

# Type 26 Revolver Major Variations

By Dan Larkin

The Type 26 revolver design was completed in 1893 (Meiji 26), and the pistol was adopted in 1894. The date of actual production inception at the Tokyo Arsenal is unknown. Some Type 26s may have been produced prior to 1896 when the Tokyo Arsenal symbol was adopted, but, there is no proof of that supposition. It is thought that the period of Standard Production ceased soon after 1923 as a result of earthquake damage to the Tokyo Arsenal. Sometime between 1925 and 1935, a small number of additional Type 26s were produced using left-over parts. A total of over 59,200 serialized Type 26s were produced (high observed: 59,227).<sup>1</sup>

Collectors classify the Type 26 revolver into five major variations. Two variations are a result of outside marking differences, two variations are due to outside metal surface finish styles, and one variation is due to its very late production period. The following is a listing of the five variations:

- Limited Early Production (two variation styles)
- Standard Production
- Arsenal Rework
- Limited Modified Final Production<sup>2</sup>

The “Limited Early Production” has two styles – one has no external markings, and the other only has external arsenal and type markings; the most telling feature is that neither variation has an external serial number. With less than 900 total produced, the Limited Early Production variation is quite scarce. The “Standard Production” and the “Arsenal Rework” comprise the outside surfacing-style variations. They are the two most common variations with a total of around 58,000 produced. The final variation is the “Limited Modified Final Production” found at the very end of Type 26 production. With approximately 300 produced, they are rare. Some additional very minor variations (not covered in this article) are created as a result of external and internal parts marking styles, grip surface marking styles, and trigger guard modifications.

Beyond the scarcity of the three lowest-production variations (Limited Early Production and Limited Modified Final Production), condition is a primary determinant of value for the Type 26. As the Type 26 was an issue sidearm and in service for up to 50 years, it is normally found in less than ideal condition. Many show characteristics of heavy use such as extreme parts and

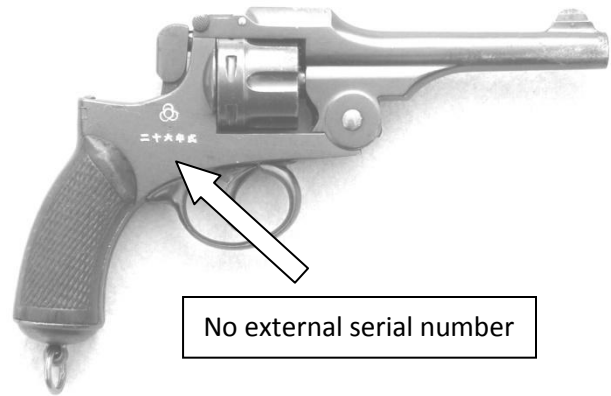
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<sup>1</sup> Harry L. Derby, III and James D. Brown, Japanese Military Cartridge Handguns, (Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2003), p. 17.

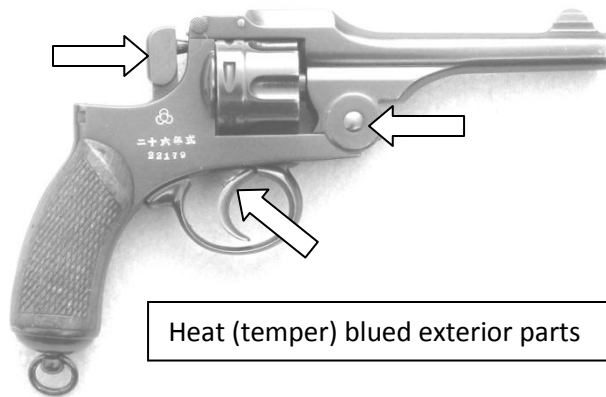
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 15-20.

finish wear. Type 26s are commonly found showing evidence of arsenal refurbishment (replacement parts and refinishing). However, even arsenal-refinished guns in nice condition are the exception. Guns retaining their original production finish characteristics and in very nice condition are very scarce, and they command the highest values.

