

# Walther P38

## 9mm Auto Pistol

### Owner Instruction & Safety Manual\*



The Walther Police Pistol Models PP and PPK have, by virtue of their unique construction, proved themselves to be the World's safest and most dependable handguns.

The absolute faith in these two products induced specialists both at home and abroad to demand a pistol of a similarly recognized and approved construction which would retain the principle of a very light weight and at the same time fire the more powerful cartridge Cal. 9mm Parabellum.

The outcome of the appropriate considerations was the new Walther Model P38 Cal. 9mm Parabellum, which combines a fantastically low weight of only 27.5 ounces (in the aluminum frame) with all the desirable advantages of a modern handgun - absolute safety, instantaneous readiness, and easy handling - and which allows the use of a considerably more potent cartridge. This pistol stands without rival. It was adopted by the German Army as the P.38 (Pistole 1938), replacing the Luger P.08 (Pistole 1908).

All the component parts are interchangeable. They are made by means of the most up-to-date production methods involving the use of modern machinery under strictest supervision. As in the manufacture of any other of the several Walther products, only the very best materials are used in the production of the Model P38.

The pages of this little brochure will give a most detailed and therefore very useful description of the various data relating to the pistol Model P38.

\*The text of this PDF comes from the widely distributed Walther\_P38.PDF manual. Unfortunately the original document had been scanned into digital form poorly plus the OCR software used introduced countless errors. Those errors have been largely corrected here along with minor editing, additions and deletions to clarify meaning and to reduce a 24 page manual to 16. Pictures and illustrations from the Walther\_P38.PDF file also were unusable and were replaced with much better ones found online in Manurhin P1.PDF and P38\_manual\_multilingual.PDF.      Quentin/RQS 9/11/2011

## **P38 General Data:**

Caliber: 9mm Parabellum (Luger)  
Action: Double-Action Semiauto  
Overall Length: 214mm/8-7/16"  
Height of Pistol: 136mm/5-3/8"  
Length of Barrel: 125mm/4-15/16"  
Number of rifling grooves: 6  
Rifling twist: 1 in 10", right twist  
Empty Weight: 780g/27.5oz.  
Loaded Weight: 865g/30.5oz.  
(Weights are for aluminum frame,  
the steel frame adds about 6.5 oz.)  
Sights: Fixed, 7" sight radius  
Magazine Type: Single column box  
Magazine Capacity: 8 cartridges  
Standard Finish: black (matted)



Illustration 1

The Walther auto pistol Model P38 can be supplied, upon request, in a polished and blued finish. A spare magazine, a cleaning rod, and a test card are supplied with every pistol. The complete equipment also includes a technical description and is delivered in a stout carton.

The pistol P38 has an external hammer. The combination of a perfect action design, made evident in the Walther self-loading pistols having an external hammer, and the constant readiness of a revolver makes the enormous advantages of these weapons abundantly manifest.

The P38 is a Double-Action, locked-breech, semi-automatic pistol. It is fitted with an external hammer which is connected to a tension trigger and which has a distinctive pressure point. The P38, like the models PP and PPK, may be fired by merely pulling the trigger. It may, moreover, readily be carried loaded and uncocked like a revolver.

Cartridges with faulty primer caps can be fired by pulling the trigger repeatedly. A bulge in the barrel - caused by some irregular agency - will not impede the functioning of the P38, since the barrel is mounted in an open and unencumbered manner. The pistol is thus always ready for instant use.

An entirely new method has been adopted in the construction of the safety device of the P38. As may be well known, there is always a certain amount of danger inherent in any loaded and cocked firearm, even though the latter may be rendered 'Safe' by means of the safety lever. Any sudden mechanical shock or a fracture of an action component can cause an accidental discharge.

In the P38, this basic evil has been remedied: the rotary safety catch does not make the action mechanism 'Safe' in the cocked stage. Instead, application of the safety catch causes the hammer to become uncocked - and that without any danger to the user. When the safety catch is moved to the 'Safe' position, the firing pin becomes locked first. Immediately following

this, the action mechanism is automatically blocked and the hammer drops harmlessly - and the pistol is completely uncocked.

Uncocking of the hammer by means of applying the safety catch, preceded by the locking of the firing pin and the connection with the tension trigger, make the P38 a truly ideal service pistol. It can be fired just by moving the safety lever to fire and pulling the trigger.

Since the pistol is thus always uncocked, but nevertheless always ready for immediate use, the hammer spring is therefore not subject to fatigue and weakening.

The P38 can be dismantled within a few seconds and without using any tools. Component parts cannot drop out. However, any unnecessary operating of the trigger mechanism should be duly avoided, and the hammer should not be allowed to drop while the chamber is empty. In any instance of "dry" shooting practice, a dummy cartridge should be introduced into the chamber first.

It is an essential rule for every shooter that despite the fully guaranteed safety of the weapon, the pistol should always be held so that the muzzle points downwards while the weapon is not being actually used. Never point at anything you do not intend to shoot.

