

A Squad of Soldiers for Your Collection (18.24)

incorporating implicitly

A Concise Chronology of the Alox Soldier Series

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Member No. 72

PART ONE

Over many centuries, and in the armies of many nations, the term "squad" (or the equivalent in their native languages, of course) has been used to designate the smallest officially recognized formation of foot soldiers; and, in more modern times, also for the group of soldiers assigned to operate, supply, and defend a crew-served weapon. In the U. S. Army Regulations from about 1891, a squad was defined as consisting of "7 privates and a corporal." In more recent times, a squad of the U.S. Army has consisted of between 8 and 14 soldiers. Today, among NATO countries a squad is recognized as consisting of 7 or 8 and up to 12 soldiers; usually led by a sergeant.

The concept of the squad is rather simple: there is a limit to the number of other persons an individual can effectively control; a small number is more easily organized, recognized, directed, and accounted for, and limited in detrimental effect if losses do occur. But how does all that relate to collecting VSAKs? Answer: anthropomorphism.

The Elsener company has been supplying pocket knives to the Swiss Army (the "Army") to meet its annual requirements since 1891; through 2018, that would be 128 years and in theory would require 128 different knives. One must deduct, however, for the few years of no production at Ibach; and one could "collapse" the years before the date stamp was made mandatory (1921) into a few types. The number of knives to make a "full set", whatever that might be exactly, would be a daunting task, and nearly impossible today. In any case, that goal is too large for my ambition and resources.

Moreover, I am most interested in the Alox models; derived from the Model of 1961; the first production of which was marked to be issued in the year 1962, represented by a stamp on the reverse of the tang of the main blade in two digits, thus ("62"). This practice continued through 2008

("08"), when that model was replaced by the current "Standard Issue" (Cat. No.0.846.MWCH).

That span of years would suggest 47 different Alox knives; but again, one must make some adjustments. My final count is at least 58 different, collectable Alox Soldiers.

NOTE: All necessary data appear below; with careful reading my number can be derived.

Within that group of 58, however. I am primarily interested in only examples that exhibit a change of some sort, even if only a small one, from the Model of 1961 or the previous year's production. These limitations resulted in my "Squad" consisting of only 12 Soldiers.

My primary source of information has been a chart showing the progression of the Soldier Knife, from its beginning in 1890 to 1996, apparently prepared by the Factory (text in German, with some words translated into English).

NOTE: See *Blade*, 1st Series, No. 7, Apr. 2001, pp.3-4.

The major heading is "Soldatenmesser" (Soldiers' Knives"); thus, this document is herein referred to as "Soldatenmesser Chart".

Now, to select Soldiers for the Squad: there is a whole platoon of volunteers from which to choose. If a collector wants to identify variations and changes, however, there must be a reference point; and that is the original Alox Soldier. In 1961 the Alox series of knives, now called First Pioneer Series ("1stPS"), had been in production for about five years.

NOTE: See Skipper, Nate, "A Collector's Guide to the Alox Pioneer Series", Part One, *Blade*, Series 2, No. 4, 1st Qtr. 2017; Part Two, *Blade*, Series 2, No. 5, 1st Qtr. 2018.

The basic model of this series was Factory Model #2220, later called "Sturdy Boy" by the U.S. Importer. The new Soldier was to follow this model very closely. *Using Italic type, I shall point out differences between Sturdy Boy and Soldier.*

The new Soldier, officially designated Model of 1961 ("M61"), was designed in conformity with Drawing #15384, which set forth the required specifications. The finished product had the following dimensions and characteristics:

NOTE: See *Blade*, 1st Series, No. 30, Jan. 2007, p.3.

Dimensions: 93mm long; 12mm thick; weigh 72g. *Same as Sturdy Boy.*

Tools were (thickness of metal): (1) blade (2.76mm); (2) awl/reamer, new style of 1961; (3) can opener, style of 1951 (2.23mm); (4) cap lifter, style of 1951 (2.58mm), except no notch, but interior of curve was beveled for scraping wire ("Bevel"). *Thicknesses of metal for Sturdy Boy was: (2.75mm); (2.20mm); and (2.18mm), respectively.*

