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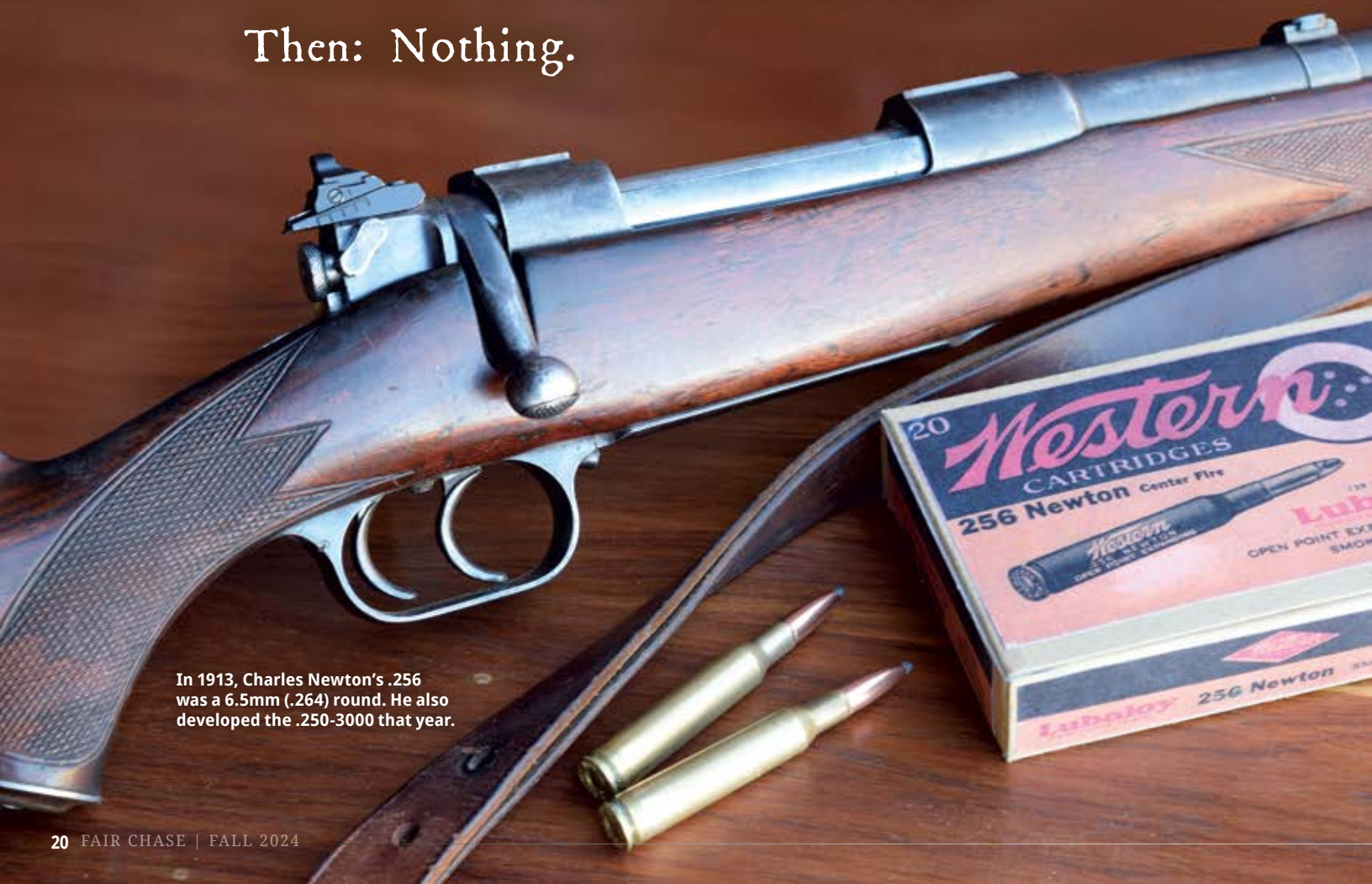
An Empty Decade?

After the Great War, the industry rallied with bolt rifles and cartridges to match.

Then: Nothing.



In 1913, Charles Newton's .256 was a 6.5mm (.264) round. He also developed the .250-3000 that year.