In Illustrations 2 through 8 below, the signal-pin immediately above the hammer is clearly visible. It indicates that there is a cartridge in the chamber, i.e., that the weapon is loaded. The signal-pin remains visible when the safety catch is applied. In Illustration 2 the pistol is uncocked, but is nevertheless ready for action. Illustration 4 shows how the pistol is fired by merely pulling the trigger (in 'Double-Action' shooting). (Note that in Illustrations 12 and 13 the signal-pin is not visible, indicating that there is no cartridge in the chamber.)

A list of the P38's individual components may be found on pages 14 and 15 of this technical description.



## P38 Auto Pistol

Cal. 9mm Parabellum  
In longitudinal section



Illustration 2

## Graphic Description of Function

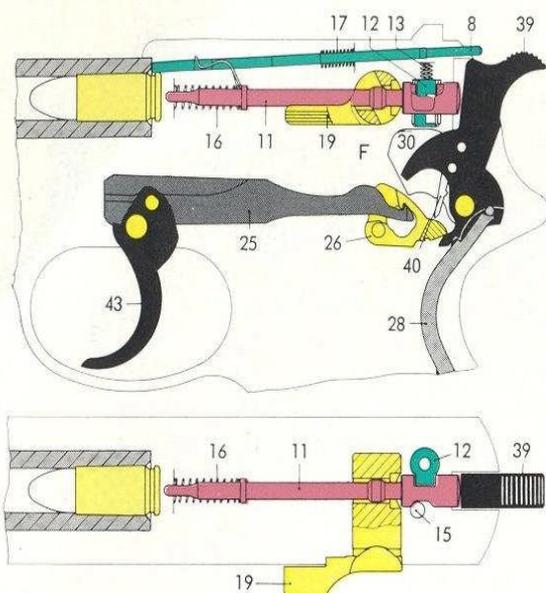


Illustration 3 ('Double-Action')

Above, the pistol is loaded and uncocked. The safety lever is 'Off'. The pistol is thus ready for instant use ('Double-Action').

### Automatic Safety

The pistol, though uncocked and loaded, may thus be fired as the safety lever (19) is in the 'Fire' position. The weapon is, as shown in Illustration 3, entirely free from tension.

The firing pin (11) is blocked by the firing pin arrester/lock (12). The live round in the chamber cannot be discharged if the pistol should accidentally be dropped and fall hammer first on the floor. The signal-pin (8) can both be felt and seen, and indicates that there is a cartridge in the chamber. (The pistol can be made safe again by applying the safety lever as is described in the column on the right on page 6.)

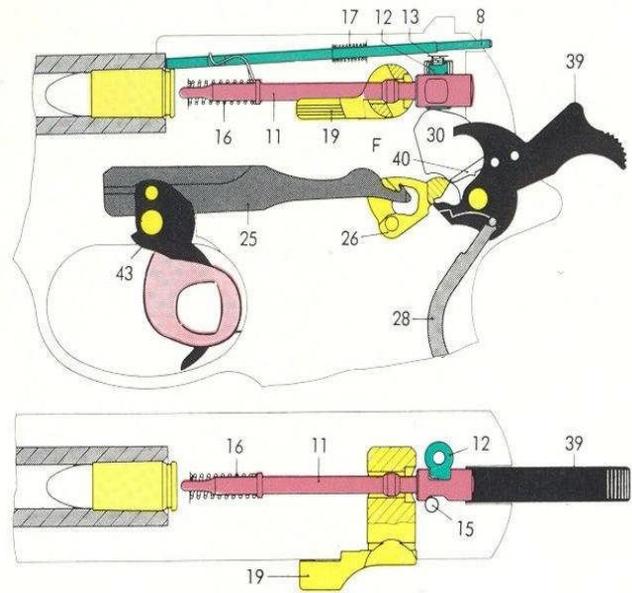


Illustration 4 ('Double-Action')

Above, the pistol is loaded, safety lever 'Off,' and cocked by 'pulling through' the trigger. (Double-Action trigger motion, shown here in the moment in which the tumbler is about to be released by the sear).

### Operating the Trigger

The trigger (43) has been pulled until the tumbler edge (40) of the hammer (39) barely rests on the sear edge of the tensioning/cocking piece (26), as shown in Illustration 4. Until then, the firing pin (11) is blocked by the firing pin arrester/lock (12).

If the trigger (43) is now pulled back a little further, the sear (40) of the hammer slides off the edge of the cocking piece (26), the firing pin arrester (12) releases the firing pin (11) and the hammer (39) strikes the rear end of the firing pin (11).

