

# WINCHESTER MODEL 1895 RUSSIAN MUSKET

*By Marc Gorelick, VGCA, PACA, OGCA, FDHAS*

## The Model 1895

The Model 1895 was the first Winchester rifle to feature a fixed box magazine located under the action instead of the tubular magazine design of previous Winchester lever action rifles. This allowed the rifle to safely chamber military and hunting cartridges with the new spitzer bullets. The M1895 was also the last of the lever-action rifles to be designed by John Browning, and featured a rear locking bolt as in his previous designs. The Model 1895 is the strongest lever-action rifle Winchester produced, designed to handle the increased pressures generated by the more powerful smokeless powder cartridges entering common use at the time of its introduction.



*Fig 1 – Winchester Model 1895 Russian Musket Photo Courtesy of National Firearms Museum*

Winchester produced some 425,881 Model 1895s between 1896 and the early 1930s (different sources list different dates for the end of production, citing between 1931 and 1936). The new model was offered in variety of calibers that were previously only available in Winchester single shot rifles, including the .30-40 Krag (.30 US or .30 Army), .38-72, and .40-72. In 1898 the .303 British was added to the lineup, followed by .35 Winchester (1903), .405 Winchester (1904), .30-03 (1905), .30-06 (1908) and finally 7.62mm x 54R (7.62mm Russian). As with most Winchester arms of the era, the guns were produced in a variety of models, including carbines (22" barrels), rifles (typically 24"-26" barrels) and muskets (military configuration with sling swivels, 28" barrels and bayonet lugs) and a couple of special "NRA" models with 24" and 30" barrels respectively. Blued barrels and receivers were standard. The Russian contract rifles were of the musket pattern. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the term "musket" meant a long infantry rifle with a stock extending almost to the muzzle. They were patterned on the Model 1895 military rifles that Winchester tried to sell to New York State for its National Guard in 1896 and on the 10,000 military rifles that Winchester sold to the U.S. War Department in 1898 for possible service in the Spanish-American War.



*Fig 2 – Winchester Model 1895 Russian Musket Photo Courtesy of National Firearms Museum*

## **World War 1 and the Russian Contract**

With the advent of the First World War Winchester attempted to sell the Model 1895 to Great Britain. Winchester offered the rifles in musket form, chambered for the .303 Mk. VII cartridge, with a bayonet. Although Britain was in need of rifles, it preferred a bolt action rifle of its own design, resulting in Britain ordering Enfield Pattern 1914 rifles from Winchester and Remington.

The Czarist Russian Empire entered the war lacking enough rifles to equip its armies. It also lacked the industry to produce enough arms to equip its armies. An assessment by Russian planners revealed that not only was there a serious shortfall in arms to equip existing troops, but that they could not replace battlefield losses nor equip an expanding army in order to resist the combined attacks of Germany and Austria. For instance, during the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914, many of the Russian troops had no rifles. They were told to pick up the rifles of fallen comrades. By December 1914 there were 800,000 fully trained troops stuck in rear area camps who could not be sent to the front because there were no rifles to equip them. The situation was so bad that the Russian General Staff issued an emergency order to purchase any rifle overseas, regardless of caliber, as long as enough ammunition could also be supplied. These purchases included Japanese Arisaka Type 30 and Type 38 rifles carbines chambered in 6.5x50mm and even some 7mm Arisakas that were originally destined for Mexico but were undelivered because General Huerta's government was overthrown in 1914. But this still didn't help Russia as many European manufacturers were already producing modern rifles full bore for their own countries' armies and Russia needed millions of arms. Further, the various rifles purchased (many were obsolete) and different caliber ammunition created enormous logistics problems for Russia. For instance, one infantry regiment is documented as having rifles with 10 different calibers.

Russia then turned to the industrial might of the United States to manufacture large numbers of its standard Mosin-Nagant rifles. It placed large orders with two American manufacturers. The first order, signed on January 26, 1915, was with Remington Arms for one million Model 1891 Mosin-Nagant rifles with bayonets. Subsequent contracts with Remington and Westinghouse were for an additional 2,300,000 Mosin-Nagant rifles. However, it would take time for Remington and Westinghouse to build the factories, purchase, install and tool up equipment, and hire and train a workforce in order to start producing Mosin-Nagants and Russia needed the rifles as soon as possible.

