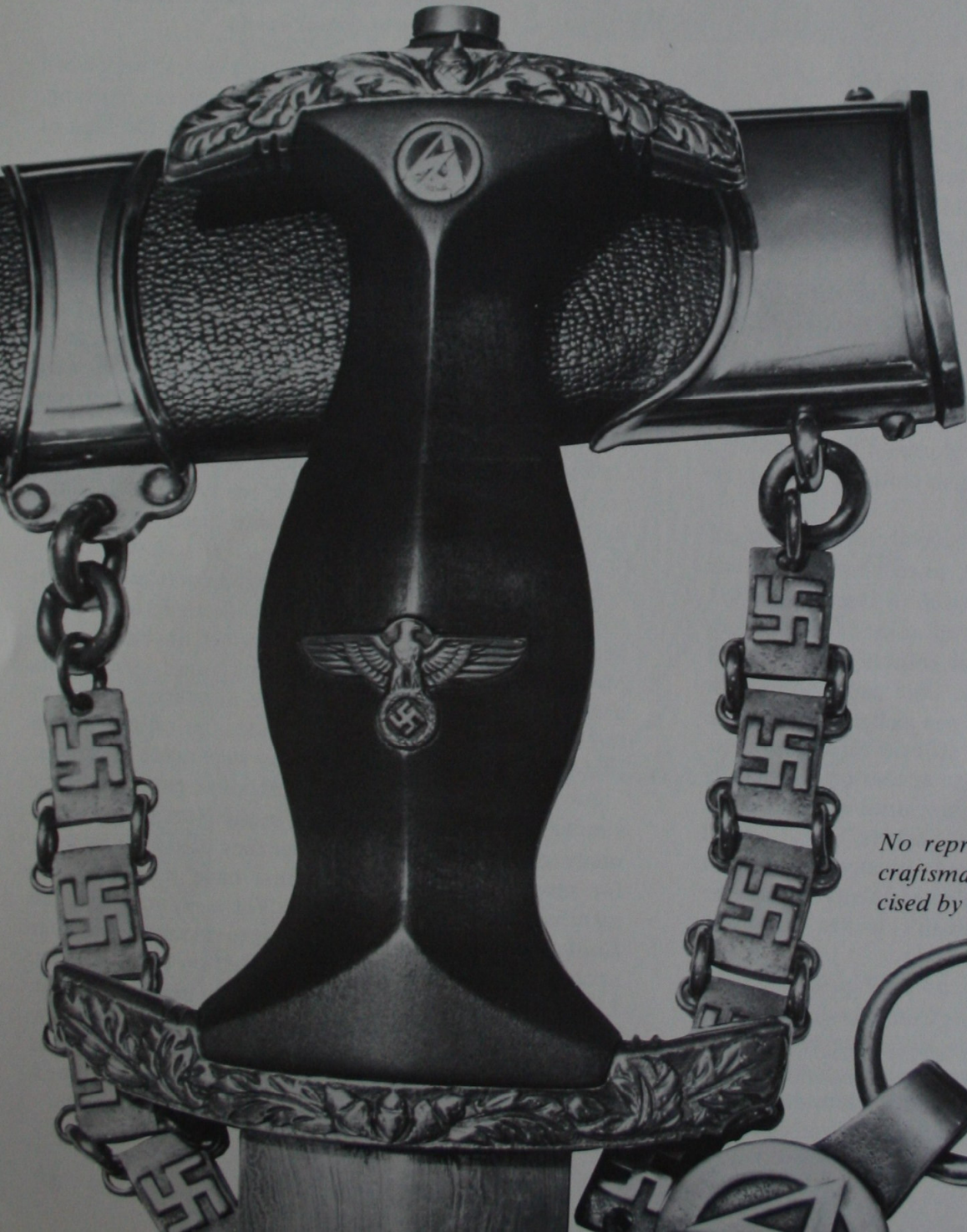


The "Fourth" Reich

LTC Thomas M. Johnson



**Reproduction
Nazi
Edged Weapons
and How
to Spot Them**

No reproduction here! The meticulous craftsmanship and quality control exercised by the Germans in the manufacture of authentic Nazi edged weapons is evident in this remarkable photograph of the hilt of a rare SA High Leader's dagger.

Thomas W. Pooler collection.
Photo by Andy Southard, Jr.