# Graphic Description continued

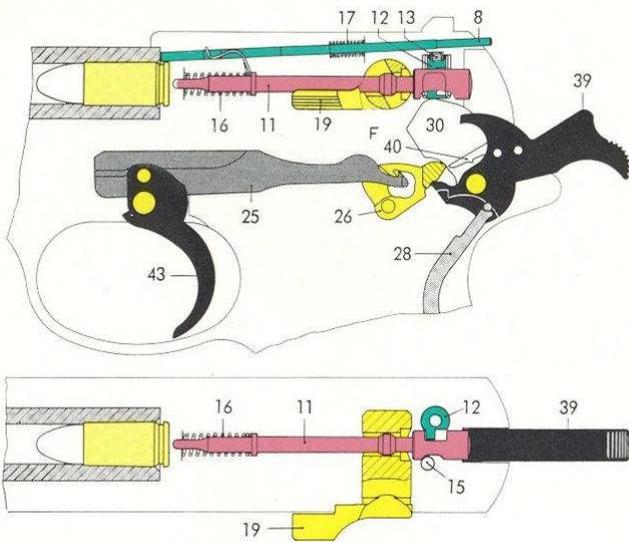


Illustration 5 ('Single-Action')

Operating the trigger when the hammer is cocked ('Single-Action'). The pistol is loaded and cocked. The safety lever is 'Off'.

Pulling the trigger a little further will fire the cartridge. (However, the pistol can instead be made safe again by applying the safety lever as is described in the column on the left on page 6.)

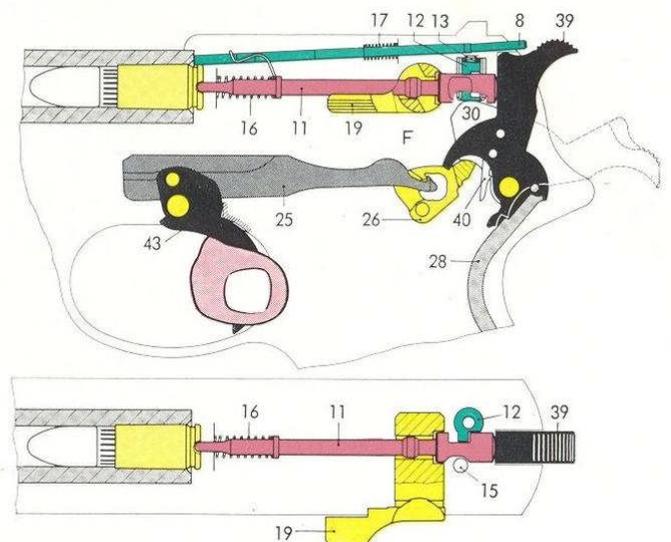


Illustration 6 ('Single-Action' or 'Double-Action')

Process of firing, the safety lever is 'Off'. ('Single-Action' or 'Double-Action')

Pistol at the moment of firing.

Upon pulling the trigger (43) fully to the rear, the hammer (39) is released from its rearward/cocked position by the lifting motion of the cocking piece (26) and strikes the unlocked firing pin (11). The tip of the firing pin detonates the primer by hitting and indenting the primer cap, thus igniting the powder charge and thereby causing the resultant pressure gases to drive the bullet out of the cartridge case.

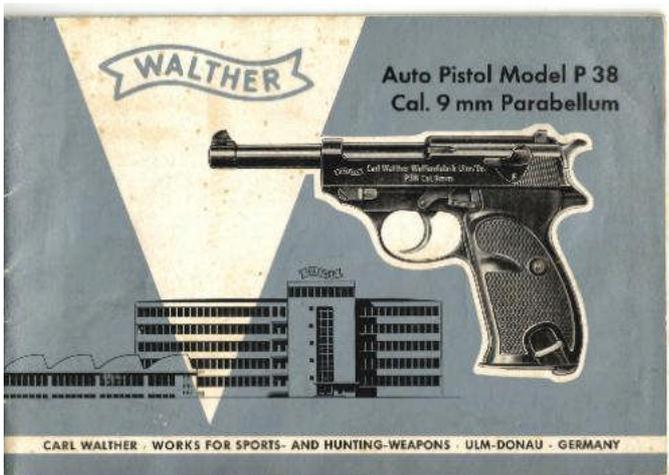


Illustration 5a (P38 English Owner Manual cover)



Illustration 6a (two magazines come with the P38)

## Graphic Description continued

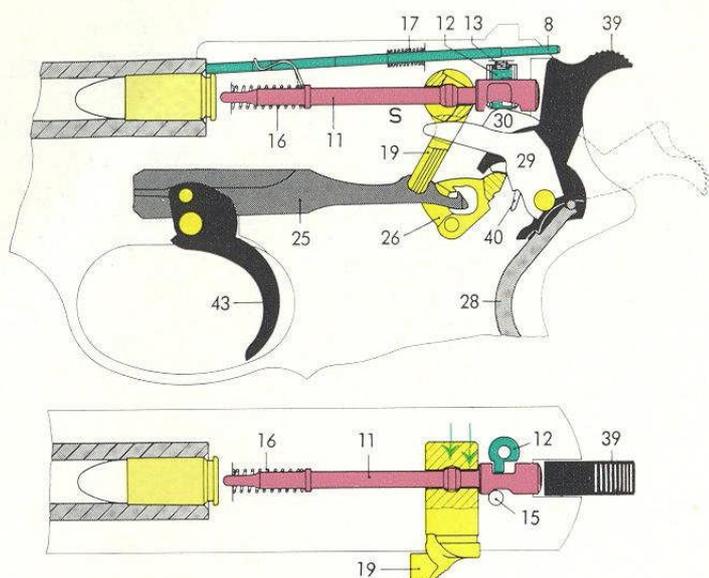


Illustration 7 (Safety Lever 'On')

Operating the safety lever when the hammer is cocked. Pistol loaded, safety lever 'On' (above)

Before the safety was applied, the hammer (39) had been drawn back, making the firearm thus ready to fire. The protruding signal-pin (8) indicates that there is a cartridge in the chamber.