Seeing a business opportunity Winchester offered the Model 1895 rifle in military musket form in the Russian 7.62x54mmR cartridge to the Russians for almost immediate production. Winchester claimed that it could modify the rifle to accept the Russian cartridge and start production in six weeks. The promise of fast delivery was a major factor in Russia's decision to purchase the Winchester Model 1895. The desperate Russian government accepted Winchester's offer and on November 13, 1914 placed an order for 100,000 Model 1895s, each with a bayonet and scabbard, a sling with quick detach swivels, and tools. A second order for an additional 200,000 rifles and accessories was placed on August 27, 1915. The average net price of the first 100,000 rifles was \$23.40 per set and the net price of the second 200,000 rifles and accessories was \$27.15 each. In addition, Russia placed an order with Winchester on May 17, 1915 for 300 million rounds of Russian 7.62x54mmR ammunition of which 174 million rounds were delivered.



*Fig 3 – Winchester Model 1895 US Army Military Musket. Winchester had manufactured 10,000 for the US Army for use in the Spanish-American War but they were delivered too late for that conflict. The Army had trialed the rifle in the Philippines but never adopted it.  
Photo Tim Prince, College Hill Arsenal*

Winchester was unable to meet its claim of being able to start producing the rifles in six weeks. In fact, production did not start for six months. This delay was due for a variety of reasons. The factory had to be set up because commercial Model 1895 receiver production had stopped and conversion from a small special order operation to large scale military production was more difficult than anticipated. The Russians required a number of modifications that proved difficult. Modifying the Model 1895 for the Russian 7.62x54mmR cartridge, designing and engineering the stripper clip charging guide loading bridge and guides, and Russian rear sight took longer than anticipated. In addition, the Russians failed to provide inspection gauges and refused to let Winchester use its own inspection gauges. Russian inspectors also perversely refused to allow Winchester to use its own ammunition for testing even though the ammunition was made under contract for Russia. Instead, ammunition had to be shipped from Russia by ship, further delaying production.

Once production started the Russian inspectors continued to prove difficult. For instance, they rejected many rifles for insignificant flaws such as the wood grain in the stocks not being straight enough. Winchester later sold these rejected rifles, which were fully functional, on the commercial market. One can surmise that the Russian inspectors were incompetent or were throwing up artificial difficulties in order to solicit bribes from Winchester. In any case, despite the delays, Winchester completed the first Russian Model 1895 contract on November 30, 1915, only two weeks late. The second contract was completed in December 1916.

Of the 300,000 Russian Model 1895 muskets that Winchester produced under the contracts, 293,818 muskets were delivered to Russia. The 6,182 difference between the 300,000 contracted for and those delivered can be attributed to losses in transit. The muskets were shipped via merchant ship and German U-boats and bad weather probably contributed to the losses. Serial numbers of the Model 1895 muskets from the first contract fall within 72,038 – 174,234, while rifles from the second contract fall within the 174-234 – 377,412 serial number range.

### **Russian Model 1895 Musket Description**

The Winchester Model 1895 Russian Musket is similar to the earlier U.S. Military Model 1895 Musket that Winchester produced for the U.S. Army. However, the Russians required a number of modifications to suit their needs.

The rifle is a little over 46 ¼ inches long and weighs 8 pounds 11 ounces. The 28 inch long nickel-steel barrel has six groove rifling and a 1 in 12 inch twist rate. The rifle is a lever action with a single column fixed box vertical magazine that holds five 7.62x54mmR cartridges. Metal parts were blued.

It is chambered for the Russian 7.62x54mmR cartridge that used the Model 1908 Spitzer bullet. This bullet weighed 150 grains and had a muzzle velocity of 2,800 feet per second.



