

The PHSC E-MAIL

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20 Seconds of History – The D-Day Photos

by Robert Lansdale

Like you, all during this past week I've been inundated by the videos and stories about the 60th Anniversary of the D-Day landings that brought the eventual destruction of the Nazi regime to completion. I've maintained a file on the subject for some years as bits and pieces emerged from here and there to become a sizeable source of information. Readers of *Photographic Canadiana* will recall stories of D-day used in previous issues so many portions of the enclosed article will seem familiar.

The Toronto *Globe & Mail* ran a story June 4th by Ted Barris under the title "The Shot Seen Round The World" in which he traced the origin and *real* story behind a short movie clip showing shadowy soldiers pouring out the door of a landing craft to initiate the invasion of Normandy. It's a piece of film constantly used in movies and videos as it is the only live-

action film that epitomizes the moment of the landings. It seems the story has to be re-investigated every ten years to right-the-wrongs of previous versions with new found evidence. It seemed to me the moment to bring together my assembled information to offer a better viewpoint as I doubt that I will revisit it again. More investigation is required (I can think of a number of different avenues) and I hope some researcher will be inspired to carry the story forward.

Ted Barris is the author of a best-seller book, ***Juno: Canadians at D-Day June 6, 1944***, so his *Globe* story should be accurate and believable.

In the *Globe* article Barris takes steps to prove that the film was shot by a Canadian ciné photographer Sgt. Bill Grant of the Canadian Film and Photo Unit (CFPU) recording actions by the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada with a 35mm Bell & Howell EYEMO camera. This has been the most persistent version of the story run for the longest time.

Barris says: "Last year, I consult-



CREDIT: MACLEAN HUNTER PUBLICATIONS

The above photograph ran in *Canadian Industrial Photography*, July 1962 with the outline: **A Canadian cameraman supplied the only Allied motion picture footage of the D-Day landings of World War 2.** He was Bill Grant, now western sales manager, Braun of Canada Equipment Ltd., Vancouver. His footage was used in the CBC's documentary, "Canada at War." Although he was one of three motion picture cameramen to cover the event, only his footage was recovered. This fact became known when Daryl Zanuck, who had searched unsuccessfully for films of the Allied landings, asked the CBC for assistance. The CBC checked army records and learned that all existing footage was Grant's.



PHOTO CREDIT: DEPT. OF NATIONAL DEFENCE, OTTAWA

ed an authority on the subject, the wife of celebrated Second World War still photographer, Ken Bell. Bell's portfolio of 35 mm snapshots, taken alongside the Canadian troops as they liberated northwestern Europe in 1944-45, are the cream of Ottawa's wartime collection. Mary Lea Bell suggested that her husband's memoirs about No. 2 Canadian Film and Photo Unit might have clarified how that famous D-Day motion picture film was shot. But Ken Bell died before writing about the CFPU's experience."

Ken Bell was a highly esteemed commercial and advertising photographer in Toronto. This writer's association with Ken was within the Professional Photographers of Canada where we served on association projects. Ken garnered many honours for his photography and for his services: Master of Photographic Arts, Honourary Life Member, awarded the National Citation, Photographer of the Year (twice) and served as President in 1956. Now Mary Lea Bell was Ken's second wife, marrying later in life before

moving to their retirement residence in British Columbia. I doubt that Mary Lea would have thorough knowledge of his wartime experiences – certainly not an "authority." For one thing, Ken used a Rolleiflex throughout much of his career (particularly while in the Army) and would gag at the description of his "portfolio of 35mm snapshots." See *Photographic Canadiana Vol 25-2, Sept-Oct 1999 for Ken Bell and His Friend ... The F2.8 Rolleiflex.*

After the war Ken served with the Canadian Army Militia and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, Royal Regiment of Canada. His photographic pilgrimages to Normandy, along with other interests, resulted in nine published books. Helping others to publish their regimental history left no time to record his own planned biography covering 60 Years of professional photography.

But Ken did leave a number of wartime memories recorded in media interviews for video and newspapers. I interviewed him in 1994 where he laid out a different story on the creation of the D-Day film. That story was published in *Exposure Ontario*, September 1994, the journal for the Professional Photographers of Ontario, also in *Photographic Canadiana Vol 20-3, Nov/Dec 1994* and *CSC News, Nov 1994 Vol 14-3.*