Jack O'Connor adored the .270, announced in 1925 in Winchester's first successful bolt rifle, the 54. Read more about Jack O'Connors adventures on page 60.

In 1920 the 18th Amendment nixed alcohol; the 19th gave women the vote. Flappers decried one, cheered the other. By mid-decade, radios and electric stoves changed how Americans got news and boiled eggs. Detroit built 9,000 Ford Model Ts daily and peddled them for $260, $590 less than their 1908 price.

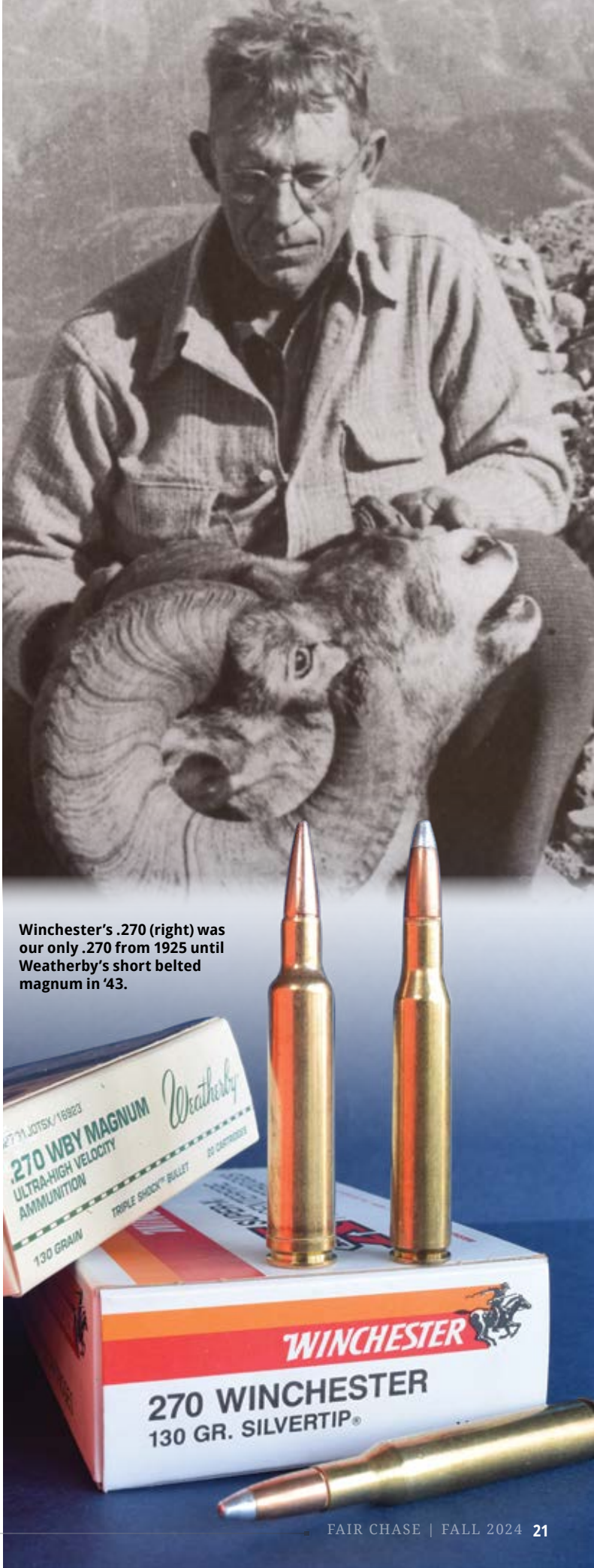
Winchester's contribution to 1925 was a new rifle. Its earlier bolt actions had not fared well. The tube-fed Hotchkiss .45-70 had armed U.S. troops beginning in 1879 but faded four years later. A few of the 1883 version remained in uniform until benched by the 1895 Lee Navy, which served the Marines and Navy as a first-line infantry rifle until 1907. In civilian form, this .236-bore rifle hung around nine more years. During WWI, Winchester built Pattern 14 and Model 1917 Enfields for U.S. and British troops. By 1922 a sporting rifle was in the works. It appeared three years later as the 7-3/4-pound Model 54. Its cock-on-open bolt borrowed heavily from the '98 Mauser's, but it had the '03 Springfield's coned breech and a Newton-style ejector. The nickel steel barrel and slender stock with shotgun butt were nicely contoured.