Handles: Alox, the surface was embossed with a "ribbed pattern" ("*gerippt*", in German, which translates as "ribbed", although "checkered" seems to me to be more descriptive), anodized silver, later anodized red; parts were secured at the main blade pivot by a solid rivet, and at the opposite end by a hollow rivet of a size to accept the then current production bail; but a bail was not included in the Army's version. *Sturdy Boy did not have the hollow rivet; but another knife in the 1stPS, Factory Model # 2220U, called Pioneer by the U.S Importer, had both hollow rivet and bail, at additional cost at the Factory level.*

An equilateral (Swiss) cross was stamped in the handle material in an area not covered by the checkered pattern. The "arms" of the cross were about 7.5mm long; the cross was placed on the center line of the knife, about 6mm away from the edge of the main blade pivot rivet, toward the opposite end ("Cross Stamped in Handle"). *A similar, but different, cross: equilateral, with arms about 4.5mm long was stamped into the obverse (shield-side) of the handle of Sturdy Boy, as well as of all other knives in the 1st Pioneer Series.*

Inspection: after assembly each knife was inspected by Army personnel; if found to comply with specifications, and if in acceptable condition, each knife was stamped with a steel die to indicate acceptance by the Army. *Obviously, no inspection stamp was needed on products intended for commercial markets.*

The inspection stamp was as follows: a circle, 5mm in diameter; within which was an equilateral cross, the arms of which extending to the circumference of the circle; in the four corners formed by the arms of the cross and the circle, straight, vertical grooves were cut to create the appearance of three lines, diminishing in height as they approach the outside of the circle; in the center of the cross, at right angles to the grooves, the following lettering was prescribed: "W-K", sized to

cause the letters to fall on the horizontal arms of the cross, and the hyphen to be centered. This stamp was positioned on the Cross Stamped in Handle so that the letters were read correctly when the knife was held vertically, with main blade opened and pointing up ("Vertical Stamp").

NOTE: See *Blade, 1st Series, No.7, Apr. 2001, p. 7.*

In addition, all Soldier knives had the customary manufacture's identification stamp on the obverse of the tang of the main blade.

NOTE: In Jahr.62, this stamp was in three lines; and in Jahr.82, in four lines, which continued to the end of the series.

The following is a check list of the variants that I have deduced from the printed materials cited, and verified in substantial part by examination of available specimens, each identified by the date stamp on the reverse of the main blade.

NOTE: Other writers differ in some details:

Cf. Young, Michael M. *The Swiss Army Knife Owner's Manual*. Denver: self published, 2011, pp.38-41.

Cf. Marsax, "*Soldier Model 1961*",

<http://swissknives.info/category/soldier/>, 2013.

To avoid any uncertainty, when reference to the two digit date on a knife is intended, the digits will be preceded by the German word for "year": thus: "Jahr.00".

NOTE: The word used in the Soldatenmesser Chart is "Jahrgang" which can be understood as "vintage of [year]" or "in respect of the [year]"; herein abbreviated as "Jahr."

When a calendar year is intended, four digits will be used, as usual. The Latin word "*per*" can mean "through (and including)", and is so used herein.

**Type I: Jahr.62 *per* Jahr.68: Red Alox
Jahr.1970: Red Alox.**

Jahr.62 *per* Jahr.71: Vertical Stamp

For the first three years, only anodized red Alox with Vertical Stamp was used for handles on Soldiers (a "Red" or plural, "Reds"). In today's collectors' market, the nearer the first one (Jahr.62) the higher the price relative to other Reds in comparable condition. If one had to make a financial choice, I would recommend choosing "date" over condition, for there is only one Jahr.62; and being the very first of the series, as well as the first of its type, makes this date most desirable! It is, however, vitally essential to have a Red specimen, but there are six other

years of Type I from which to choose.

- I have a red Soldier, Type I, Jahr. 62*.
- I have another Red, Type I, Jahr.....

**Type II: Jahr.65 per Jahr.08: Silver Alox
Jahr.65 per Jahr.71: Vertical Stamp**

The first silver-colored Alox Soldiers (a "Silver", or plural, "Silvers") were issued for Jahr.65. There were no physical changes from the original specifications during the seven year period Jahr.65 per Jahr.71. The reason generally accepted for the change in color is that the Army was dissatisfied with the rapid rate at which the red anodized finish wore off in service. Since the Silvers did not suffer as much as the Reds from ordinary use, one can expect to find these in better cosmetic condition. It would be very desirable to have a silver Jahr.65, because it was the first of its type.