A fraud is not perfect unless it be practiced on clever persons. — Arab Proverb

The fascination with chivalric ideals which caused the forces of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich to bedeck themselves with some of the most ornate military and political regalia the modern world has witnessed, also created, inadvertently, the foundation for a present-day area of militaria collecting.

Since the ending of hostilities on May 8, 1945, there has been a growing interest in the military technology of the Third Reich and its products, boosted no doubt by the unprecedented extent to which World War II was recorded and documented. The fact that Germany had numerous opponents during the conflict accounts for an international interest in the history of the Nazi movement and war effort.

The prices for Nazi artifacts have paralleled the demand which such interest has created, the personal belongings of Hitler and his key leaders exchanging hands at amounts which defy the imagination. With Nazi relics appreciating at a steady fifteen to twenty-five percent annually, according to magazine and newspaper reports, many investors have been attracted to this area of collecting.

No single element of this collecting mania has proven to be more popular than that of the swastika-emblazoned edged weaponry of the "Thousand Year Reich." Both the quantity and the quality of German edged weapon sidearms from the period make them naturals in the collecting arena. From 1933 until time ran out on the Third Reich, scores of distinctive edged weapon sidearms were designed, adopted, manufactured, and issued to some twenty different Nazi political and military organizations. Most of these differed significantly in design and composition, and in many cases different models were created for the officer and enlisted personnel within the same unit, resulting in even more varieties. Herein lies one key to their collecting desirability: to complete a collection of such a diversity of models is a challenge to even the most ardent collector.

Another attraction is the superb craftsmanship evident in German blades — a quality which has been famous since medieval times. Much of the world's finest steel today still comes from the rich Ruhr Valley of Germany, center of blademaking for centuries.

Scarcity and the increased demand for German blades by both collectors and investors have escalated prices sufficiently to attract the counterfeiter, and it is becoming imperative for collectors to learn accurate identification of both reproductions and outright fakes. While books have been written on the subject which are important sources of information to would-be Third Reich edged weapon collectors, and in spite of the fact that there is absolutely no substitute for experience, a few common-

sense guidelines will help identify spurious pieces when examining edged weapons.

I commonly refer to the indicators to be discussed below as "red flags," because, hopefully, each will serve to trigger a mental warning before a bad purchase is made. When one or more red flags have been spotted, forget about purchasing the item being examined. It is more than likely a reproduction.

New Appearance

The majority of edged weapon reproductions on the market appear to have been manufactured within the past few weeks (and might well have been!). Thirty years of age will invariably leave some telltale signs, regardless of the care and storage means utilized. When examining a piece, look at the screw heads. Are they bright, shiny, and completely free of any dirt or corrosion? Inspect the small leather washer under the crossguard (if one is present). If it appears as new as the leather on a belt you have just purchased, proceed with caution. Take a flashlight and have a close look at the *inside* of the scabbard throat. If all the internal parts appear to have been made earlier in the month, they probably were. Unfortunately, this new appearance indicator will not stand alone, as some unscrupulous individuals have discovered such devious techniques as burying or soaking in urine to "age" reproduction pieces. Old appearance alone is no guarantee of authenticity.

Misfitting Parts

To say that German quality control has always been superior would be an understatement. The meticulous care exercised by the Germans in the manufacture of automobiles, cameras, and countless other precision items is esteemed around the world. That same stringent quality control was exercised by Third Reich arms makers, and is evident when comparing an authentic piece with one of the recent reproductions from the United States, Spain, England, or elsewhere.

Be wary of *any* misfitting parts. For example, if an SA dagger's wooden grip shows large gaps between the handle and the crossguard, rest assured that it never would have left the factory that way. Likewise, an SA eagle and swastika grip insignia that rests in an indentation much larger than necessary to accommodate it should definitely raise a red flag. In general, be on the lookout for crudeness in manufacture and/or fit of component parts. Also take the time to include exact dagger dimensions in your edged weapon reference library. Numerous reproductions have grossly inaccurate dimensions. A previously unpublished blueprint of the original SA dagger dimensions was furnished to the author by well-known edged weapon collector and author John Ormsby and is reproduced here. The credit for the talented art work goes to Frank Quinn of Chicago.

