finishing, and it was a high-quality item. Then on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, starting WWII. Defending Polish horse soldiers wielding pistols were unfortunately no match for panzer armies and the overwhelming onslaught of blitzkrieg warfare. The Radom plant was soon under German control.

In September 1939, the Radom plant was placed under the direction of new management headed by an official of the Steyr-Daimler-Puch arms factory in Austria. The plant was idle for about a year, and then production began anew. The Polish eagle was no longer stamped on the slide, although other markings remained the same. The Germans called the pistol the P.35(p), meaning Pistole 35 (Polnische) and this model designation was additionally stamped on the slide. Other stamps were an eagle over “Wa77,” which designated the Radom plant as the place of manufacture, an eagle over “623” which was the waffenamt inspection stamp of the Steyr organization, and the acceptance stamp of an eagle over a swastika, indicating Nazi Germany ownership. VIS pistols were provided in large numbers to the Kriegsmarine (German Navy), Polizei (police) units, Fallschirmjaegers (paratroopers) and the Waffen SS. The pistol pictured was made in 1942, and bears the appropriate German markings.

The quality of pistols produced under German occupation gradually began to decline as the war bore on, and simplification measures were eventually implemented, most notably the elimination of the takedown lever. The pivot pins previously held in by the lever were then staked in place. Still, the pistol was entirely serviceable. In the meantime, the Polish resistance had begun smuggling parts out of the factory to assemble pistols in secret, and when the Nazis discovered this fact, they cruelly and summarily executed 12 workers in front of their shocked associates at the plant. A number of these “underground” pistols were used in the famous Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943, and in the more extensive general Warsaw uprising in 1944.

With the Germans fearing sabotage, barrel production started at the Steyr plant in Austria, and the pistols were assembled from Polish parts and inspected there. In December of 1944 and January of 1945, the Soviets occupied Radom. They discovered that the Radom plant’s inventory and machinery had been removed and relocated. Later it was found that the pistols were being made at that time in a concentration camp in Znaim, Czechoslovakia, about 200 kilometers from Steyr. These “last ditch” pistols were of extremely poor quality and used a number of ersatz expedient parts. Total German-supervised production has been recently estimated to be from 312,000 to 350,000 pistols. When the war in Europe ended in April of 1945, no further VIS pistols were produced. The Radom plant began producing the TT-33 Tokarev pistol for the People’s Republic of Poland under the control of the Soviets. That pistol was admittedly inferior to the VIS, but it was the standard for the occupying troops. In 1997, at the revived Radom plant (then free of Soviet control), some commemorative VIS pistols were produced for a short while.

Today, Radom VIS pistols are quite collectible but are becoming scarce and hard to find, particularly the “Polish eagle” guns made prior to the German occupation. Most specimens made prior to 1944 are very effective sidearms that are well made, reliable and accurate. No World War II weapons collection would be complete without one or more of these interesting and historic handguns.