Since Jahr.71 was the last year of the Vertical Stamp, one might also want a silver Jahr.71 for this reason alone. On the other hand, at least one specimen from this group of seven years (Jahr.65 per Jahr.71) is necessary, for a change in acceptance stamp was to follow.

- I have a silver Soldier, Type II, Jahr. 65*.
- I have another Silver, Type II, Jahr.....

1972: No production by Elsener.

**Type III: Jahr.65 per Jahr.08: Silver Alox
Jahr.73 per Jahr.77:
Horizontal Stamp**

No physical changes were made in Soldier knives from Jahr.65 per Jahr.76, and part of Jahr.77. The important change in this time period, which occurred for Jahr.73, was in the placement of the acceptance stamp. The Cross Stamped in Handle remained the same, and was placed in the

same position as before. The acceptance stamp itself was unchanged, however; it was rotated 90° clockwise. This change required the knife to be held in a horizontal position, back up, with the main blade opened and pointed to the left, in order for the K-W impression to be read correctly ("Horizontal Stamp").

NOTE: See *Blade*, 1st Series, No. 30, Jan. 2007, p.3, Illus. #2 and #4.

I regard this as a most interesting change, and one for which no reason has been found or even suggested. Jahr.73 was as an important year, a specimen of which should be in every collection. However, if Jahr.73 is illusive, then a silver Jahr.75 per Jahr.77 may be easier to find.

- I have a silver Soldier, Type III, Jahr.73*.
- I have another Silver, Type III, Jahr.....

Jahr.74 No production by Elsener

Type IV: Jahr.75. Red Alox: Horizontal Stamp

The Soltdatenmesser Chart indicates that Reds were made by Elsener for Jahr.62 per Jahr.68, Jahr.70, and Jahr.75, but not for Jahr.1969, 1971, 1973 ("empty years"), nor after Jahr.1975. The number of Reds made in 1970 and 1975 surely were few, no doubt with the intent to exhaust stocks of red handle material remaining from 1968 and before. I regard this variation (Type IV) as almost essential, for this is the only year in which Reds had the Horizontal Stamp. Some collectors may seek a Silver Jahr.75 to compare or contrast with the Red.

Some collectors and commentators have suggested, however, that actually a very few Reds were made during those "empty years"; but none have been reported.

I have a red Soldier, Type IV, Jahr.75*.

I have a silver Soldier, Type III, Jahr.75.

TO BE CONTINUED

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PART TWO

Type V: Jahr.77 per Jahr.08: Schweizerwappen Jahr.77 per Jahr.88: Quadratic Field Jahr.77 per Jahr.87: New Acceptance Stamp

Although the functional characteristics of the knife did not change, Jahr.77 was one of major change in the shield and in the form and placement of the inspection stamp. The Soldatenmesser Chart indicates production for this year of both the older design (Type III), as well as commencement of the new (Type V), both only in silver. There were 10 years of Type V from which to choose (Jahr.77 per Jahr.86).

The Cross in Handle was deleted and a new shield was adopted in its place: red with a curved bottom, occupying a space about 10.5mm high; and about 9mm wide; placed on the obverse, and on the center line of the handle, about 7.5 mm from the main blade pivot rivet; bearing a white (actually, silver, the Alox was left bare) Swiss cross centered; this is the "federal shield", or Coat-of-Arms, of the Swiss nation (herein called "Scheizerwappen").

To provide a place for an inspection acceptance stamp, a flat, smooth area, about 4.5mm square, was embossed or stamped into the handle material, on the same side as the Scheizerwappen, located on the center line of the handle, about 4.5mm, from the Hollow Rivet toward the main blade pivot rivet, (herein called "Quadratic Field").

The inspection stamp itself was redesigned: a stylized "W", consisting of curved sides, with a smaller, inverted "v" connecting the curves; somewhat like the

"ram's horns" badge used by a popular truck brand in the U.S. Within the curves, an upper-case "K" (a little less than 2.0mm high) and a smaller equilateral cross were centered. The letter "K" was read correctly when the knife was held vertically, with the blade opened and pointing up (herein called "New Stamp"!). *Neither Sturdy Boy nor any other knife in the 1stPS was affected by this change in shield.*

- I have a silver Soldier Type III, Jahr 77.
- I have a silver Soldier Type V, Jahr 77*.