If for some reason it is not intended to fire the round, the safety lever (19) should in such case be moved downwards until the letter 'S' becomes clearly exposed and the 'F' is fully covered. This application of the safety lever (19) causes the firing pin (11) to be blocked (see arrows in the bottom part of Illustration 7). Moreover, during the last third of the safety lever travel the hammer (39) becomes disengaged by the lifting of the cocking piece (26) and drops forward. (See also page 9 - 'Operating the Safety...' and Illustration 14.)

The trigger moves backwards and remains in the rearmost limit of its travel.

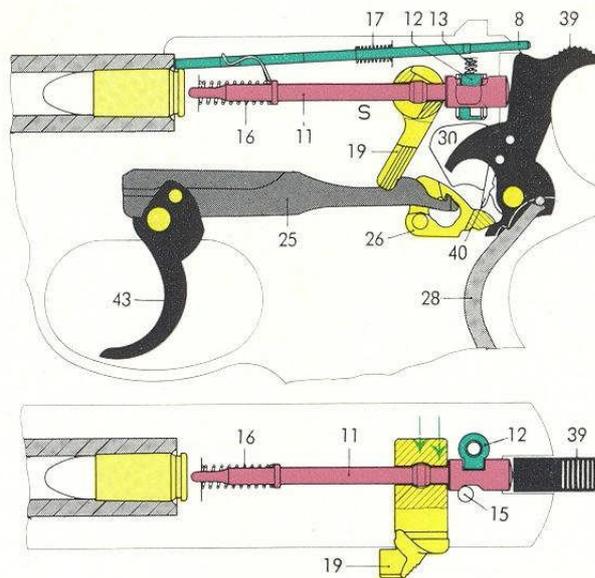


Illustration 8 (Safety Lever 'On')

Operating the safety lever when the hammer is uncocked. Pistol loaded, safety lever 'On' (above)

Before the safety was applied, the firing pin (11) remains blocked by the automatic safety effect of the firing pin arrester/lock (12) when the hammer is in an uncocked state. By moving the safety lever (19) downwards, thereby exposing the letter 'S' fully and covering the 'F', an additional lock is applied to the firing pin (11), as shown by the arrows in the bottom part of Illustration 8.

Note that - unlike when the hammer was cocked - this time the trigger remains in its normal forward position. Pulling the trigger cannot fully cock the hammer. (Compare trigger positions in Illustrations 7 and 8.)

## Directions for the Use and Handling of the Pistol P38



Illustration 9

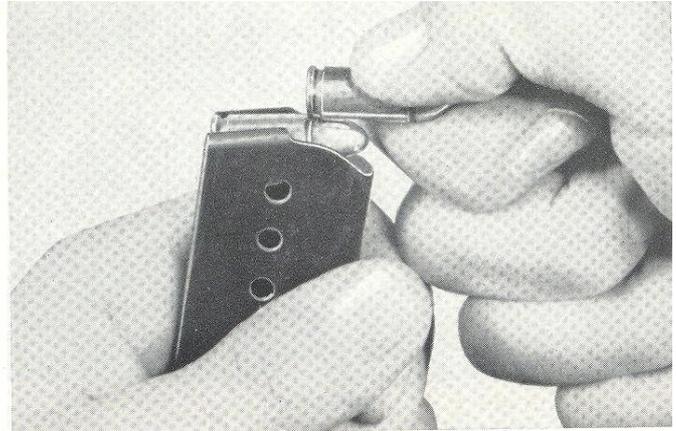


Illustration 10

### Preparing to Load the P38

Hold the pistol and render it 'Safe' by turning the safety lever downwards to the fullest extent of its travel, thus exposing the letter 'S' and fully covering the letter 'F'. Remove the magazine by releasing the magazine catch with the left thumb. The left index finger withdraws the magazine from the grip as shown above.

### Proper Ammunition and Safe usage

Always use quality ammunition in order to avoid ammo related malfunctions like described below. **The P38 was not designed for high pressure +P/+P+ ammo.** For your safety, instead use the standard 115-124gr FMJ it was designed for. JHP ammunition may not feed reliably in the P38.

The following pages describe firing the P38. Handle the pistol safely at all times and use adequate hearing and eye protection. To fire, align the front and rear sights on your target then pull the trigger. If there is no report or recoil, check the signal-pin to ensure that there is a cartridge in the chamber. If not, then load the pistol. If there is a cartridge in the chamber, pull the trigger again to fire the primer.