Winchester offered the first 54s in .30-06 and .270 (eight more chamberings to follow). While the .270 was as new as the rifle, some gunrag gurus gave it only a shrug. Jack O'Connor, *Outdoor Life* Arms and Ammunition editor from 1942 to '72, claimed his predecessor Charlie Askins never wrote of the .270. Ned Crossman and *Field & Stream*'s Paul Curtis apparently gave it tepid reviews. An *American Rifleman* report came three years late. But Townsend Whelen and *Sport's Afield*'s Monroe Goode treated it kindly.

The .270 arrived in an era dominated by 6.5mm cartridges (.264 bullets). The 6.5x55 Swedish and 6.5x54 Mannlicher-Schoenauer excelled in uniform and out. The 7x57 (.284 bullet) rode the 1892 Mauser to lasting fame. Perhaps Winchester wanted to pitch a truly American cartridge of different measure than ammo that had bloodied U.S. troops in Cuba and France.

O'Connor's first .270, a Model 54, took a deer in the fall of 1925. At 200 yards, from the sit over open sights, he winced at the sodden tunk – a hit too far back. He tracked the beast, killing it with another shot. Impressed by the effect of the little 130-grain bullets, O'Connor had that 54 re-stocked and installed a Lyman 48 receiver sight.

The stock market implosion of '29 sent Winchester Repeating Arms hurtling



Winchester's .270 (right) was our only .270 from 1925 until Weatherby's short belted magnum in '43.

toward receivership. In December 1931, Western Cartridge Company bought all assets. Under John Olin, Western kept the 54 alive. T.C. Johnson and his engineers refined the rifle they'd built and added nine new versions. In 1936, their last full production year, Model 54s were priced from $59.75 to $111.

Late in 1936, the Winchester Model 70 improved on the 54 with a separate bolt stop, a safety that swung under scopes, and an action long enough for the belted .300 and .375 H&H Magnums. An instant hit, the 70 sold almost as well in .270 as in .30-06 through the 1950s. O'Connor published his enthusiasm for the .270. "I do not know of a better sheep cartridge," he declared in 1962. It would give him more than 35 game species, most from Model 70s.

In 1925, Western added the .300 H&H Magnum, or Super .30, to its roster. London's Holland & Holland shop began building hunting rifles in 1835 when tobacconist Harris Holland abruptly changed careers. His nephew Henry joined the business as an apprentice in 1861, becoming a partner six years later. In 1876, "Holland & Holland" replaced "H. Holland" as the firm's name of record. But Harris held tight to the checkbook until his death in 1896. At that time in England, cartridge design was part of gun-making.

The Holland shop listed the .300 in 1912, along with the .275 and .375 H&H. They share a belted case with a .532 rim, but the .275's hull is .35 shorter than the 2.85-inch .300 and .375 brass. The .300 has a gentler 8 ½-degree shoulder than the .375. Compatible with the spaghetti-like cordite powder of its day, that leggy husk glides silkily from magazine to chamber.

Ballistically, the Super .30 performed much like Charles Newton's sharp-shouldered .30. But the pale cordite strands loaded by the Brits were rich in nitroglycerine. Tropical heat hiked pressures from this fuel. As rifles in .300 H&H were likely to wind up in Africa or India, early charges were conservative, and the bullets delivered speeds we've come to expect from the .30-06. Current options are much friskier, with 150-grain bullets approaching 3,200 fps. With 180s at 2,950, the .300 H&H shoots about 15 percent flatter than the .30-06 and boasts a 10 percent advantage in wind. Driving 220- and 225-grain bullets at 2,600 fps, it carries the punch of Rigby's .350 Rimless Magnum, a British rival introduced in 1908.

Before it appeared as a charter chambering in Winchester's 70, the .300 H&H earned its keep as a fast-stepping medium-bore. New York's Griffin & Howe built rifles for it on Magnum Mauser actions. It got an unexpected boost from Ben Comfort, who in 1935 used it to win the 1,000-yard Wimbledon Match at Camp Perry. His 13-pound G&H rifle had a Remington 30S action, a prone stock by the shop's Ernest Kerner. Winchester supplied the heavy 30-inch barrel. Comfort fired his top score of 100-14V with a 10x Lyman Super Targetspot scope and Western factory loads.