TYPE VI: Jahr.77 per Jahr.88:Quadratic Field Jahr.87 per Jahr.88: No New Stamp

The year 1987 was another of significant change, for the Army determined that inspection of Soldier knives would no longer be necessary. The reason given was excellent and consistent quality over a substantial number of years. This change in policy resulted in the New Stamp not being applied in Jahr.87 and Jahr.88. The Factory need time (until sometime in 1988, it would appear), to adjust production to eliminate the Quadratic Field, so that feature continued through part of Jahr.88.

These two circumstances resulted in there being intentionally two years with Quadratic Field, but without New Stamp. I regard these two to be of equal interest, so either may represent Type VI.

NOTE: I was skeptical of there being two Types in one year: it would seem inefficient, but could have been necessary to utilize inventories of left-over parts. Recently I have discovered two other unexpected Type VIs, Jahr.82 and Jahr.83; no explanation found. Could these be freaks; or made for commercial markets? Unless explicitly stated otherwise, it is unknown whether or not two Types were made in other years.

- I have a Soldier, Type V, Jahr. 87;
- I have a Soldier, Type VI, Jahr. 87*;
- I have a Soldier, Type VI, Jahr. 88.
- I have a Soldier, Type VI, Jahr.....

TYPE VII: Jaht.88 per Jahr.08: No Quadratic Field

During 1988, the Factory had adjusted production to remove the Quadratic Field; resulting in production of both Type VI and Type VII, for that year. Since the next change did not take place until sometime in Jahr.93, the collector has an additional five years (Jahr.89 through part of Jahr.93) from which to choose a Type VII.

- I have a Soldier, Type VI, Jahr.88.
- I have a Soldier, Type VII, Jahr.88*.
- I have another Soldier, Type VII, Jahr.....

TYPE VIII: Jahr.93 per Jahr.08: Solid Rivet

For Jahr.93, the Army decided to deleted the Hollow Rivet in favor of a solid river, in appearance the same as the pivot pin rivet. *Like Sturdy Boy.* Again, this resulted in production of both Type VII and Type VIII for the same year (Jahr.93). The next change occurred in 1994; leaving, the collector only one year (Jahr.93), as the sole representative of a Soldier having both the original Cap Lifter with Bevel, without Quadratic Field, but with the new Solid Rivet.

- I have a Soldier, Type VII, Jahr 93.
- I have a Soldier, Type VIII, Jahr 93*.

NOTE: Recently, I have found a Type VII Jahr.93 in my own collection.

TYPE IX: Jahr.94 perJahr.08: Cap Lifter Notch

For Jahr. 94, the Army decided to again modernized the Soldier; wire insulation had apparently changed. Older wire required "scraping" to remove the insulation; while more modern types had Vinyl or similar insulation which could be "pushed" off. Thus, the Bevel was deleted from the Cap Lifter; and a notch, about 2mm wide for bending wire or pushing insulation ("Notch"), was cut into its lower edge, much like the earlier design of 1951. *The notch had been a feature of Sturdy Boy and others of the 1st PS since inception.*

The next change would not occur until Jahr.96. Thus, there were two years (Jahr.94 and Jahr.95) in

which the Solid Rivet and new Notch would be the only features of "modernization", before the 1996 change.

- I have a Soldier, Type IX, Jahr 94*.
- I have a Soldier, Type IX, Jahr 95.

TYPE X: Jahr.96 per Jahr.08: Thinner Cap Lifter

For Jahr.96, the Army requested, or acquiesced in, reducing the thickness of the Cap Lifter by a nominal 0.4mm, no reason for this change has been found. My measurements of thickness for a specimen of Type X were: blade, 2.72mm; Can Opener, 2.26mm; and Cap Lifter, 2.22mm, respectively; differences from Type IX were (-.04mm); (+.03mm); and (-.38mm), respectively. This is the last change, but one has only 12 years (Jahr.96 through Jahr.07), from which to choose, if one is to treat Jahr.08 separately.

- I have a Soldier, Type X, Jahr.....*.

TYPE XI: Jahr.08: End of Official Issue

The year 2008 was the last in which the Alox Soldier was issued to Swiss troops. In that year, an entirely new concept was being developed for the soldier knife: the "New Standard" was first issued to Swiss Troop as Jahr.08. I regard a specimen of this last year (Jahr.08) of M61 as essential.

- I have a Soldier, Type XI, Jahr 08*.

TYPE XII: Jahr.08: Final Run for U.S.

