

Henry carbine

The **Henry Carbine** is a fictional gun, probably based on more than one firearm, namely the Henry repeating rifle, the Hawken rifle, as well as the Colt revolving rifle. It was established by German writer Karl May (1842-1912) (who wrote in his novels about Winnetou, Old Shatterhand and Kara Ben Nemsj) as a gun called the Henry Carbine (in German *Henrystutzen*) after its design engineer Mr. Henry, a fictional gunsmith from Saint Louis, who gave it to his friend, later famous in Karl May's fictional Wild West as Old Shatterhand and in his fictional Orient as Kara Ben Nemsj.

In the world of Karl May's novels this repeating carbine was capable of firing 25 times without reloading and was renowned (together with its owner) throughout the entire fictional Wild West and fictional Orient. Because it didn't need to be reloaded often (compared to more common rifles with one or two chambers) the native inhabitants of both Karl May's fictional Wild West and fictional Orient considered the firearm to be 'magic'.

In the story of 1881, *Die Both Shatters* (*The both Shatters*), Karl May described the earliest incarnation of his famous fictional gun: a certain Jake Hawkins from St. Louis made his *Henrystutzen* (Henry Carbine), which 'shoots 25 shots before reloading'^[1] (Middle of right column). (All citations in German, of original German texts in public domain from Karl-May-Gesellschaft in Germany, except the citation of *Commerce of the Prairies* by Josiah Gregg.)

The above statement evidences that Karl May knew of both the Hawken Brothers of St. Louis, who hand-made the famous Hawken Rifle^[2] and Benjamin Tyler Henry, the inventor of the repeating Henry Rifle. The 'secret rotating mechanism' came later

Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* was among Karl May's source and resource materials. Josiah Gregg had with him a Colt revolving rifle; Gregg's descriptions of how he used his revolving Colt rifle are echoed a number of times in Karl May's works. See text on pages 56 (Depart to Santa Fe) to 57 (Distances and Directions) of Ch 3, Vol 2 of *Commerce of the Prairies*^[3]. In *Satan & Ischariot*, the first person hero, Karl May's alter ego in the Wild West muses: ...the *Henrystutzen* caused trepidation through the mere mention of the name^[4] (Page 100).

Karl May describes his *Henrystutzen* as a firearm with a peculiar-looking magazine and/or firing mechanism; in 1880/1, his *Henrystutzen* (as well as his revolvers) still had safety mechanisms that others could not fathom or operate, as described in what later became known as *Through Wild Kurdistan*^[5]: [First person narrator] I meant the *Henrystutzen*. It, as well as the revolvers, were fitted with a safety mechanism that the man was unable to operate [...] I requested a knife from the antagonist: '...so that I can open the hammer.' [...] I took [the knife], pushed the safety mechanism back with the aid of its tip, although I could have done so with the slightest pressure of my finger [...]. (Search 'Henrystutzen' for one match in the relevant passage).

It is also in this story where the cartridges are described as 'small things' by the antagonist; and by 1885/86 at the latest, in the story *The Last Ride* (later included in the '*Orientzyklus*'), Karl May's own image of Old Shatterhand's unique, famous 'Magic' Rifle began to solidify when he made one of the antagonists belittle the 'toy' rifle and say: 'That stranger must have had rats in his head. This rifle is nothing but a toy for boys who are learning to parade. One cannot load it; one cannot shoot with it at all. Here is the barrel and there the butt; in between sits a steel sphere with many holes. What is the sphere for? To take the cartridges by chance? One cannot turn it! Where is the hammer? The trigger won't move. If the person were still alive I would invite him to fire a shot. He would be unable to do so, and would have to be ashamed!'^[6] (Version *Der Orientzyklus* - *In the Canyons of the Balkans*) (Second location of 'Ratten' in search)