*Fig. 4 – Russian 7.62x54mmR Cartridge. Photo Public Domain.*



*Fig 5 – Winchester Russian Model 1895 receiver (right side). Note “keeper eye” on the front of the magazine. Photo – Bill Chronister*



*Fig 6 – Winchester Russian Model 1895 receiver, action open. Photo – Bill Chronister*



The Russian Model 1895 has a three-piece walnut musket-style stock with an oiled finish. The pieces are the buttstock, forestock and handguard. It has a curved shotgun-style buttplate with a sliding trapdoor that allowed access to a compartment in the buttstock that held a cleaning kit (pull-through and disassembly tool). There are two barrel bands, both of which have sling swivels. There is also a sling swivel in the bottom of the buttstock for a quick detach sling swivel, and a “keeper eye” on the front of the magazine to which a sling swivel can be attached. The front barrel band has a lug for a Winchester-made knife bayonet.



*Fig 7 – Buttstock with sliding trapdoor to compartment for cleaning kit and disassembly tool. Photo – Bill Chronister*



*Fig 8 – Detail of quick detach sling swivel on the buttstock. Photo – Bill Chronister*



*Fig 9 – Detail of front barrel band, front sight and bayonet lug. Photo – Bill Chronister*

The rear sight is in the form of a base with steps and a folding leaf. It is calibrated for the Russian cartridge, using the same calibration as the Mosin-Nagant rifle. The sight is marked in Russian arshins, a Russian linear unit of measurement. One arshin equals 28 inches or .78 yards. The rear sight base is graduated in 400 to 1,400 arshins in increments of 200 arshins corresponding to the steps in the base. The leaf was graduation is 1,500 to an optimistic 3,200 arshins in increments of 100 arshins. The front sight is a ramp style with a sighting blade pinned to it.



*Fig 10 – Winchester Russian Model 1895 rear sight. Photo – Tim Prince, College Hill Arsenal*

The Russian Model 1895 Musket is distinguished from other Winchester 1895 muskets by the specially designed two-piece loading bridge with guides for stripper clips or chargers. A major requirement of the Russian government was for the Model 1895 to be able to use the same stripper clips as the Mosin-Nagant rifle. This speeded loading (increasing the rate of fire) and was a point of commonality with the standard Russian army rifle. The stripper clips bridge/guide are attached with screws, one on each side of the frame.





*Fig 11 – Winchester Russian Model 1895 receiver, action open showing the 2-piece loading bridge with guides for stripper clips. Photo – Bill Chronister*



*Fig 12 – Winchester Russian Model 1895 receiver, action open 2-piece showing stripper clip with ammunition inserted into loading bridge. Photo – Bill Chronister*

## **Markings**

The left side of the receiver has the Winchester markings:

**MANUFACTURED BY THE WINCHESTER REPEATING ARMS CO. NEW HAVEN CONN. U.S.A  
PATENTED NOV.5.95.NOV.12.95.AUG.17.97.JAN.25.98.AUG.28.98.AUG.6.1907.**



*Fig 13 – Winchester markings on left side of receiver. Photo – Bill Chronister*

The top of the receiver is marked with the stylized WP in an oval over the caliber:

WP  
7.62  
M.M.



*Fig 14 – Markings on top of receiver. Photo – Bill Chronister*

The upper tang is marked:

**MODEL 1895  
-WINCHESTER-  
TRADE MARK REG US PAT OFF & FGN**



*Fig 15 – Winchester Model 1895 markings on upper tang. Photo – Bill Chronister*

The lower tang, which is underneath the lever when it is closed, has the serial number stamped laterally across it.



Russian inspectors were assigned to the various American factories that were manufacturing arms for Russia. It appears that their inspection stamps were not standardized and different factories had different inspection marks. The final inspection mark for Winchester Model 1895 rifles was the Cyrillic letters

**Хи3** inside a box.

This was stamped on the forward edge of the right side of the receiver, on the barrel under the handguard, and on the right side of the buttstock near the buttplate.



*Fig 16 – Russian inspection stamp on the right side of the receiver. Photo – Bill Chronister*

## **Bayonets**

Each Model 1895 that Winchester supplied to the Russians came with a leather sling and blade bayonet with a steel scabbard that had an attached leather loop. There were two different types of bayonets; a short bayonet and a long bayonet. The first 25,811 bayonets were the short ones. They are 12 5/8 inches long with an 8 3/16 inch long blade that is one inch wide. It weighs 13 ounces and has a two-piece walnut grip. The grip panels are held in place with flat rivets.