In many ways, the mid-1920s and early '30s left hunters adrift, as if engineers and factory floors had delivered for a decade in 1925. The Remington Model 30 and Winchester 54 were arguably the first successful bolt rifles for both firms. But the .30-06 was the only cartridge available in both models that took full advantage of the strength and accuracy potential of those actions. Include, in all charity, the grizzled 7x57 (late to the Model 30S). The 54 alone offered the .270. For most shooters, the 1920s bumped along toward their finish like an empty wagon.

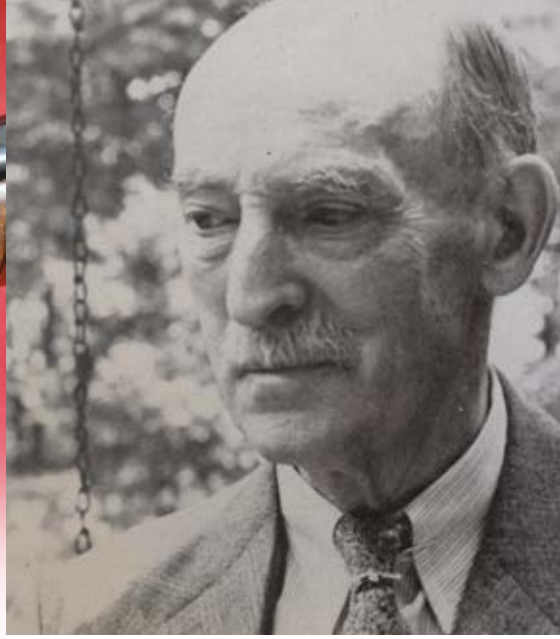
There was some logic to this vacuum in rifle and cartridge design. Military contracts had dried up, and hunters could not float the industry at the level supported by war. Hills and hollows affected greater society, too. Movies got sound as Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic in record time. But Prohibition powered underworld brutality that tested even aggressive new FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. In 1926, the Bureau tallied 12,000 murders. Across town, industrialists and Wall Street piled up profits.

The crash of '29 swept $26 billion in market value from stocks—this when a billion dollars was a lot of money. Depression defined not just the years to come but the national mood. Dust trailed drought across corn belt and prairie, obliterating horizons and, it seemed, a decade.

This Model 70 .270 shows the rifle's earliest form. It was drilled later for that 2 ½x Lyman Alaskan.

Wayne's .270 M70 with Lyman Alaskan took this buck in Oregon's Wallowa Mountains, about 1978.

Remington listed its Model 760 pump rifle in .270 — and, during the mid- to late 1950s, in .257 Roberts.



RIGHT: Ned Roberts (1866-1948) was an authority on single-shot rifles, but his .257 endures in bolt-actions.

MEN OF THE TIME

You'd have thought him an unlikely island of cheer. "... Only an ignoramous," he declared (his spelling), "would use loaded cartridges in a Scheutzen rifle [instead of] one shell ... reloaded for each shot." Furthermore: "A scope does not make a rifle shoot any more accurately; [it] only puts the old man with defective sight [on level footing with] younger men having good sight."

He was born in Goffstown, New Hampshire, the year after Lee surrendered to Grant. Bringing a passion for firearms into the cartridge era, he became an authority on single-shot rifles using black or low-pressure smokeless cast-bullet loads in 200-yard offhand matches. "The Germans call this the 'Schuetzen' rifle," he harrumphed, pointing out that as "the Germans started [both world wars]," he would write of it as a "match" or "target" rifle.

Ned Roberts was a man of his time.

He readily dispensed advice, leaving little to the enquirer's imagination: "You ask for good loads, [so] hunt up a Pope .32-40 bullet mold casting [Pope's] 200-grain taper bullet [and use] 1 to 25 or 1 to 30 tin and lead. Next, get some Remington No. 2-1/2 primers ... these are the best [for] small groups. Use only one shell, reloading it for each shot with 20, 21 or 22 grains bulk of DuPont I.M.R. #4227. [Insert] a sheet cork wad in the mouth of the shell to keep powder from spilling... breech seat the bullet 1/16 inch ahead of the case, and there you have a load that will make from 5/8- to 1-inch 10-shot groups at 100 yards [from a bench or] machine rest."