Unmarked Interior Parts

If the edged weapon you are examining lends itself for disassembly, carefully take it apart and scrutinize the interior components. Take the time to learn what markings, if any, should be evident. For example, the inside of both TENO EM grips should be marked with the familiar Eickhorn squirrel trademark. The tangs of several different model dagger blades were carefully marked with the manufacturer's initials and/or mark. Often each component was stamped with a corresponding serial number. Make sure you know what to look for when you disassemble a particular model sidearm.

Unusual Variations

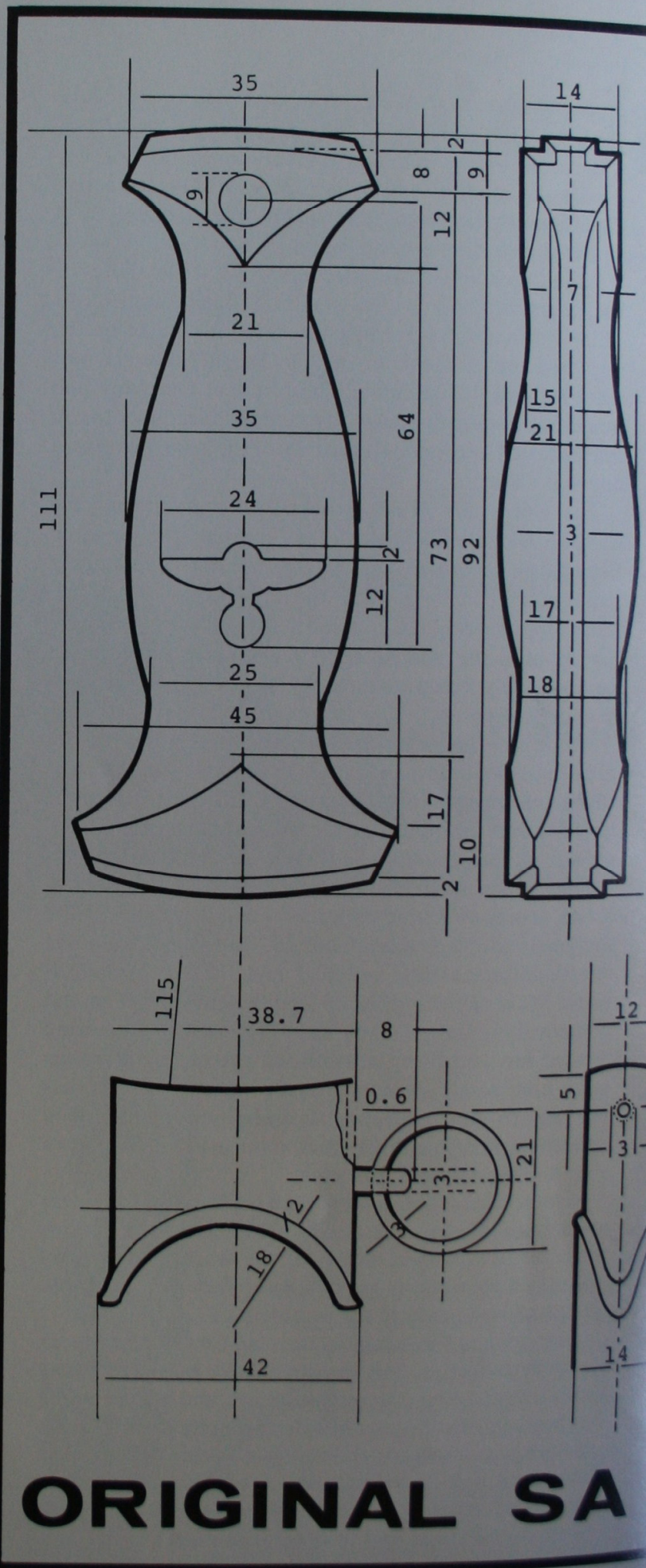
With the ever-increasing escalation of Third Reich artifact prices, a multitude of "one-of-a-kind prototypes" is finding its way into the market. While some of these pieces are indeed authentic, a non-documented prototype should be approached with a great deal of caution. Most of the so-called prototype Nazi daggers being offered for sale today are reproductions, and since prototype pieces demand top dollar, I recommend insisting upon complete documentation prior to the purchase of one. Fortunately, the majority of Solingen Waffenfabriken sales catalogues survived the war and represent a collector's primary reference source. A tedious search of all available references should be made prior to spending large sums of money for unusual variations or prototypes.

