Winchester Models 1905 , 1907, & 1910

By Austin Reville

Winchester Model 1905 Semi-Automatic Rifle .32 Win. Self-Loading

Firearms today are built with ease of use in mind. Shooters today do not have to worry about much these days when it comes to the actual function and maintenance of their firearms. Most firearms are semi-automatic (meaning that the fire with each pull of the trigger) and do not require manual loading of the cartridge. This is a relatively new concept.

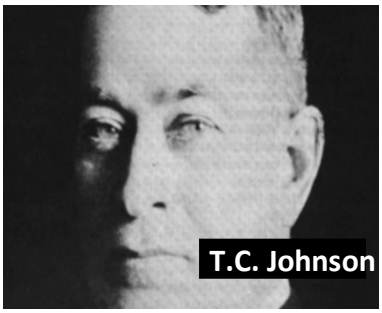
Up until the late 1850's firearms were muzzle loaders and difficult to operate, maintain, and manipulate in use. They were predominantly single shot and had to be manually reloaded before being used again. This all changed right before and during the Civil War. Firearm technology leaped ahead with reloading speed in mind. Henry came out with the .44 Mag Lever Action Repeater and the infamous Sharps Carbine was a breach loader that could be fired and reloaded three times as quickly as the standard muzzle loader.

These designs still had some drawbacks, however. They were still manually operated firearms that did not "self-load" the next round into the chamber. From a pure military perspective, they had a slow rate of fire compared to modern Battle Rifles. While one would think of this as a drawback, the U.S. Military considered this a strength.

Krag–Jørgensen Rifle of 1892 in .30-40 Krag

The United States Military approved the Krag–Jørgensen rifle in 1892 due to its slower loading rate. In the mind of the Military, slower loading equaled slower firing which meant a lower cost of operation. By the time the Spanish American War broke out in the 1891, the Spanish used the German designed Gewehr 1888 rifle that featured a stripper clip fed internal magazine. The much higher rate of fire gave them an advantage over American troops during the conflict.

Despite all of this, the U.S. Military was still not looking for a Semi-Auto rifle to feature with its troops. That would not come until the late 1930's and early 1940's in the lead up to World War II. However, inventors all over the world were looking at the next progression in firearm technology.



Hiram Stevens Maximum invented the fully automatic machine gun with his recoil-operated machine gun in 1884. The very next year, in 1885, a young man by the name of T.C. Johnson joined the Winchester Arms company. He began tinkering on a semi-automatic rifle that would feature the "self-loading" component like the machine gun, but at a slower more controlled rate of fire.

Winchester Model 1903 Rimfire Self-Loading

In 1903 he would succeed with the Model 1903 Winchester Rimfire rifle. It was America's first semi-auto rifle. Quickly understanding the need for a larger caliber version of this weapon, Johnson quickly followed it up with the Winchester Model 1905 self-loading rifle. This first centerfire rifle cartridge rifle would spark the beginning of a new era in firearm innovation and alter the future of firearms forever.

There are three subsequent models of this rifle. The Model 1907 and 1910 would follow this 1905 design. Only minor changes would be made to the different models, mostly in the caliber and magazine options offered. The Model 1905 had a 5 or 10 round magazine that you could purchase and came in two different calibers. These were the .32 Winchester Self-Loading Cartridge and the .35 Winchester Self-Loading Cartridge.

Winchester Model 1907 Semi-Automatic Rifle .351 Win. Self-Loading

All three models are a blow-back operated design and feature the charging handle as a "plunger" under the barrel. For military service the Model 1905 saw very little to none. Its sister model, the 1907, served during World War I with France, the U.K., Russian Empire, Italy, and the U.S. in albeit small and limited numbers.

The Model 1907 made some improvements to the magazine's capacity and allowed for a 5, 10, or 15 round magazines. Winchester and T.C. Johnson upped the caliber for this model to .351 Self-Loading which has a muzzle velocity somewhat like a .30-30. The recoil on these rifle designs are more pronounced than modern semi-autos due to its blow-back operating system.

Winchester Model 1910 Semi-Automatic Ri-

Modern rifles use a gas system to operate the reloading mechanism due to it being easier on the shooter. The Model 1907 has become the more famous of the trio due to its resurgence in the video game Battlefield 1 which is set on the battlefields of World War I. In searching for a semi-auto rifle to ease the gaming experience for modern gamers, the developers implemented the plausible and lightly used Winchester Model 1907 as an option for gamers to choose from.

T.C. Johnson's follow up the 1907 was the final iteration of this model the 1910. This was a step back in magazine capacity as it only sported a 4-round magazine. However, the caliber was upped to a .401 Winchester Self-Loading cartridge and was ordered by the French and Russian militaries during the war. Unfortunately, the exact amount of these rifles ordered is unknown and lost to time.

While these rifles were available during the First Would War, their appearance on the battlefield would have been rare at best. The Springfield 1903 and Enfield Pattern 1917 rifles such as the Eddystone made famous by Sergeant York, were much more common. Most of this is due to the fact that all three of these models were extremely expensive for their time.

These rifles retailed at $28 a rifle which would equal early $887 dollars in 2024. Given that the average salary per year in the United States was $750 in 1912, these rifles were extremely cost prohibitive to own. Their main success lay in military orders but even that would be small in comparison to modern gun sales. The Model 1905 would remain in production up through 1920. The Model 1907 would be produced all the way until 1957 and the Model 19190 would end production in 1965.

While these rifles remained in production for decades after their design, they are a bit forgotten in history when it comes to the rifles of the era. The Great Depression would have a major negative impact on the production of these weapons. However, the biggest blow to the popularity of these rifles would be done by the Winchester Company itself. In 1938 the U.S. infantry requested development for a carbine for use by troops. While the final design was not approved until 1940, the M1 Carbine was developed and became a staple of both World War 2 and the Korean War.

This development slowed the production of the models 1905, 1907, and 1910 and eventually over came them. The M1 Carbines iconic place in WW2 history and approval by the men that carried them overshadowed its earlier cousin. In a post war era following the defeat of Japan, Italy, and Nazi Germany the availability of surplus and cheap M1 Carbines and the familiarity of the platform boosted the sales of the M1 Carbine and replaced the models 1905-1910 in terms of the American public.

Today, the models 1905, 1907, and 1910 are mostly relegated to history. A forgotten piece of firearm innovation that pushed forward what we could do with firearms. Without these steps the modern arms we enjoy today, such as the AR15, may not have come into existence. The understanding of self-loading and the mechanisms that would be used to accomplish that were taken from the lessons these three models provided us. We owe a great deal to Mr. T.C. Johnson and his innovation.

For a closer look at the Models 1905 and 1910 please check out our Youtube Channel @2IBST for more!