By the time May wrote *The Treasure In Silver-Lake*, in 1891^[7], he had refined the spherical magazine, lock, and firing mechanism, or rather, he had done so one year earlier already, in a story called *Krueger Bei*^[8] (Version *Satan & Ischariot*, chapter *In Tunis*), (Search 'Daumen'), where he gives a shooting demonstration and turns the sphere continually with his thumb, to advance it and line up the holes that contain the cartridges with the barrel—he repeats the demonstration in the Silver-Lake novel; but Mr Henry, the one

who built Shatterhand's famous 'Magic' Rifle (The *Henrystutzen*) only made an appearance in 1893 for the first time, in *Winnetou I* in 1893 ^[9] (Page 13). Karl May, in his guise as the young German adventurer in the Wild West, visits his friend, Mr Henry, in his workshop in St. Louis: '...he took a polygonal piece of iron from a cabinet and began to file its edges. I noticed that every one of its many sides had one hole. [...] ... I asked: "Will this also become a part of a gun, Mr Henry?" "Yes," his reply sounded as if he had only just realized I was still there. "But I'm not aware of a firearm with such a part." "I believe you. It's in the making. It will probably become the 'Henry system'." "Ah, a new invention?" "Yes." "Please forgive me for asking! It is, of course, a secret." For some time he inspected all the openings, turned the piece of iron in all directions, held it several times against the rear end of the barrel, which he had placed aside before, and finally said: "Yes, it is a secret; but I trust you with it, because I know you're discreet, although you're a perfect, genuine greenhorn; that's why I'll tell you what it is supposed to turn into. It will be a twenty-five round repetition carbine."

During his lifetime, Karl May was taken to task about the fictitious repetition firearm, especially when he used all kinds of guns to pose with on his promotional costume photos ^[10], pretending they were the *'Henrystutzen'*. He developed a protective mechanism, claiming Mr. Henry only ever built 12 *Henrystutzen*, and only his had survived, the other 11 had perished in the Wild West together with their owners.

Fan mail with queries about the guns resulted in evasive answers: One reply published in March 1892 ^[11] (PDF from KMG; Q12.), in response to a query by a reader of the magazine *Der Hausschatz* reads: [...] "The famous engineer Henry in St. Louis has constructed a repeating rifle the lock of which consists of a sphere that moves eccentrically; twenty-five bullets find room in its holes. May was tasked with testing it, declared it a unique rifle, but pointed out that, should it be produced and sold in large numbers, the extermination of the Indians and the wildlife would be the inevitable consequence. Subsequently, Henry, an old, but decent eccentric, decided to only build twelve, which he sold, but indeed at very high prices, to twelve famous Westerners. Eleven of them were 'extinguished' in the course of time; they disappeared in the Wild West, and their rifles with them. May is the only one [of the famous Westerners with a *Henrystutzen*] who is still alive, and his rifle the only one still in existence. He has been offered very high sums for it, but he doesn't sell it, and also doesn't allow anyone to examine its construction. Unfortunately, your wish can therefore not be fulfilled. Besides, this *Henrystutzen* has nothing in common with other rifles that carry similar names."

And in a letter dated the second of November 1894 ^[12] (Link 25), to one of his fans, Karl May states: "The bear killer is a double muzzle-loader with balls weighing two lot [old unit of weight varying between sixteen and fifty grams], accuracy to eighteen hundred metres, weight twenty old pounds; it therefore requires a strong man. Built by the famous company M. Flirr, San Francisco. It is the only gun of its type." And: "The *Henrystutzen* is rifled; the barrel does not get warm, which is its greatest advantage. Accuracy to fifteen hundred metres. The cartridges are contained in a sphere that turns eccentrically. [...] The thirty-four-shot rifle by Evans is a fable. No other rifle surpasses my carbine. Henry only ever built twelve at the time; eleven have vanished; only mine is still in existence."

To fill the gap that the fictional 'Magic' Rifle (a number of antagonists called the *Henrystutzen*'*Zaubergewehr*', or even '*Teufelsflinte*', Devil's Gun) had created (*Winnetou's Silver Rifle* was in existence, and so was an elephant gun that doubled as the '*Bear Killer*'), Karl May purchased a Winchester in 1902. The barrel inscription says: *Henry's-patent-Oct.16.1860/King's-patent-march 29.1866*. All three guns are exhibited in the Karl May Museum, in Germany ^[13]

See also

- [Bear Killer](#)
- [The Silver Gun](#)
- [Old Shatterhand](#)
- [Kara Ben Nemsi](#)
- [Winnetou](#)
- [Henry rifle](#)

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