Faulty Engraving

As with the prototypes, the premium prices being paid for Third Reich edged weapons with engraved blades have opened the floodgates for reproductions of engraved bayonets, daggers, and swords. Not only are complete blades presently being manufactured, but unscrupulous dealers and collectors are resorting to having the local jeweler engrave crossguards, scabbard fittings, and the like with fictitious (and sometimes actual) German names and unit designations. My advice here is two-fold: first, study the engraving style, depth, etc. of known original pieces. More times than not, the counterfeit is completely unlike the characteristic German patterns utilized during the war years. Second, refer to the original company sales catalogues to ascertain whether a particular standard engraved blade pattern was, in fact, a product of the manufacturing firm in question.

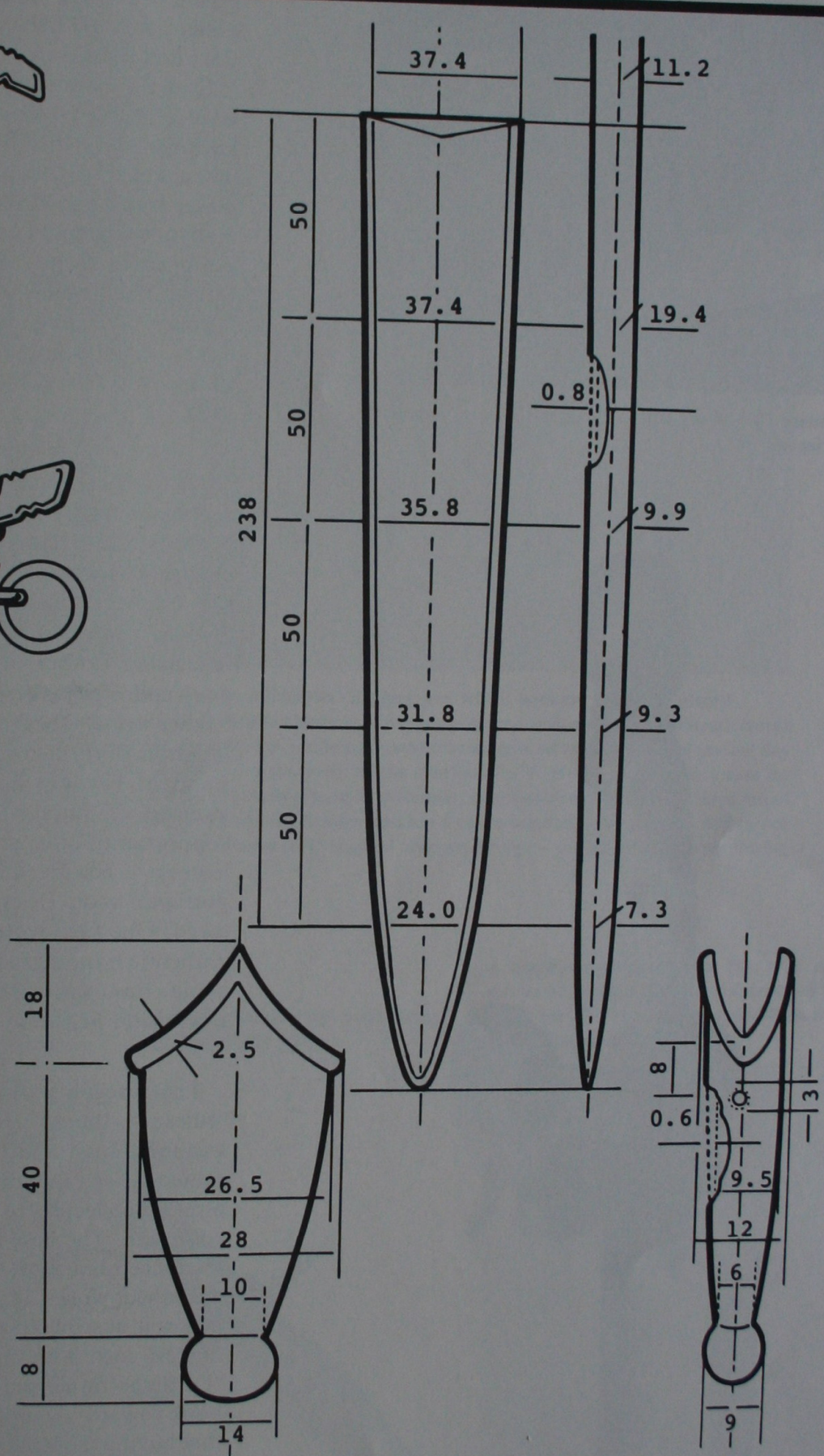
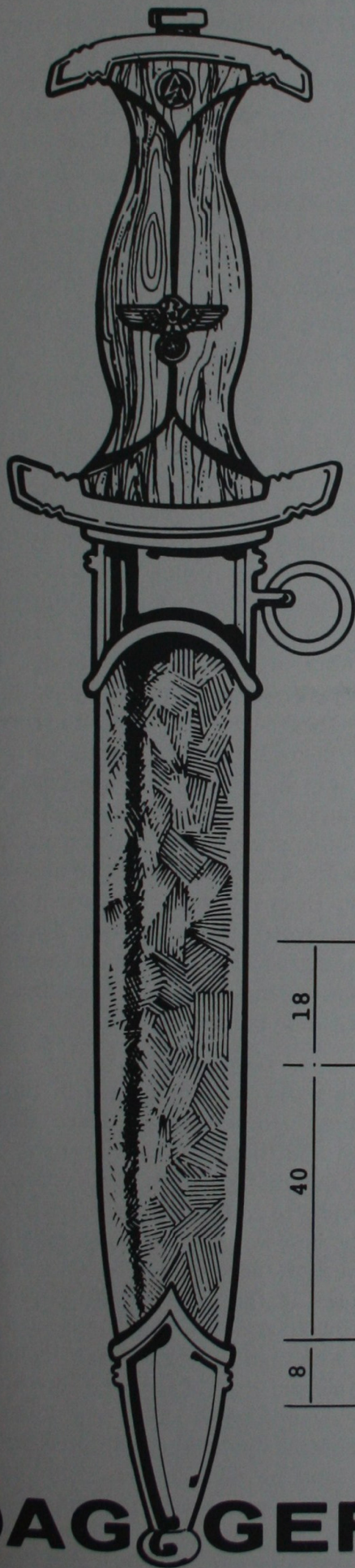
Incorrect Proofmarks