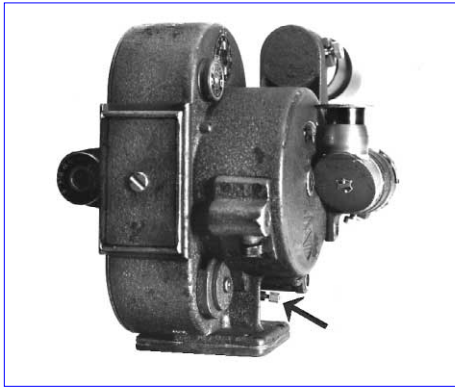
In the article Ken pointed out: "It's about time the real story was told of the D-Day landing film clips. ...all sorts of people are wrongly given credit for the photography. The honour must go to Captain Colin McDougall who was in charge of photographers for the Canadian Film and Photo Unit. It was impossible to insert photographers into the section of 22 highly trained soldiers (per boat) who had been intensely trained as a unit. In no way could they break up a group so no photography would record the historic moments. But ingeniously, Captain McDougall came up with an idea to statically position 35mm Eyemo cameras near the back of several boats and have Navy personnel trigger the shutters. Six cameras were so installed.



CREDIT: KEN BELL COLLECTION

A section of the Canadian Army's Film and Photo Unit, taken near Caen in Normandy, France during the summer of 1944. Twenty-nine year old Ken Bell stands at the left with a Rolleiflex around his neck (others not identified). Personnel involved in the D-Day landings were: Capt. Colin McDougall, Sgt. Al Grayston, Lt. Frank Dubervill, Sgt. Bill Grant, Lt. Don Grant, Lt. Ken Bell and Sgt. Bud Roos which included three stillsmen and three ciné photographers. With death all around and unceasing noise, it was a traumatic experience. By day's end only four cameramen remained to fulfill their duties.

The Bell & Howell Eyemo was first introduced in 1926, a 35mm version of the successful Filmo 16mm ciné camera. Rugged and all metal, it found great use in newsreel photography. Taking a 100 foot load of film on a daylight loading spool, great care was needed to switch the camera on only as the action started.



EYEMO CAMERA COURTESY OF LARRY BOCCIOLETTI

The camera is powered by a clock-work motor which runs approximately 22 feet of film on one winding (under 15 seconds). M. (Sammy) Jackson-Samuels CSC of Toronto who used an Eyemo for years undertook tests for us to see how much film could be eked out during a run. He found it would amount to a maximum of 20 seconds at 24 frames per second. Cameras could be adjusted to run at 18 fps giving a maximum run of 30 seconds (not normal practice) providing a longer run but with jerkier action. Sammy pointed out that there is a small thumb lever at the side of the camera just above the tripod mounting plate. Once that lever was pushed the camera would run continuously unless shut off by returning the lever again to the OFF position.

Mr. Bell related: "With all the distractions, chances were slim that the

film would capture key action of the invasion. When Captain McDougall hit the beaches he made a very dangerous search to retrieve the cameras. Two landing craft and their cameras were completely destroyed but out of the rest came the historic footage. Films were rushed to HQ for processing and censoring then printed as 16mm newsreels for world wide distribution. But no one identified the troops as Canadian nor the camera man as Canadian. Unfortunately the original negatives were burned in a fire so only the 16mm edited distribution prints exist." The magazine, *Canadian Industrial Photography* Sept/Oct 1967 lamented the loss in a blazing hangar fire at Beaconsfield, Que. (suburb of Montreal). In his story Ken referred to a fire at Rockwood Airport (in 1958) where the flammable nitrate film had been stored as a safety measure.

So whose story is correct? Either/Or? or could both be true? Writer Barris located another Canadian Army lensman 'Chuck Ross in Edmonton' who I really think should be identified as Charles (Bud) ROOS.

Mr. Ross [Roos] validated that Sgt. Bill Grant "set up the camera and tripod several times during the run-in to the beach. He had shot a complete roll of film as the Queen's Own prepared, waited and (as the doors swung open) dashed from the landing craft. Grant then scooped up his camera equipment and two more rolls of unexposed film and scrambled ashore with the Canadian troops. There on the beach and shortly afterward in Bernières, Grant had shot the rest of his movie film documenting the village's complete liberation."

To validate this claim Barris then sought out Staff Sgt. Ken Ewart living in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. who had edited the film on the morning of June 7, 1944, just 24 hours after it had been shot. Ewart remembered: "I received the cans of film with Bill Grant's name written on the outside. Of course, for the newsreels, we took the best part of every scene. We didn't use everything he shot. We

flashed the news...." Ewart laughed at the idea that the camera was simply mounted at the back of a landing craft and tripped by a sailor.

Closely analyzing the films, discloses pieces put together with variations in background scenery and boat details indicating footage must surely have come from several different boats. Studying "Canada At War" by the NFB I noticed that there is an initial clip of six seconds before switching to a longer 30 seconds of action.