If again nothing happens, you may have a 'hang-fire' (a delayed primer ignition) so keep

the pistol pointed in a safe direction and wait a full minute, then cautiously extract and properly dispose of the cartridge. **If instead there is reduced recoil or report don't fire again!** You may have a 'squib' load that has lodged the bullet in the barrel. Check the barrel for obstructions before firing again.

### Filling the Magazine

As shown above, hold the magazine with the left hand and push the cartridges - base first - under the magazine lips by carefully depressing the feeder platform with the cartridge rim. The magazine holds eight (8) cartridges. When emptying the magazine, push the cartridges gently forward until they are finally expelled by the upward thrust of the magazine spring. The 7 holes in the side of the magazine serve to facilitate checking the contents of the magazine.

Any forceful jamming-in or tearing-out during either of these two respective operations would cause damage to the magazine and consequently lead to functional disorders of the pistol.

## Directions for the Use and Handling of the Pistol P38 continued



Illustration 11



Illustration 12

### Introducing the First Cartridge into the Chamber

The pistol should be 'Safe' as shown above. Insert a full magazine into the pistol grip until it positively clicks into place. Hold the pistol with the right hand and grip the slide by the ribbed rear end with the left hand and pull fully backwards - then let go. This operation causes the first cartridge to slip into the chamber. The hammer, however, does not become cocked by this process, as the safety lever is still applied and the hammer of the P38 therefore cannot be cocked either by hand or else by pulling the trigger through. To make the pistol ready for immediate use, push the safety lever upwards to cover the letter 'S' (Safe) completely and the letter 'F' (Fire) becomes visible. The weapon will still remain uncocked and the firing pin is still blocked. The pistol is nevertheless ready to fire in 'Double-Action' mode.

### 'Single-Action' Shooting

In target shooting, it is recommended before the first shot to cock the hammer with the right thumb as shown above. With a little practice, this operation should become fairly easy. It offers the advantage of having only a comparatively slight amount of resistance (trigger pressure) to overcome. This in its turn increases the accuracy in shooting the first shot quite considerably.

If the hammer is not cocked, the first shot will be fired 'Double-Action', with a long, heavy trigger pull thus may not group well with the following 'Single-Action' shots on the intended target.

Manually cocking the hammer applies to the first shot only as subsequent shots automatically are 'Single-Action' since the hammer is cocked by the slide during recoil.

## Directions for the Use and Handling of the Pistol P38 continued



Illustration 13 (Safety Off)

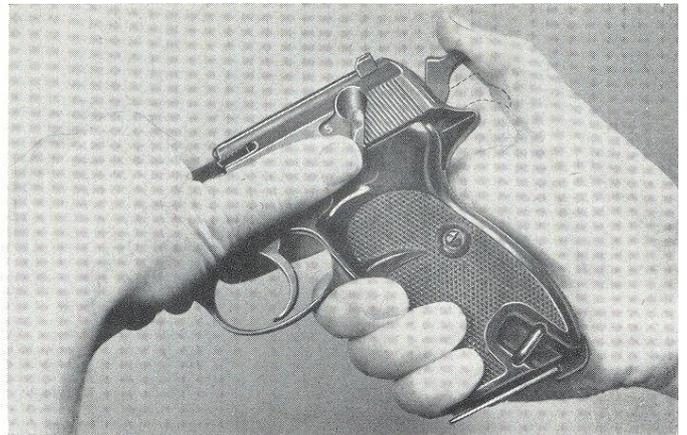


Illustration 14 (Safety On)

### **'Double-Action' Shooting**

Firing the first shot by means of the 'Single-Action' method is, of course, chiefly enacted in practice and competition shooting at targets, while 'Double-Action' shooting of the first round occurs mainly under active service conditions. In the latter event, the hammer is cocked by simply pulling the trigger through its entire length of travel for the first shot.

Only the first round is fired 'Double-Action', the following shots are 'Single-Action' as the hammer is cocked by the slide during recoil.

Whether the first shot was fired 'Single-Action' or 'Double-Action', should for reasons of faulty ammunition the pistol fail to fire, pull the trigger again. A second impact of the firing pin on the primer cap will as a rule cause even a defective round to detonate. Of course avoid using faulty ammunition but in an emergency, having the double-strike capability of a 'Double-Action' trigger can be important.

### **Operating the Safety/Rendering the P38 Safe**

To render the P38 safe, hold the weapon with the right hand, and place the right index finger along the side of the trigger guard. The right thumb grips the hammer, while the left thumb pushes the safety downwards making the arm safe. The hammer can now slowly return to its resting position, as shown above. Don't let it drop fast. Care should be taken that the muzzle of the pistol points downwards during this procedure.

Note that the tip of the safety lever is clearly Off (fully up) in Illustration 13. In Illustration 14 it's clearly On (turned to its full downward position).