The Russians, however, believed that a longer bayonet would be more effective in close combat so Winchester supplied longer bayonets. These are 20 7/16 inches long with a 16 inch long blade that is one inch wide. It weighs 16 ounces and has the same two-piece walnut grip as the shorter bayonet.

Both short and long bayonets have a muzzle ring diameter of 5/8 inch. They are both marked on the flat of the front of the cross guard, facing the blade:

**WINCHESTER REPEATING ARMS CO.**

## **Russian and Latvian Use of the Model 1895**

The Winchester Model 1895 Russian Muskets saw a great deal of use during and after World War I. Although written records are hard to come by, there is enough photographic evidence showing that the rifles were well used. Russia issued the Model

1895s to front line units almost as fast as they arrived and the rifles saw extensive combat against the German and Austro-Hungarian Armies. For example, Model 1895s played a part in the bloody Brusilov Offensive in Galicia during June to September 1916. When the Austro-Hungarian army counterattacked, General Aleksei Brusilov's entrenched Russian troops, many armed with Winchester Model 1895s repulsed them with heavy casualties. According to an Austrian official history:

“Our advancing soldiers were met with fierce fire from the entrenched Russians, who used their Maxim machine guns to great effect, supported by repeating rifle-fire that proved insurmountable to overcome. We were forced to retreat with heavy losses and use our artillery, which was superior, to break up the enemy's lines.”

Brusilov's offensive is credited with breaking the back of the Austro-Hungarian Army which suffered about 600,000 dead and wounded and about 400,000 soldiers taken prisoner. It is estimated that the German Army, which came to the assistance of the Austrians, suffered about 350,000 dead and wounded. Turkish forces were not heavily involved and suffered 12,000 casualties.



*Fig 17 – Russian troops with Winchester M1895 Rifles. Photo Public Domain.*

Besides supplying Winchester Model 1896 Muskets to Russian formations, Russia also issued them to volunteer battalions from Eastern Europe, Finland, Latvia and Estonia. As the war progressed many of the volunteer battalions were combined into regiments and larger units. For example, Latvian battalions were combined to the Latvian Riflemen Division. Two brigades of the Latvian Riflemen, many of whom were armed with Winchester Model 1895 Muskets, took part in the Russian Christmas Battles offensive near Jelgava, Latvia in January 1917. The Latvian brigades were the spearhead of the Russian attack and took the first two German defensive lines. These units took extremely heavy casualties due to lack of support by Russian units (several

Siberian regiments mutinied and refused to move forward) and incompetent leadership by the Russian High Command. The bitter fighting ceased when temperatures fell to minus (–) 36 degrees Fahrenheit. The heavy casualties resulted in a strong resentment against the Russian generals and the Tsar among the riflemen. This resentment led to Latvian Riflemen support for the Bolsheviks, who were advocating an end to the war. The Latvians believed that the Bolsheviks would be amenable to granting Latvia its independence. Latvian troops, many armed with the Model 1895, supported the Bolsheviks, taking part in the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917. Lenin depended on them to gain control of Russia and Latvian troops from the Riflemen Division protected him and the Kremlin while savagely putting down uprisings against the Bolsheviks.

Although the Winchesters generally gave a good account of themselves when used by the Russians in static defensive positions, they had a number of serious flaws when used in modern combat. There was a reason why bolt actions were becoming the standard military action by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Winchester's action proved more susceptible to fouling and jamming than the bolt action in the dirt and mud of the then-modern battlefield. The lever action was more complicated than the bolt action. Several contemporary military sources noted that working the Model 1895's lever action and reloading it while trying to stay low in the prone position was rather more difficult than operating a bolt action rifle. And unlike many service arms, the Winchester Model 1895 did not have any real safety – only the half-cock position of the hammer. Finally, it was easier to lose the sight picture when working the lever than when working a bolt action. Clearly, the Russian purchase of the Winchester Model 1895 was a wartime expedient.