CREDIT: CBC TV

Image from TV monitor shows open observation portal in the door of the landing craft and not seen in other footage of the film.

Being a military history buff John Eckersley of Vancouver became so interested in the snippets of D-Day footage that he endeavored to review (to his wife's distraction) all videos he could lay his hands on. He wanted to analyze various treatments of the film – different videos include varying lengths and different portions.

"I've concluded," writes Mr. Eckersley, "that all the Eyemo footage in those that I have seen come from three boats. *D-Day Plus Fifty* by the CBC with Knowlton Nash has spliced together footage from two boats – 'A' and 'B' with both boats in roughly the same position on the beach, based on the location of two prominent buildings in the shots. This video has the longest version of 'B' anywhere. Roughly the same footage appears in *Crusade in Europe, Volume IV; D-Day - The Turning Point*.

"The *Norman Summer* episode of the NFB series *Canada at War* has the most footage from 'A' boat. It starts earlier and shows the first two men reacting to fire from the left

before the doors open. Spliced on to the 'A' footage, at the point the third man is standing in the door, is footage from boat 'C,' without the two distinctive buildings, so apparently at a different location on the beach. Earlier in this video are some shots that show the layout of, and position of, men in the boats.

"No Price Too High – Canadians in the Second World War, Episode V Liberation 1944 has the longest and best quality footage from boat 'C.' It begins with a crewman in the left front opening the left door with his left hand and then looking at (or past) the camera and smiling.

"World War II, The War Chronicles - Volume 2 has footage from 'C' and 'A' (including the 'back slap' which can be identified as later footage from 'A' by the sheepskin jacket and left hand position of the crewman standing behind the helmsman at the right front of the boat).

"All of the above videos were from local libraries. In all three, the camera is in the same position - on the left gunwale, aimed slightly to the right. That seems to support the 'clamped Eyemo' explanation." [But a static camera on a tripod would give the same imagery if the photographer reached up from a safe crouching position to trigger the camera. But would a tripod be as steady from buffeting seas and the grounding of the boat as it halted near shore?]

Into this mix we must add another element. Navy photographer Bill Poulis, in a speech before the Photographic Historical Society of Canada in 1995, indicated the film could very well be his own coverage as he accompanied the first wave of Canadian troops to hit the beaches then returned with the second wave in a larger landing craft. He pointed out that ten Navy photographers were assigned to the invasion. He found no problem inserting himself into the smaller LCA landing craft as it was under control of the Navy. As to the idea of unmanned cameras being used he thought it not plausible. The low light level of early morning combined with slow film (Plus-X ASA 64), and the unmanned cameras to be started by busy sailors – made it unbelievable in his estima-

tion. Cameras were scarce at the best of times so gambling with six units would be questionable.



PHOTO BY ROBERT LANSDALE

BILL POULIS IN 1995

Mr. Poulis said he was issued a very heavy tripod but ditched it for a lighter civilian tripod he bought in London but still resorted to hand-held shooting for most action. He would slate (identify) a reel of new film by writing RCN or POULIS with chalk on a rock or the side of a landing craft – not all film was slated. To keep the films dry he would enclose them in a condom. The biggest problem was keeping the camera clean, inside and out – he used the oil from the side of his nose to keep the pressure plate lubricated. He was equipped with Kodachrome colour film in a 16mm ciné camera, but it was so slow he had to wait until noon to shoot it. On the beach Bill remembered it was very noisy. He covered only the beaches seeking naval activities while "inland" was Army territory. By 9:00 AM he had a lot of footage so thumbed a ride out to the Algonquin and was on board when it went inshore to give assistance to Commandos stranded on a barge with a field gun. They were duelling with German tanks and were wiped out. The Algonquin received damage and pulled out. After shooting for seven days he ran out of film, so returned to London for rest.

Mr. Poulis wrote in 1997 to the CBC (Mark Starowicz, Executive Producer) commenting on their "excellent documentary" *Dawn Of The Eye*. Although praising the film he expressed objections to crediting the Canadian Army Film & Photo Unit and Sergeant Grant with the landing footage (as per our previous paragraphs). "[It] is to my mind erroneous and simply not true. We all sent film back [ten Navy newsreel photographers as well as British] to SHAEF [HQ] in special priority despatch bags via the first ships we knew were returning to the U.K. For all I know, one of the two shots of soldiers leaving assault craft were mine. The two you showed, and credited to Sgt. Grant were of different troops on different landing craft. I made an initial run in before dawn on the beach at Bernieres, and another landing in brighter light with soldiers of the Chaudiere Regiment.