If your pistol's safety does not function exactly as described in this manual or is erratic, this is a dangerous condition. Have it inspected by a competent gunsmith immediately. Never fire a malfunctioning firearm!

It also is recommended that the safety and firing pin of a worn pistol be examined closely by a competent gunsmith.



Illustration 15

### The Emptied Magazine/Load Another

When the last round in the magazine has been fired, the slide lock lever will hold the slide open. If shooting is to be continued, remove the empty magazine and insert the next full magazine. Pull the slide back slightly and then let go. It will glide forward smartly. This process will cause the first round to be introduced into the chamber. The safety is off, the hammer cocked and the first round will fire 'Single-Action'.

This cartridge may also be fed into the chamber without using the left hand - by simply depressing the slide lock lever with the right thumb. If it is not intended to continue shooting, apply the safety lever (Illustration 14).



Illustration 16

### Unloading the P38

If the pistol P38 is to be unloaded after a live round has been lodged in the chamber, put the safety lever into the 'Safe' position, withdraw the magazine, and remove the cartridges from the latter. Now pull the slide fully back, as shown above. The cartridge will be extracted from the chamber by this operation and drop out. Hang on to the slide and allow it to slowly glide forward. (There is no good reason to allow the slide to slam forward on an empty chamber.) Be 100% certain that there are no cartridges in the chamber or magazine!

## Dismantling the P38



Illustration 17



Illustration 18

## Dismantling the P38

Hold the unloaded pistol in the right hand and move the safety lever to 'Safe' (Illustration 14). Insert an empty magazine. Next pull the slide back until it stays open, then remove the magazine. Now turn the barrel catch lever downwards with the left thumb until it engages with an audible 'click' (Illustration 17).

If an empty magazine is not available, the retracted slide may be made to stay open by pushing the breech catch/slide lock lever upwards while the slide is fully pulled back.

The barrel catch lever having been turned down approximately 120 degrees, the slide should now be pulled back slightly and then allowed to move forward slowly so as to be separated from the frame (Illustration 18).

Alternatively, the slide may be drawn back with the left hand while the right thumb depresses the breech catch/slide lock lever. Hang on to the slide and allow it to slowly glide forward and off the frame unit.

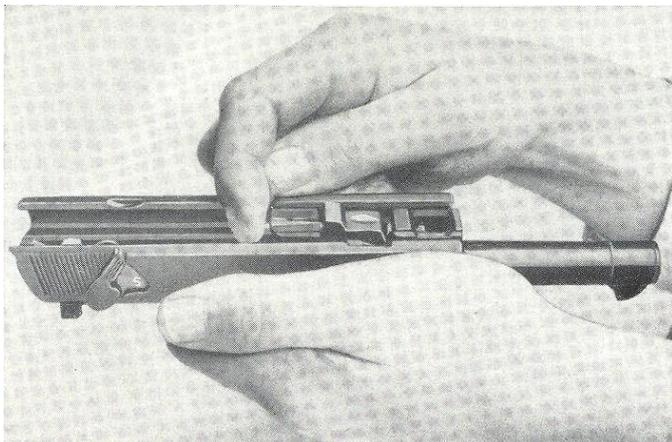


Illustration 19a

### **Separating the Barrel from the Slide**

Hold the slide upside-down as shown above. Press the small internal locking bolt/plunger towards the muzzle end. The barrel can then be readily taken out of the slide unit.

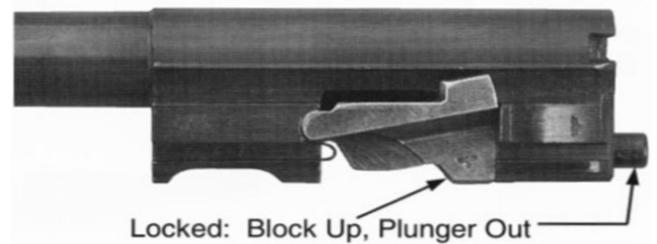
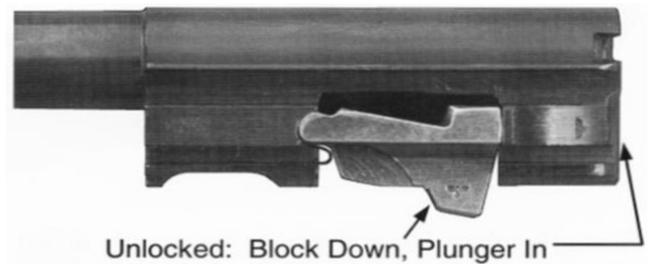


Illustration 19b



Illustration 20

### **Cleaning the Component Parts**

The pistol has now been partly stripped and split up into its four main units: barrel, slide, frame (grip), and magazine, as shown above. These components can now be cleaned and oiled. The barrel, the grooves of the slide and the grip unit should be lubricated with a good acid-free and non-resinous oil, and the barrel should be then wiped dry again. Any further dismantling should be carried out only if there is an uncommonly great amount of dirt present in these parts. Any such work, however, should be entrusted to skilled craftsmen.