*Fig. 18 - Latvian Rifleman with Winchester Model 1895. Photo Public Domain.*





*Fig 19 - Latvian troops during the Russian Revolution with Winchester Model 1895s.  
Photo – Author's Collection.*

During the Russian Revolution Winchester Model 1895s were used by both Red and White Russian troops and volunteers. After the revolution, the Russians put them into storage. Besides being used in the Russian Revolution, Winchester Model 1895 Russian Muskets were used by both sides in by the Latvian and Estonian Wars of Independence, the Finnish Civil War and the Polish-Soviet War.



*Fig 20 – Russian Red volunteers in Moscow during the Revolution. Most are carrying Mosin-Nagant rifles, however the two in the front row on the left (one is uniform the other in civilian clothes) appear to have Winchester Model 1895s. Photo Public Domain.*

## Finnish Use of the Model 1895

Thousands of Russian Winchester Model 1895s were used by both sides in the Finnish Civil War which took place from January 27 to May 15, 1918. A Grand Duchy in Russia, until the collapse of the Tsarist Russian Empire, Finland became autonomous in March 1917. Economic and political turmoil was exacerbated by the October Revolution in Russia. The Civil War was a conflict between the *Reds or Red Guards*, led by the Social Democratic Party, and the *Whites or White Guards*, led by General Mannerheim and the non-socialist, conservative-led senate, for the control of Finland during the transition to an independent state. The Whites were supported by Germany and Sweden, and the Reds by Bolshevik Russia. The Whites won.



*Fig 21 – Finnish “White” volunteers with Winchester Model 1895s. Photo Public Domain.*



*Fig 22 – Left. Finnish Red Guard soldier (Punakaarti) in 1918 with Winchester Model 1895. Photo Public Domain.*

*Fig 23 – Right. Finnish Red Guard soldier with Winchester Model 1895. The paramilitary Reds were composed chiefly by urban industrial and agrarian workers and were supported and supplied by Soviet Russia. The conservative White Guards, with the help of units of the Imperial German Army, defeated the Reds in a vicious Civil War that saw the use of terrorism and mass executions. Photo Public Domain.*





*Fig 24 - Finnish Red home guard women during the Finnish Civil War 1918. The second from the left and middle woman are holding Winchester Model 1895s. Photo – Public Domain*



*Fig 25 – Victorious White Guards during victory parade after taking Helsinki during the Civil War, 1918. Note the Winchester Model 1895s being carried by the officer in front and several others in the first ranks. Photo Public Domain.*



According to one Finnish author, during the Civil War the Winchester Model 1895 gained a reputation as an “elite” weapon, which led to many being taken home as war souvenirs. It was found that they made excellent hunting weapons and many in private hands were sporterized. After the Civil War the Model 1895 remained in the new Finnish army’s inventory, even though there weren’t that many of them. Their use was also limited by a shortage of spare parts for repairs. Those that weren’t put into storage were issued to artillery, rear echelon and specialist troops. As Finland standardized on the Mosin-Nagant, most of these were retired and warehoused. During this time, about 1920 to about 1938, large numbers were transferred to non-military government authorities and a few were sold to civilians.

When Finland went to war with the Soviet Union in the Winter War (1939-40), those Model 1895s remaining in inventory were issued mostly to Home Guard units, rear echelon and reserve troops and some artillery units. As reserve and Home Guard troops moved up the front, their Winchester lever action rifles went with them. However, due to combat losses and their replacement by captured Russian Mosin-Nagants by 1940 less than 1,700 remained in service. Most were withdrawn from service and few were used during the Continuation War (1941-1944). In 1950 the Finnish Army sold its last remaining 503 Model 1895s to military personnel.



*Fig 26 - Finnish troops circa 1939 marching with a variety of weapons. Note the soldier on the right has a Russian contract Winchester Model 1895. Photo courtesy of Finnish Defense Forces, Finnish Wartime Photograph Archives, SA-KUVO.*

Among Finnish civilians the Winchester Model 1895 rifle gained the reputation of being a good quality hunting rifle. Unfortunately for collectors of military arms many Finnish civilian owners sporterized and modified them to chamber larger caliber ammunition – the 8.2x53mmR cartridge was very popular. This was because early Finnish hunting legislation forbid the hunting of elk with a rifle of less than 8mm caliber.