The size of the edged weapon factories during World War II ranged from mammoth corporations to small "cottage-craft" shops operated in the rear of Solingen homes. Obviously, each individual firm did not manufacture the entire range of Third Reich sidearms. In some cases, a single firm designed a particular model dagger and application for a patent was made. The blade was then stamped "GES. GESCH." (*Gesetzlich Geschützt* —



ORIGINAL SA

Original factory blueprints of several Nazi edged weapon models are



DAGGER DIMENSIONS

still available. The copy pictured above depicts the exact dimensions of the common SA dagger.

Artwork by Frank Quinn, Chicago, IL.



National Archives collection.

The standard 1935 Army Officer's daggers in wear, complete with portepees.

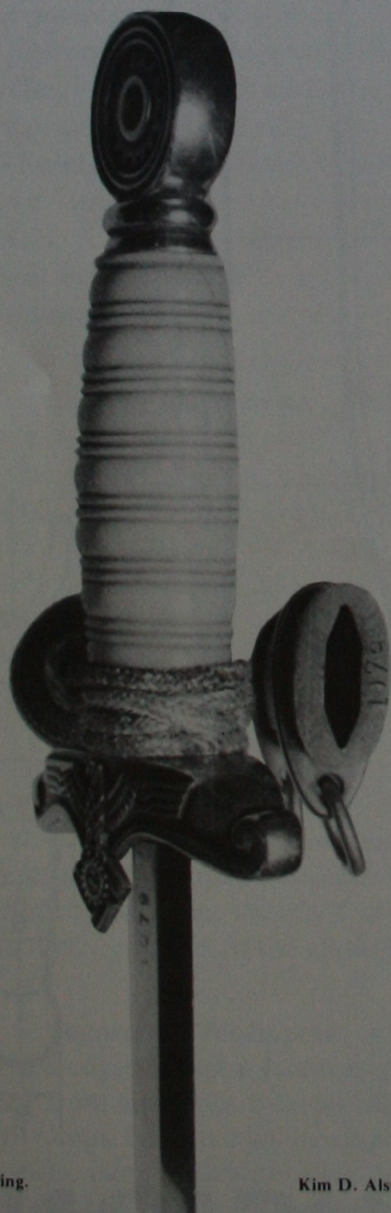


Photo by Dave Essing.