Bullets, he insisted, "must not be sized but shot as they come from the mold; you will have to try different bullet lubricants to get the right one ...." In a book on Roberts and Schuetzen rifles, G.O. Kelver listed this recipe: "Three parts mutton tallow, one part wax ... a teaspoonful plumbago to a pint ... thin [if needed] with a little sperm oil...." Or: "Vaseline and [just enough] paraffine to make the Vaseline hard enough [or a piece] the size of a good-sized duck egg to one pound of paraffine...."

Meanwhile, a new generation of shooters was firing service-rifle matches with Krag-Jorgensen and Springfield bolt-action repeaters and hunting with them. There was no need for cork, sperm oil, or sheep tallow!

Major Roberts was crusty but not hide-bound. Gun Editor for *Hunting and Fishing* magazine, he wrote too for *American Rifleman* and contributed to Phil Sharp's "Complete Guide to Handloading," an exhaustive book in its day. Roberts followed the work of custom rifle-builders and wildcatters. Adolph O. Neidner of Dowagiac, Michigan, was both.

Neidner's sense of line and proportion helped define the "classic" look in pre-war sporting rifles and endures in fetching contemporary bolt actions. His wildcatting included work on the 7x57 necked to .25. (Some reports date efforts in this vein to 1909 at Griffin & Howe.) Neidner is credited with birthing the .25-06 decades before Remington adopted the cartridge in 1969.

Roberts and Neidner surely discussed other .25 options. Bullets of that diameter were shackled by the .25-35 in 19th-century lever actions and the .25 Remington in pre-WW I autoloading and pump rifles. Charles Newton's .250-3000 had more spunk than those cartridges and, at its 1913 debut, a bright future in Savage's Model 1899. But that rifle's short action limited bullet types and velocities. By some accounts, Newton nudged Roberts toward the 7x57. His view was in line with Franklin

In 1934 Remington adopted the .257 Roberts (left) as a necked-down 7x57 with the original shoulder.

Mann's, whose trials with powders of the day pointed to a case like the .30-40 Krag's. Or the 7x57's. A .25 on either made sense for hunters craving a U.S. cartridge with the game-killing zip of Austria's 6.5x54 Mannlicher-Schoenauer. It would also send lightweight bullets on flat arcs over 'chuck pastures.

In 1928, after Roberts reduced the 7x57's shoulder angle to 15 degrees (reportedly at the urging of Townsend Whelen), Neidner chambered rifles for this .25 wildcat. Remington restored the original 20-degree, 45-minute shoulder six years later to catalog it as the .25 Roberts. In 1936, it appeared as the .257 Remington-Roberts. In those innocent days, before cartridge rosters became as dense as listings in phone directories, arms and ammunition companies took care not to confuse shooters. Remington didn't wish its new quarter-bore to be mistaken for its old .25 or for Roberts' original slope-shouldered round—let alone Winchester's .25-35! By the mid-'40s, it had become the .257 Roberts.

The first commercial rifle to chamber the .257 was Remington's Model 30S, a rifle that appeared in 1930 in .30-06. (Its predecessor, the 30 Express, an improvement on the unpopular 30A of 1921, had appeared in 1926.) The rifle's .30-06-length Enfield-style action could well have accepted .257 loads with pointed bullets seated out. Alas, Remington offered only a blunt 117-grain missile seated deep. It ate into powder and held exit velocity to 2,650 fps. The bullet's round nose braked it quickly in flight. Neither did the pressure of that load (50,000 psi, or 45,000 CUP) test the .30S's stout action.

In 1941, the Model 30S gave way to the Model 720, which also chambered the .257 Roberts. The 720 died early. In 1948, Remington announced its new, more economical 721/722 long—and short-action bolt rifles, listing the .257 in the 722. Four years later, the Model 760 pump rifle arrived. Shortly after, the .257 joined eight other chamberings in deluxe 760s. It sold in standard versions from 1955 to '58.