While I have seen nothing confirming in print, logically there would have been a quantity of raw materials and parts remaining unused, after the demise of M61. To reduce this problem, it would appear Management decided, or was persuaded by the U.S. Importer, to make a final run of 5,000 units, the main blade of which was etched in two lines: "Final Production Run"; "1 of 5,000 U.S.A."

- I have a Soldier, Type XII, Jahr.08*.

Some nicely discriminating connoisseurs may decline to include this "after discontinuance"

knife. Type XII. as part of a "real" Soldier collection. One also could omit Type X; then Type XI would serve both as representative of Type X, to show the final change, and as representative of Type XI, as the "last" issuance of M61. These two choices would reduce the Squad to only 10; personal decisions, of course.

A couple of years later, about 2010, Swiss Bianco must have been allowed to acquire the last stocks of Soldier components, for they offered small quantities of their own "soldiers", some colored, with later dates.

NOTE: see www.swissbianco.com

Well, there you have it: my Squad of 12 Swiss Army Soldiers. To make sure there is no uncertainty, I have placed an asterisks (*) next to my selections. You may make different choices; or even seek a "complete" collection of Alox Soldiers, which, of course, would also included both types in years of multiple-type production, freaks, as well as any other variations I may not have discovered. This would expand the total to at least 56, as indicated above.

NOTE: see the bar graph on page 9.

If I were doing so, I would add a Sturdy Boy, as a sort of "prototype", or predecessor; and a silver Second Series Pioneer as a kind of successor, memorial to, and a continuation in spirit of, the heroic Soldiers which served their country faithfully and honorably and with internationally acclaimed distinction for nearly half a century.

If you are inclined to concur with my selections, the question arises: how to metaphorically "quarter", protect, and display the Squad? I found a hard Vinyl case fitted for only 12 knives; I have put my Squad into that case, with small paper stickers printed with the Jahrgang and my Type number. If the occasion arises for a discussion or a presentation of this subject, I feel I can speak with some assurance

that my exposition of facts is substantially supported by hardware.

In closing, allow me to observe that most writings on historical or scientific matters are virtually ephemeral; new discoveries or a better understanding of known facts frequently demand modest changes or a full restatement. In this light, your comments, corrections, criticisms, and material for expansion of this Check List and Chronology are requested and would be welcomed. Please call me and leave a message: [Tel:252-637-6703](tel:252-637-6703); or send a message via E-Mail: cutlerscart@embarqmail.com

Nate's Quick Pocket Checklist

Type	Color	Jahrgang*	Distinguishing Features
none	Red	1957-7?	Sturdy Boy (predecessor)
I	Red	1962-70	New Design in Alox
II	Silver	1965-71	Vertical Stamp
III	Silver	1973-77	Horizontal Stamp
IV	Red	1975	Horizontal Stamp
V	Silver	1977-86	Schweizerwappen; Stamp
VI	Silver	1987-88	Quad. Field; No Stamp
VII	Silver	1988-92	No Quadratic Field
VIII	Silver	1993-08	Solid Rivet
IX	Silver	1994-95	Cap Lifter Notch
X	Silver	1996-08	Thinner Cap Lifter
XI	Silver	2008	End of Official Issue
XII	Silver	2008	Final Run, "1 Of 5,000"
none	Silver	Current	Pioneer 2 (successor)

* In some Jahrgagen, two Types were produced.

DISCLAIMER: the Author acknowledges that the names and designs of knives used or described herein, are owned by, or first use is claimed by, other persons or entities; and the Author disclaims any proprietary interest therein.

Editor's Note: The foregoing Article (both Parts One and Two) has been severely condensed from a Special Issue of *The Swiss Blade*, written, edited, and published by Nate Skipper. This Special Issue (12 pages in "booklet format") contains references to other knives in the Soldier Series, not seen in U.S. Catalogs, or rarely found in the U.S. Also, additional details, historical information, and some thoughtful commentary are included, as well as a reproduction of a part of the "Soldatenmesser Chart" mentioned above, and an original "Bar Chart" to graphically illustrate the timelines referred to herein. If interested in obtaining a copy, contact Nate at the address shown above. -30-