Kim D. Alstott collection.

This photograph well illustrates the correct stampings of a serial number (1079) on the blade and scabbard throat of an original Teno Officer's dagger.

Patent Pending). Prime examples of patented model designs are the TENO Officer and Enlisted daggers by the Carl Eickhorn firm.

Even the more common models were often restricted to several selected manufacturers. Armed with extensive knowledge of which firms produced which sidearms, the wise collector can rapidly eliminate a number of phonies bearing incorrect proofmarks. For example, how many readers could accurately compile a list of the *only* Solingen factories to produce naval daggers for the Reich? The completed list should read like this: Alcosse, Clemen und Jung, Eickhorn, Holler, Horster, Klaas, Krebs, Lauterjung, Luneschloss, Pack, Plumacher, Puma, Max Weyersberg, Paul Weyersberg, Winger, and WKC.

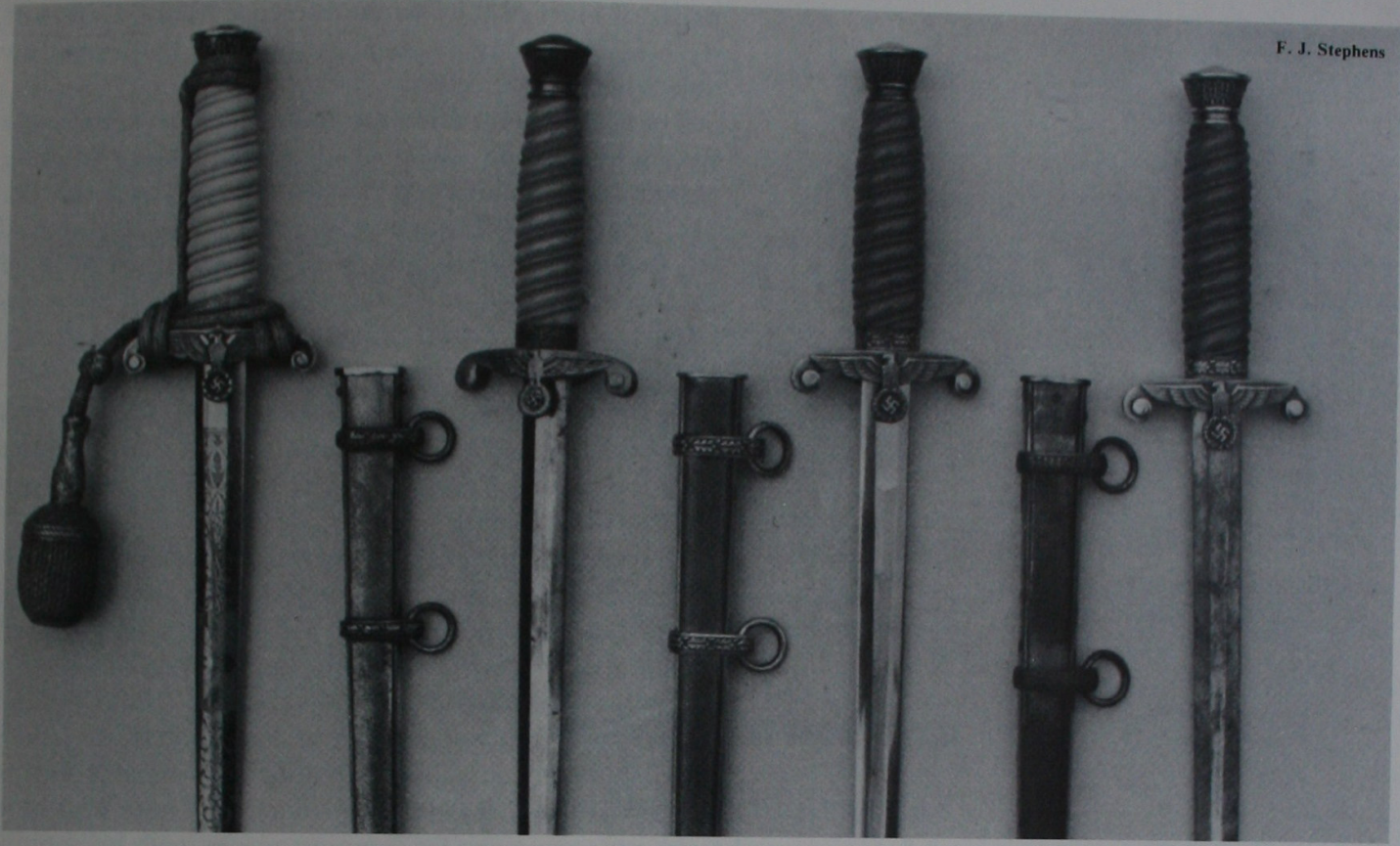
Incorrect Accoutrements

An excellent red flag source can be the accoutrement accompanying a particular sidearm. Although it is obvious that hangers, frogs, and knots are interchangeable and are often switched on authentic pieces, the reverse is usually true with reproductions. Most "repros" are manufactured complete including the associated leather or fabric accoutrements. Thus, the wary collector makes a careful inspection of the inside of leather items. Does the natural leather and thread stitching show thirty years of aging? If all of the known original standard bayonet frogs you have observed were constructed of smooth leather and you are offered the "opportunity" to purchase one constructed of pebbled leather — beware. Check the condition and wear of the portepee/knot. Does it appear to be recently manufactured? One final word of caution: some dealers will add authentic trappings to a reproduction sidearm in order to avoid this particular giveaway. Thus this indicator should not be the sole criterion.

General Rules