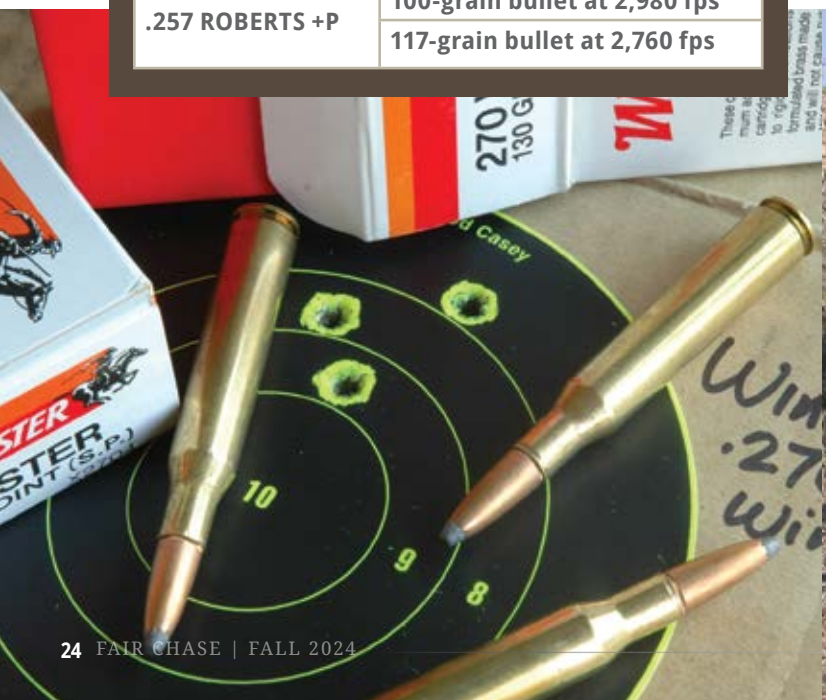
Winchester was not to be left without a .25. In 1935, it offered the Model 54 in .257 Roberts. A year later, as the Model 70 went into production, the .257 became a charter chambering in that rifle. By then the cartridge was getting attention from commercial rifle-makers offshore. A couple of years after its arrival, the 1952 Mannlicher-Schoenauer Carbine (in my view, one of the most desirable M-S models) appeared in .257, 6.5x54, 7x57, and .270. Surely, these rank among the best deer and sheep cartridges ever! The .30-06 and the then-new .308 were listed too. That year an M-S Sporting Carbine (or Rifle) fetched $205.75, a steep sum compared to prices for U.S. rifles. A Winchester 70 in .257 Roberts cost $120.95, a Remington 760 pump $104.40, a Remington 722 $82.80.

In 1955, Winchester unveiled its .243 on the .308 case, while Remington announced its .244 (later renamed the 6mm Remington) on .257 Roberts brass. Both launched 100-grain bullets at over 3,000 fps. The .257 had a 100-grain spitzer at 2,900 but was still tethered to the old 117-grain round-nose at 2,650. The 6mms, more than Remington's adoption of the .25-06 in 1969, put the skids under the .257 Roberts. It was absent on chambering rosters for Remington's Model 700, new in '62, and for Winchester's post-'64 Model 70. In the 1960s and early '70s, Browning chambered the .257 Roberts in its lovely FN High Power series and later in its A-Bolt and BLR lever-action. Ruger gave the Roberts a nod in 1972 in the Model 77 bolt rifle, later in the No. 1 single-shot. During the '80s, Remington and Winchester brought it back briefly in turn-bolts. Kimber has offered its 84M in .257.

A .257 Roberts "+P" won SAAMI approval in 1974. Heavier brass with more ambitious powder charges bumped pressures about 10 percent, to 58,000 psi (50,000 CUP); +P loads weren't recommended for pre-'98 Mausers or Remington 760s. SAAMI figures for velocity increases reflect the boost.