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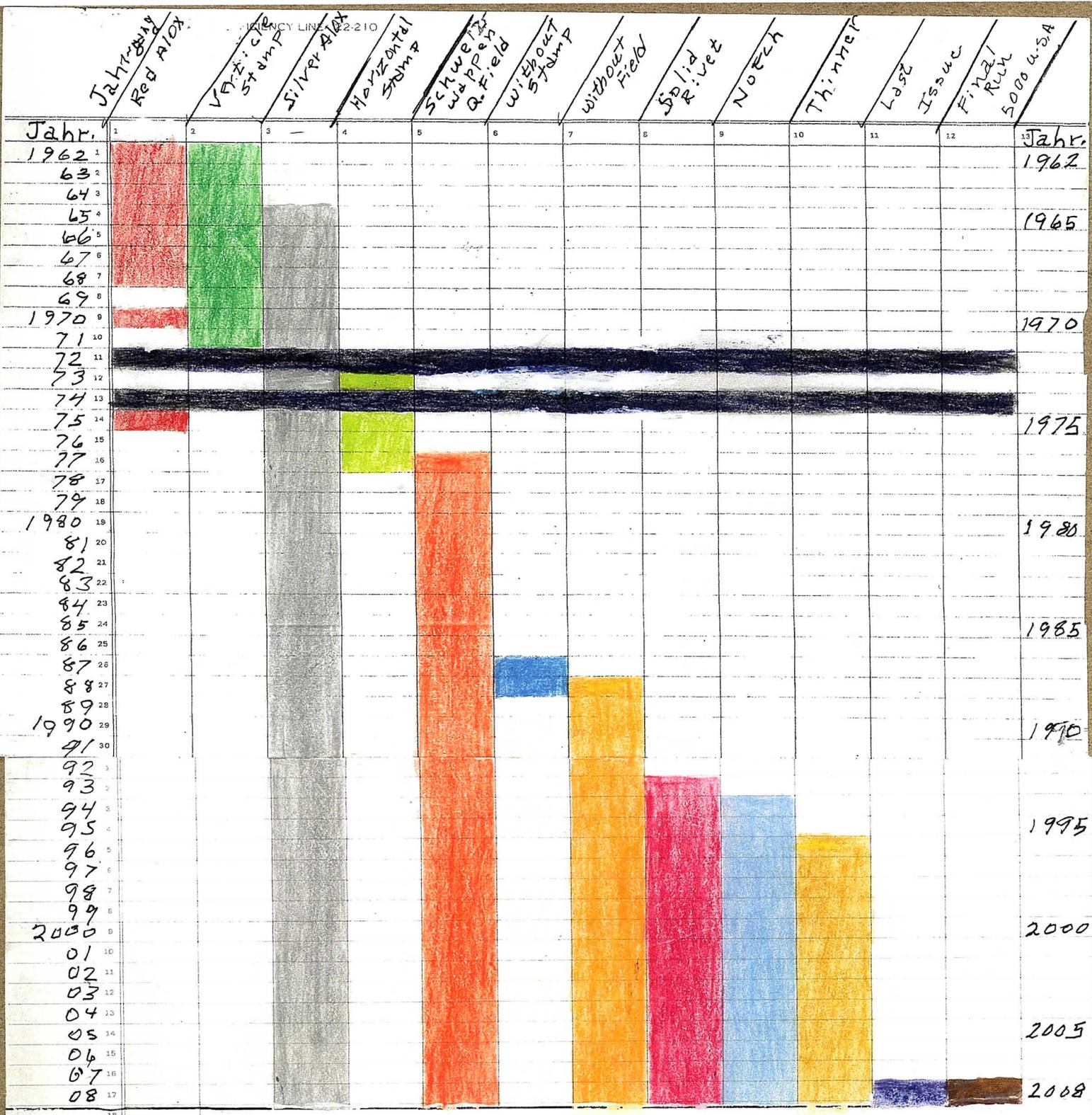
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PART THREE

**Computation of Number of Collectable Soldiers
Answer to "Puzzlement" on first Page**

START: with the span of years (1962 to and including 2008) = +47;

DEDUCT: years of no production at all (1972 and 1974) = -2;
DEDUCT: years of no production of Silvers (1962 to and including 1964) = -3;
ADD: years of production of Reds (1962 to and including 1968, 1970, and 1975) = +9;
ADD: years of production of two types (at least 1977, 1987, 1988, and 1993) = +4 <;
ADD: years in respect of which "freaks" have been found (at least 1982 and 1983) = +2 <;
ADD: final run (in 2008) = +1;
THUS: $47-2-3+9+4+2+1=58$.



Graph showing Jahrgang (vintage year) and Distinguishing Features of the Alox Soldier Series

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