The foregoing can be summarized in three general "rules of thumb" for collecting Third Reich edged weapons. First and foremost, become a *student* of the subject. Don't rely on "gun show talk" and the opinions of other collectors to educate yourself, learn the facts on your own. The best way to begin is by building a large reference library on the subject. The limited number of published works in the field of Nazi edged weapons makes it possible to establish your library at a relatively modest cost. Although I've heard many collectors say, "I'd much rather put the \$15 cost of a current reference book toward a good dagger," the truth of the matter is that buying the book might repeatedly preclude throwing away sizable sums on *bad* daggers. Try to supplement your library with as many original Solingen sales catalogues as you can obtain. These have the distinct advantage of depicting *only* original materials, whereas a few reproduction pieces inevitably seem to creep into the

F. J. Stephens



The sight that unnerves the most experienced collector — a selection of identical daggers, but which ones are the rogue pieces? Displayed, left to right, are: Original Army dagger with etched blade, by the company of Alcosa, Solingen; post-war German manufactured dagger, the blade is in all probability original, but the fittings are definitely modern; Spanish manufactured reproduction of present day vintage, one of the best copies on the market and highly detailed — right down to the spurious F. W. Holler trademark (a case for prosecution under the Protection of Trademarks Act); and the worst possible fraud to encounter, an assembled dagger constructed out of part original fittings and part modern — these pieces are being assembled by dealers who have, say, 6 original Army daggers, and thence purchase 6 Spanish reproductions, then all the pieces are swapped around and 12 “original” daggers emerge — certainly the most perplexing reproduction to confront the collector.

As mentioned in the text of the article, the ever-increasing escalation of Third Reich edged weapon prices has resulted in a multitude of “one-of-a-kind prototypes” finding their way into the market. The dress dagger and hangers pictured above were auctioned in Munich, West Germany a few years ago.

Close-up of the currently-made Army Field Marshall's Dagger.

A *quality* reproduction of the 1933 standard service SS dagger. Only an experienced eye will detect the “red flags” associated with the dagger in this photograph.



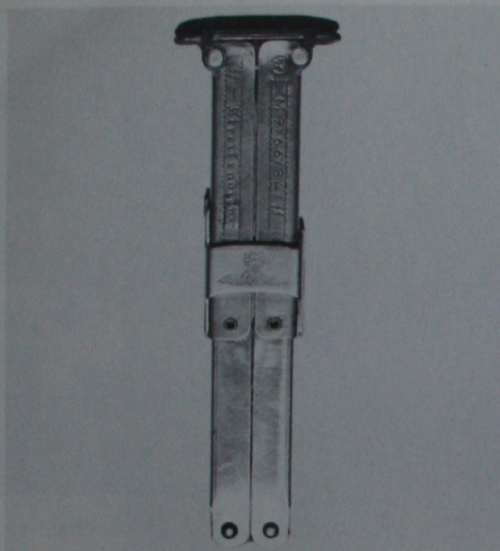
Private collection.