Some factory loads beat these figures. Nosler catalogs a 110-grain AccuBond at 3,000 fps, a 115-grain Ballistic Tip at 2,800. Not long ago Federal

.257 ROBERTS	87-grain bullet at 3,150 fps
	100-grain bullet at 2,880 fps
	117-grain bullet at 2,630 fps
.257 ROBERTS +P	100-grain bullet at 2,980 fps
	117-grain bullet at 2,760 fps



LEFT: The Winchester that gave Wayne this group was then nearly a century old. Buy a new deer rifle? Why? RIGHT: This Coues' deer fell to a 6mm (.244) Remington. After their 1955 debut, the .244 and Winchester's .243 put the skids under the .257.

had a 120-grain Nosler Partition at 2,800. Hornady sells a Superformance load with a 117-grain SST at a scorching 2,946 fps. At 400 yards, that bullet still clocks over 2,000 fps, its remaining 1,100 ft-lbs of punch edging that of many 140-grain 7x57 spitzers!

The .257 Roberts shares the "in-between" curse of its sibling, the 6mm Remington. Both evolved from the 7x57, a mid-length round Paul Mauser developed for his 1892 rifle. Case length is 2.24 inches, overall (loaded) length 3.06. The .30-06 case and those of its offspring are roughly 2.50 inches long, OAL 3.34. Actions for the .30-06 are under-served by mid-length cartridges. While short actions for the .308 and kin (2.02 cases, OALs of 2.75) accept some mid-length loads, Pinnochio-nose bullets must be seated deep, gobbling powder space. Handloaders get the most from this child of the Depression (and the sharp-shouldered .257 Ackley Improved) in Mauser actions or those for the .30-06.

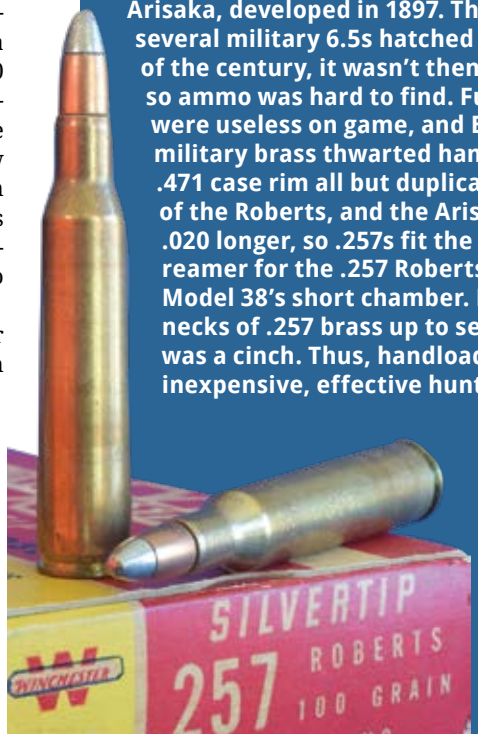
The .257 Roberts deserves more field time than I've given it. A Henriksen-stocked Mauser took a blacktail buck for me at 150 yards, as can many cartridges. But none as lethal are more civil! At the range with a new rifle, I turn to my Serengeti in .257 to ensure lousy groups aren't my fault. Gently, routinely, that rifle shoots into 3/4 inch.

Though there are better choices for big hoofed game in cover, a 110- to 120-grain .257 bullet, bonded or Partition, at 2,900 fps makes my short list of elk rounds.

Ned Roberts lived in a wonderful time to be a rifleman. But his contributions to the industry long out-lived him. Most notable: his civil, versatile .25. ■

SALVATION FOR THE ARISAKA

A tide of Japanese Model 38 infantry rifles arrived with GIs returning from WWII. Arms dealers bought some in quantity to peddle at bargain prices. The stout 38 fired the semi-rimless 6.5x50 Arisaka, developed in 1897. The shortest of several military 6.5s hatched around the turn of the century, it wasn't then loaded stateside, so ammo was hard to find. Full-jacket bullets were useless on game, and Berdan-primed military brass thwarted handloaders. But the .471 case rim all but duplicated the .473 rim of the Roberts, and the Arisaka cartridge was .020 longer, so .257s fit the magazine nicely. A reamer for the .257 Roberts "cleaned up" the Model 38's short chamber. Bumping the necks of .257 brass up to seat .264 bullets was a cinch. Thus, handloaders got an inexpensive, effective hunting rifle!



Mild loads safely served early rifles bored for the .257 Roberts; deep bullet seating cut hull capacity.