



### Mr. Nielsen and the FN C1 Rifle



#### Article Contributed by: [Finn Nielsen](#)

Having collected and shot all kinds of firearms since I was fifteen years old there are always some which stand out in your memory many years later. One such was the FN C1 semi-automatic rifle, or the 'C 1' as we young soldiers called it.

I joined the Canadian Army in the summer of 1963. There were a number of reasons for doing so; the biggest one was probably curiosity, and the fact that at age nineteen it seemed like a good thing to do! The old shout, 'you'll be sorree' never did occur, although I will freely admit there were a number of times I asked myself what the hell have you done! In the final analysis I didn't have to join, it was all voluntary and as they used to tell you, 'if you can't take a joke, then you shouldn't have joined'.

The Major at the recruiting office when he saw I had actually applied for the infantry, everybody else wanted to learn how to be a plumber or an electrician, said, 'You are a big tall lad, how would you like to join The Guards?' I thought that was a capital idea having no clue what it was.

Let's get back to the rifle. Prior to joining I had had very little exposure to semi-automatic center-fire rifles, other than a friends' Remington 740. Of military semis I had just bought a Tokarev Model 40 prior to my departure, but had no chance to try it before getting on the train to the 'Camp'.





1964 where we trained on the M4 Sherman with the turret removed prior to receiving the M113. The M4 could go places the M113 couldn't.

To those of you who have soldiered I don't have to elaborate on the first few weeks as a recruit, in any Army. The procedures are the same all over to varying degrees. So I won't go into that.

We had been there about a week when sufficient people had arrived to make up a training Platoon of forty-some bodies. One morning we were duly marched to the QM Stores and here The Rifle was issued. At the same time helmets and web gear was also given out. We were also sternly admonished not to mess (*another word was used*) around with them, we would be taught soon enough. On getting back to 'The Shack', that was of course exactly what we proceeded to do. Young savages with their new toys!

At first glance the C1 was not very impressive, dark walnut stocks and almost black Parkerizing with the awkward looking pistol grip protruding down below. We were also issued four magazines and a blank firing attachment. My rifle was marked 'C.A.L 1958' and it was number 3L6139. Some things we will take to the grave with us, like your Regimental or Service Number, and in my case, my rifle number also. In later years I would be issued a sub-machinegun (*also C1*) and the C2 L.A.R. (*Light Automatic Rifle*) but couldn't tell you their serial numbers to save my soul. We usually remember our 'firsts', and that was a 'first' of sorts, being entrusted with

my 'own' rifle as it were.

The instructors described it as the best rifle in the world. Looking back at the year, 1963, and the weaponry other nations used, I believe that for once they were telling us the truth.



This is part of my company getting ready for the annual Battle Run. I never want to do this again!

It was a "Shoulder controlled, gas-operated, semi automatic rifle in 7.62 caliber weighing 10.4 pounds fully loaded" and with it's twenty round magazine it was a 'bundook" to be reckoned with.

At our first range exposure one NCO in the prone position belted off twenty magazines with the rifle as fast as he could. WOW! At the end of the demonstration the wood forearm was smoldering and the whole thing was hot, but we had just seen 400 rounds pumped down range at an amazing rate, no stoppages either.





Left and right views of a C1 rifle.

It was to be a while before we were actually allowed to shoot our rifles. First there were interminable lectures on cleaning, disassembly and functioning. Immediate action drills, in case of a stoppage, were pounded into us for hours. I still remember shortly after I had been 'released', yes, they called it that, I was at the range with a buddy who 'got out' the same time as me. I gave him a little 6.5 mm Mannlicher bolt action to shoot. He put it to his shoulder and fired, waited a second, and then squeezed the trigger again! Nothing. He then immediately and instinctively reached for the non-existent cocking handle on the left side of the rifle in order to carry out his 'C1' immediate action drill which had been pounded into him to the cadence of 'Rifle Fires', 'Rifle Stops', 'Look and cock!' This was the drill which would clear most common 'Stoppages' with this oh-so-reliable weapon.

The things that stay with you!

The unique gas adjustment system on the FN was what made it so reliable. If your weapon got filthy-dirty and refused to function the action of turning your gas setting to a lower number would increase the amount of thrust on face of the gas piston and your weapon would keep on functioning.

I should add that the possibility of your rifle ever getting filthy-dirty was so remote that it could not even be imagined. When we were in the field, the highest priority was weapon cleanliness. After a week in the bush your body might get really grungy, but your rifle had better be clean and lightly oiled or your Section Corporal would know the reason why.

Let's take a closer look at the rifle and some of the reasons why I love and still have an as issued C1 in my gun rack.



Canadian C1 rear sight.

The sights are probably the best ever put on a service rifle. The rear sight is a circular steel peep graduated to 600 yards. It's a dial type sight where you merely rotate the dial and the range will show in white numerals at the bottom of the sight, 200-600 yards. Windage is controlled by means of two opposing adjustment screws on either side of the rear sight. The range was adjusted by turning the front sight and locking it in place with the retaining screw when the setting was right for 200 yards. Any windage adjustments you will have to make by holding off, if you have time.