The Type 26 example to the right is a Limited Early Production variation with arsenal and type markings but without an external serial number. The serial number is stamped on the left grip frame under the grip (this example is #663). This externally-marked version is the more common of the two Limited Early Production variation styles – the other style does not have any markings at all on the outside of the frame. The externally-marked Limited Early Production version will be found below approximately serial number 900 (high observed: 847). The highest “no markings” Limited Early Production version observed is #297. The two versions are found interspersed within normal serial sequencing.



Below is an outstanding example of the Standard Production variation with its original bright charcoal blue finish on the larger parts. Most of the smaller parts are heat (temper) blued and have a deep luster which makes this variation easy to recognize. Collectors look for the distinct



temper blue of the hammer, trigger, and hinge pin. Although most Type 26s found will have been refinished sometime in their history, Standard Production examples retaining original finish characteristics are relatively common. However, they almost always exhibit the wear traits of heavy use including metal surface damage, worn bluing and grips, and replaced parts. Standard

Production variation examples in very nice condition are scarce, and examples found in almost new condition are rare and highly sought-after by collectors.

The Arsenal Rework variation is very common. These guns have been returned to the arsenal for refurbishment – some of them have been returned several times. Their metal surface finish is rust blue which is “duller” in appearance than the Original Production charcoal blue. The previously heat (temper) blued parts are also rust blued. This bluing difference is the primary way collectors quickly recognize the Arsenal Rework variation. The grips are replaced on some

Arsenal Rework examples, and replacement grips are almost always grooved instead of checkered. It is also not uncommon to find replaced or mismatched parts on Arsenal Rework examples. The Arsenal Rework variation is found throughout the Type 26 production serial range except for the ending Limited Modified Final Production variation which was a separate production run. Like the Standard Production variation, real nice-condition examples are uncommon and in demand.



Here is an Arsenal Rework example in very nice condition with the duller rust blue finish and with the replacement grooved grips. This example is a little different in that it is one of the first Type 26s made – serial number 9. The replacement grooved grips are re-serialized with a “9”, and the outside arsenal, type kanji, and serial number are deeply re-stamped with thicker dies used much later in production.

The extent of arsenal refurbishment on any one Arsenal Rework example will vary, but, the one consistent variation determinant is the rust blue surface finish.

The Limited Modified Final Production variation consists of approximately 300 guns made-up of left-over parts well-after original production ceased. It is unknown when they were assembled. They are identified by a few specific features:

- High serial number (the lowest confirmed example is #58903)
- Grooved grips
- Rust blued major parts (earlier examples have temper-blued minor parts, and later examples have rust blued minor parts)
- All parts marked with the last two digits of the serial number

This last feature is the definitive way this variation is identified. If the parts are all serialized with the last two digits of the serial number, the gun is a Limited Modified Final Production example. This last-two-digit serial number parts marking system is not used anywhere else in Type 26 production.

The Limited Modified Final Production variation is very close in appearance to the Arsenal Rework variation, and examples can be easily overlooked as just one more refinished Type 26. The best way to find them is to remember that they have a very high serial number. If any Type 26 with a serial number of near 58,8xx or higher is found, it should be examined closely for the

telling features of the Limited Modified Final Production variation. These guns are very rare, and they command premium pricing.

Below is an image of two rare Limited Modified Final Production variation examples.



These two Type 26s have consecutive numbers! Very few consecutive pairs of Type 26s are known to have been reunited by collectors. The finding and acquiring of a consecutive pair of this rare variation is a very lucky happenstance.

Most Japanese militaria collectors are happy with one representative Type 26 example. Others will acquire examples of the two most common variations, the Original Production and the Arsenal Rework, as it is relatively easy to find them. Advanced Type 26 collectors will also seek the three rarest variations – the two styles of Limited Early Production and the Limited Modified Final Production. Very few Type 26 collectors have acquired all five major variations. Also, the several minor variations offer additional collecting opportunities for advanced collectors. Collecting the Type 26 presents an additional challenge in that finding examples in nice condition is almost as difficult as finding the rare variations themselves.

I am hopeful that this article will assist general Japanese militaria collectors in identifying their Type 26 acquisitions. If there are any questions or comments on identifying your Type 26, please contact me at [danlarkin@suddenlink.net](mailto:danlarkin@suddenlink.net). Thank you and good hunting.