## The Winchester Model 1895 in the Spanish Civil War

When civil war broke out in Spain in 1936 both sides looked abroad for arms and assistance. The Republicans turned to the Soviet Union among others and the Russians grabbed this opportunity to off-load a hodge-podge of surplus arms in exchange for Spanish gold. The Soviets took large numbers of their non-standard or obsolete arms out of storage and shipped them to the Republicans, for a price. Among them were thousands of surplus Winchester Model 1895 Russian Muskets. Although the Winchesters started life as well made, sturdy weapons, their condition on arriving in Spain is unknown. Although documentation is scarce, it appears that at least two shipments of 9,000 Model 1895s each is documented as having taken place in 1936. The Russian ship *Andreev* arrived at Bilbao from Leningrad on October 26 with 9,000 Winchesters among its cargo. Records indicate that the Russian ship *Kursk* arrived at Bilbao from Sevastopol on November 3 with another 9,000 Winchester Model 1895 Muskets as part of its cargo. The total number of Russian Winchesters shipped to Spain and what units, if any, used them is not known. Some of the records are incomplete, others are vague in their descriptions of the arms.

After General Francisco Franco's Nationalists won the Spanish Civil War in 1939 his government collected all the serviceable arms recovered from both sides and sent them to Spanish arsenals for overhaul and repair. The arsenals reblued the metal parts, refinished the wooden parts and often (but not always) removed such markings as Russian inspectors' stamps from the metal and wood. They then stamped the Spanish mark – an **MP** over **8** inside a flaming bomb on the buttstock. In the 1950's many of these rifles were sold and imported into the United States and can occasionally be found on the market.



*Fig. 27 - Spanish "MP 8 in a bomb" arsenal mark. It can be found on a number of rifles rebuilt in Spanish arsenals after the Spanish Civil War. This includes former Russian Winchester Model 1895s that Franco's victorious Nationalists seized from the defeated Republicans. There are minor differences in the stamps. Illustration by author.*

### Collector Notes

The Winchester Model 1895 Russian Musket is of great historical interest to collectors. The design showed the genius John Moses Browning. The Russian contracts were the last major military orders for lever action rifles. The muskets saw combat not only with the Imperial Russian Army, but also in the Russian Revolution, the Latvian and Estonian Wars of Independence, by Finland in its Civil War and the two wars against the Soviet Union, in the Spanish Civil War, and possibly other conflicts.

Winchester Model 1895 Muskets that served in the Imperial Russian Army were used hard. Many of the photographs that depict Russian soldiers holding or using them the

Winchesters show hard use. Much of the bluing is gone from the receiver and other metal parts. The same is true of photographs showing them being used by Latvian troops and in Finland. Russian Winchester Model 1895 today will often show signs of hard usage. Besides the loss of bluing and the usual dings and dents in the wood, in some cases the Russian inspectors' cartouche will be gone or other stamps will be worn down. Although they are not common, they can be found on the collector market. Those rifles that were rejected by the Russian inspectors and sold by Winchester on the commercial market will often be in better condition but will, of course, lack the Russian inspection marks.



*Fig 28 – Russian Winchester Model 1895. Photo Bill Chronister*

Surplus Winchester Model 1895 Russian Muskets that came from Spain will often be in decent shape as most were sent to an arsenal for overhaul and repair. These rifles were often given a dark blue finish on their metal parts and the wood was often refinished as part of the rebuild or refurbishment process. They should have the Spanish arsenal mark on the stock and may or may not still retain the Russian Inspector marks. They are occasionally found on the American collectors market.

Not many Finnish Model 1895s have been seen on the American market, especially not in their original military musket configuration. Many that were sold to, or kept by, Finnish civilians were converted to sporting or hunting rifles. A Finnish Winchester Model 1895 in original musket configuration with Russian and Finnish marks (often the letters **SA** inside a box) would be a real find for a collector.