We were also taught to always double-tap when firing at a target. If one doesn't get him the other one will!





Prior to going to Cyprus we spent most of the summer training in the wilderness. Morning rifle inspection, always.

There was also a grenade launcher available we were told, but I never saw one. We were also shown an IR Night Sight and instructed to just look at it and keep our mitts off it. It was probably the only one they had, and very likely not soldier proof.

The telescopic sight that was made in some quantity by Ernst Leitz of Canada was not an issue item. I did not have a chance to examine one until many years after I 'got out', as we said. It was actually nicely made unit, but the body cover mounting was not as sturdy as it should be and the desired accuracy was not achieved, I believe.

Disassembly of the rifle was easy:

1. Remove the magazine and ensure the chamber is clear.
2. Push back on the body locking latch and push the upper receiver down.
3. Pull back on the protruding 'rat tail' of the bolt carrier and pull it and the bolt out of the action. Separate the bolt unit from the bolt carrier.
4. Move up to the front of the rifle, depress the little button on the gas plug, turn the plug and ease it off the gas tube.
5. Remove the protruding gas piston and piston spring.

That was the extent of disassembly allowed.





The lads are taking a break from acting as enemy (*note white tape*) on the caps and epaulettes.

The trigger group was only allowed to be disassembled under the 'direct supervision of an NCO'. The inference being that these creatures knew so much more than the average dull witted private! I didn't realize that was true until I became an NCO myself, for a while, but that is another story.

We were also issued a pretty good cleaning kit for the C1 made in England by the Parker-Hale people. Among the usual assortment of brushes, rod and oil bottle was the 'combination tool'!

There are combination tools, and there are combination tools. One Corporal made the fatal error of telling us that the rifle could be completely disassembled using only the famed combination tool. He was right. About two years later I was a Corporal myself. Dizzying heights! Walking down the hallway of the "quarters", or "The Shack" as it was mostly called one of my section called me to come and see something. When this happens, if you know soldiers, it's usually safest to go in the other direction, but it was too late. Then I was shown something amazing. There, on a poncho, laid out on the bed of a soldier, who shall go unnamed, was a C1 rifle COMPLETELY DISASSEMBLED!





This was our 'passing on' parade after approximately ten weeks of training. The complete cycle was sixteen weeks.

He had even managed to disassemble the rear sight, not to mention the dreaded complicated never-to-be touched trigger group!

Admiration at this feat, he had only used the combination tool, struggled with the spectacle of him showing up on parade with an incomplete rifle "Weel, I said why don't you just re-assemble it, and we will say no more about it" I then hurriedly left the scene and as far as I know it was re-assembled, very likely only using the combination tool.

Another procedure we carried out on the first day on the range might be of interest to FN/FAL owners. That was **BALANCING** the rifle.

The procedure is as follows, the rifle is held at the hip loosely with the muzzle pointing down range. Your gas setting can be say '6'. You fire a shot, holding the rifle loosely still, and observe what happens.







More training, this time it is for riot control, which was anticipated, didn't have even one!

If you have a failure to extract or you breechblock doesn't even budge, then you turn the gas to '5' and repeat the procedure.

When it is functioning normally for each shot you can then turn it one number lower just to be on the safe side.

Some of the miracle lubricants available will make your action so slippery it might even function as low as a '7' setting!

You will find each rifle a little different, but if it is balanced correctly you will never have any stoppages. I carried mine in extremes of temperature from almost 100+ Middle East degrees to -35 cold in Canada and never had a stoppage.

How well do they shoot ? Most of them, if in decent shape with good ammunition, will dump them consistently into 3" or a little less at a hundred. I have seen the tuned up ones make 1" groups off a sand bag rest at 100 yards.

Accurizing the C1 for competition consisted mainly of smoothing the bearing surfaces of the trigger group and tightening up the hinge pins for the upper and lower receivers.





Two of the lads inside the M4, cramped and its a long hop to the ground when the final assaults went in.

When I was on my Battalion rifle team we were not permitted to disassemble the special C1's we were issued. Being bad, I did switch trigger groups prior to leaving the team and carried old 3L6139 to my overseas posting with a nice crisp 3 – 4 pound trigger pull rather than the usual 6 – 8 pounds.

I omitted to mention that we were also issued a bayonet. Sturdy all steel construction, it was very useful for opening beer bottles and puncturing the ever present tins of condensed milk. It was mounted for special ceremonies, of course, but the rest of the time it resided in its all steel scabbard hanging off your web gear. Most of us had privately owned knives which were much handier in the field.

The 'EIS' or 'Equipment Issue Scale' for the C1 rifle was four twenty shot magazines, sling, bayonet, magazine loader, blank firing attachment and the bayonet and scabbard.

That's about all as far as the C1 is concerned. Some people may claim it is too heavy and obsolete in view of new lighter military rifles in smaller calibers. Maybe, but

as long as you can get ammunition for any rifle military or otherwise, and know how to use it, how can it ever become completely obsolete? I like the heavy old club.

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