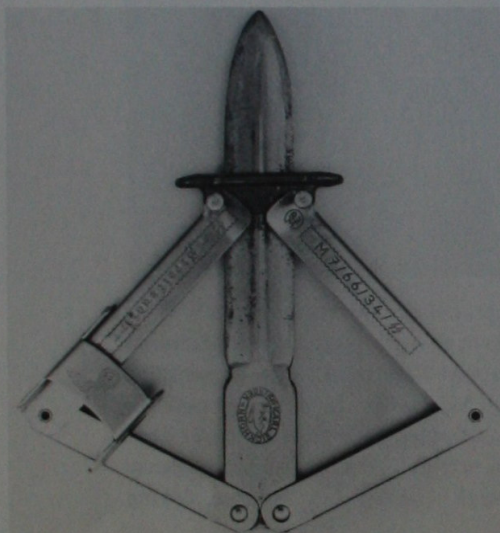
Photo by Andy Southard, Jr.
Private collection.



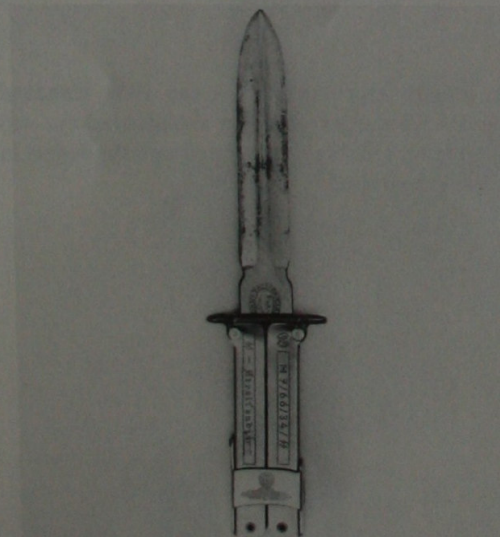
Private collection.



1.



2.



3.

Photos by Andy Southard, Jr.

1. The SS folding pocket knife, shown in the closed position, is actually a fake as opposed to a reproduction, as it never existed. Manufactured in England, these knives are "aged" in advance to appear original.

2. The fake folding knife in the half-extended position.

3. The knife fully extended. Note the simulated aging on the blade and the early 1933-1934 Carl Eickhorn squirrel logo.

pages of most of the current reference books. Copies of the original catalogues (and reprints of several) are available from many dealers.

The only current reference sources dealing specifically with reproduction edged weapons that I know of are a paperback pamphlet published in England by R. McFarlane in 1969 entitled *Bluebook of Identification of Reproduction Nazi Edged Weapons*, a chapter devoted to the subject in my first book on edged weapons (*Collecting the Edged Weapons of the Third Reich* Volume I, The R.L. Bryan Co., Columbia, S.C., 1975) and, more recently, a fine reference work by Frederick Stephens devoted solely to the subject of reproduction (*Reproduction? Recognition!*, Direk Press Print, Stone Stratford, England).

The second rule of thumb pertains to dealers (or other sources). Try to find one you can trust implicitly and direct your total business his way. The integrity of Third Reich edged weapons dealers (and collectors) in this country and abroad runs the gamut from beyond reproach to totally unscrupulous. Fortunately, the field is small enough that a few fast enquiries to other collectors will usually reveal the dealers to avoid. Those who have sold reproductions as genuine pieces will be rapidly identified!

A third rule will serve you well. If you have any reservations about the authenticity of a particular edged weapon, leave it alone. Psychologists refer to this uncertainty as "cognitive dissonance." Obviously, the dissonance may occur before or after the actual purchase but much better for the purchaser if it is initiated early by one or more "red flags," thus preventing the purchase. An honest collector will readily admit that the majority of his "maybes" turned out to be reproductions.

Conversely, if you see an item for sale at a show, in a shop, or even on a dealer's list that appears to be original and would fill a gap in your collection, do not procrastinate. A sign commonly found in antique shops is "The best time to buy an antique is NOW. If you wait, it'll be gone!" The same is certainly true of World War II edged weapons.

Any Man At Arms reader who feels he might have an original Nazi dagger in his possession and is interested in learning its value may write to Colonel Johnson who has volunteered his assistance. Do not mail the actual piece, but send a complete description and include a sketch and/or small snapshot. Send all enquiries, along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope, to LTC Thomas M. Johnson, P.O. Box 7152, Alexandria, VA 22307.