# Assembling the P38

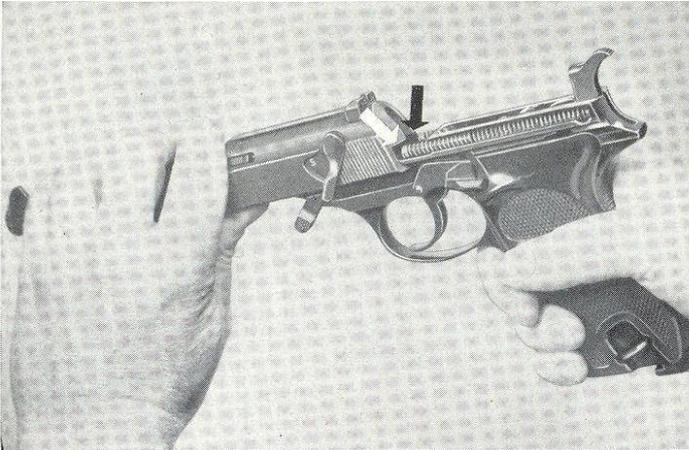


Illustration 21



Illustration 22

## Assembling

The re-assembling of the weapon is appropriately carried out in the opposite order to that of taking-down. In order to avoid damage during this process, it is important that the following explanations and illustrations be observed.

It is particularly important to realize that re-assembling can be carried out only while the pistol is in a 'Safe' state and the hammer must be uncocked as pictured above.

First unlock the barrel locking block by pressing the plunger in. Then re-fit the barrel into the slide and press the bottom of the locking block to lock the barrel to the slide (see Illustration 19b). Now carefully slide the barrel/slide unit on the frame as shown above. As the slide passes over the recoil spring guide pins **ensure that the ejector is pushed down before pushing the slide further on the frame** (see the left arrow in Illustration 22). Also ensure that the barrel locking block below the chamber is pressed upwards with the left thumb in the manner shown in Illustration 21.

It may take a little deftness but the slide should continue going on the frame. It is important not to use excessive force. Go slow, look for and clear snags, don't force anything. In addition to the ejector, the release lever and relief piece/trip lever may protrude above the frame and must be pushed downwards so as to permit the slide to run freely back over the top of the frame (the three components that may protrude above the frame are indicated by arrows in the illustration above).

With the above task done correctly, the slide unit can be easily pushed back over the frame until it contacts the uncocked hammer without any damage to the recoil springs, the parts that can protrude, the slide or the frame.

At this point don't allow the slide to move forward, keep it pressed against the hammer until the next step is completed.

## Assembling the P38 continued



Illustration 23



Illustration 24

### Assembling

Insert an empty magazine into the grip or press up the slide lock. Pull the slide back until the slide lock engages, holding the slide back as shown above. Now rotate the barrel catch lever into its normal locking position with the left thumb, as shown above.

Finally, pull the slide back slightly with the left hand and push the breech catch/slide locking lever downwards with the right thumb, then holding on to the slide, let the slide move forward slowly. Don't allow it to slam forward.

The P38 is now once again in its complete original state - Safe, and ready for further service.

### Further Information

The P38 was accepted by the German military in 1938, seeing service until the end of WWII when production was almost entirely halted. These wartime models had steel frames, Nazi markings and military codes, a collector's dream. In 1957 Walther started new P38 production then introduced the **P1**, a mechanically identical twin. These post-war models almost exclusively had a new aluminum frame. The German military accepted the P1 version (probably to avoid the stigma of the Nazi era P.38) while most commercial and police models were stamped P38 on the slide. As P1s and post WWII P38s are virtually identical except for the model number, parts normally can be interchanged. However, parts compatibility between WWII and post WWII models can be troublesome.

The Walther P38 and P1 saw continued use in Germany and many other countries until the mid-1990s when they began to be replaced with newer designs, many based on the P38! They are presently under Curio & Relic status, which paved the way for thousands of bargain priced imports into the United States and launched a rebirth of this fine firearm. Early imports often were new or like-new, however lately it is more common to see German Army reworks. These reworks tend to be mixed-parts guns, but done right - often upgraded with newer barrels and thick slides. P38 marked pistols are rarer thus command a higher price but either version should be a fine choice.



# P38 Exploded View

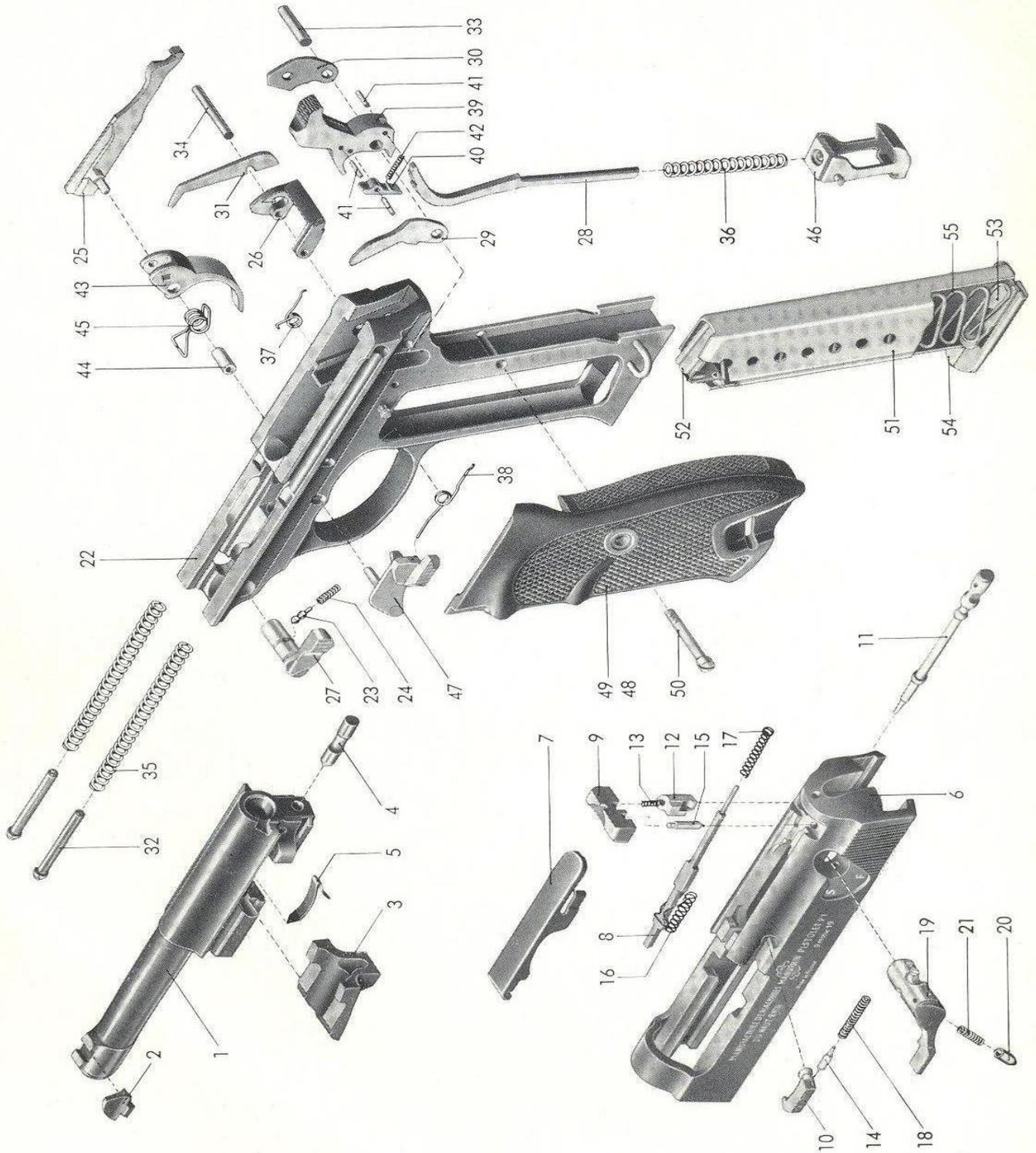


Illustration 25

## Components List of the Walther Pistol P38

<b>UNIT I: Barrel</b>		External Safety lever unit	19	Cocking piece spring	38
Barrel	1	Safety Rest pin	20	Hammer	39
Front sight	2	Safety Rest pin spring	21	Hammer trap/Tumbler	40
Locking-piece	3			Pins to Nos. 39 & 40	41
Locking pin	4	<b>UNIT III: Grip/Frame</b>		Hammer trap spring	42
V-spring	5	Frame/Grip	22	Trigger	43
		Barrel Catch Rest pin	23	Trigger sleeve	44
<b>UNIT II: Slide</b>		Barrel Catch Rest pin spring	24	Trigger spring	45
Slide body	6	Trigger connector plate	25	Magazine holder/release	46
Slide Cover	7	Cocking-piece/Sear	26	Breech/slide lock lever	47
Signal-pin	8	Barrel catch lever	27	Grip plate, right	48
Rear sight	9	Striker/Hammer rod	28	Grip plate, left	49
Extractor	10	Internal Decock relief piece	29	Grip plate screw	50
Firing pin	11	Firing pin lock release lever	30		
Firing pin lock	12	Ejector (may have a spring)	31	<b>UNIT IV: Magazine</b>	
Spring to No. 12	13	Recoil spring guide pins	32	Magazine casing	51
Extractor pin	14	Hammer pin	33	Feeder platform/follower	52
Limit stop pin	15	Cocking piece pin	34	Magazine bottom lock	53
Firing pin spring	16	Recoil springs	35	Magazine bottom	54
Signal-pin spring	17	Striker rod spring	36	Feeder spring	55
Extractor spring	18	Trigger plate spring	37		

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of practical experience  
in the manufacture of precision-built  
hunting, sports and defence weapons  
is intimately associated with this name.**