"...Our (my) job as a cameraman was to show beach activity - troops landing - wounded - prisoners - supplies - etc. We filmed hundreds of feet of 35mm film and some 16mm colour footage; – that early footage was immediately sent back to the U.K. as fast as humanly possible via ship.

"...I realize *Dawn Of The Eye* is a historical documentary on the motion picture news business and not necessarily about WW2 – but I do believe that you went top-heavy on the Yankee side of wartime film making - to the detriment and exclusion of the role played by newsreel cameramen of the Royal Canadian Navy Film & Photo Unit."

So we may never be able to give definite credit to any one photographer but be assured that it was a CANADIAN(S) who scooped the world. We salute those brave photographers who faced the enemy and death with their cameras.

*The images of assault troops on the lead page were reproduced in Ken Bell's book: *The Way We Were*. Ken personally searched through the 16mm print film and arduously made enlarged copy negatives in order to produce usable images. ☺

Coming Events

June 26 to September 26, 2004,
Market Gallery, South St. Lawrence
Market (second floor), 95 Front St.
East, Toronto will mount the exhibit
People & Places of Riverdale with
photographs, paintings, maps and
memorabilia depicting this idyllic part
of Toronto along the Don River.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We welcome as new members to
our Society the following people,
may they long enjoy our benefits,
our social activities and the camaraderie of fellow collectors.

Davis Hanson of Etobicoke, ON
George Redburn of Hamilton, ON
Ronald Tuttle of Peoria, Illinois,
J.H. Diotte of Whitby, ON
Nik Njegovan of Stoney Creek, ON
Sarah Stacy of Ottawa, ON
Anita Dammer of Water Valley, AB
Peter van Overbeek, Wellesley, ON

CHARLES ABEL CLOSES LABS

The growing popularity of digital
photography has forced Chas Abel
Photo Services to close their film
labs in Toronto after 98 years of
service. The company will still offer
digital-printing services.

Faced with a drastic drop in film
developing business, manager
Graig Abel conceded that the pixel
has replaced the processor. The
company was started by Graig's
grandfather Charles. "It was just
not worth turning the machines on
in the morning," said Abel, who
estimated that film developing
accounted for 5 percent of his business less than a decade after it
had previously made nearly 100%.

Advertisements

Members are invited to submit one free advertisement to the classified section of each issue, limit 50 words, used at the editor's discretion.

For Sale

Rollei pamphlet collection, approx. 42
pieces, mostly from 1960s & 1970s.
E-mail Roger: chanrak@sympatico.ca
or telephone (450) 688-5305 – if not
home, please leave a message.

Program for Wednesday, June 16th

George Gilbert of New York returns to Toronto bringing a first-person account of his role behind a Hollywood film honouring the Leitz family and its famed Leica cameras. (The Leica of today is no longer a Leitz product).



GEORGE GILBERT

moving as many as 20-30 refugees at a time, was withheld for years at the family's request. As late as 1963, the family feared anti-Leica reaction by remaining Nazi sympathizers both in Germany and abroad. Their heroism was finally revealed (as promised) after the death in the 1980s of the last of the Leitz team members who had spearheaded the deception.

Hollywood will now bring attention to the subject, blossoming from a mere idea into the first footage of *The Magical Leica* – the working title.

Gilbert was Founding President of the *American Photographic Historical Society*, editor for many years of the *Photographica* magazine and author of over 400 articles under five different names. He'll describe his escapades in the writing world by the second-name-route (pseudonyms) on June 16 at the North York Library, Memo

The story of the secret 1937-38 Leitz anti-Nazi underground-railroad tells of relocating Jewish and anti-Nazi non-Jews out of Germany to foreign lands which were not accepting additional refugees after official quotas had been filled and closed. The deception's success, moving

A Report From Bievres

Cindy Motzenbecker, PHSC member and President of the Michigan PHS sends a report of her venture to Bievres, France to witness that famous outdoor photographica event. "The Bievres market was absolutely amazing. I'll forward images once I get them sorted. I think I took over 400 digital pictures. Lots of images from the V&A, also le Musée des arts & métiers (SP) and the flea market itself. I saw things for sale that I've only seen in books. If only I had more money to spend. But I wouldn't have enough room anyway – that's at home, not just the suitcase. The amount of images for sale was staggering – more than a third of the market, and PRICEY too! I regret to say that I didn't find any chromotypes for you despite looking through piles of cdv's & cabinets. I hardly found an English image in France and vice versa."

In other news: "We [the MiPHS] are going to try a flea market this summer outside a camera shop to catch the traffic from the Ann Arbor Art Fair.

"Sam Vinegar had a heart attack over a month ago. They put in a stent and he seems OK. His wife's not well either. I heard he's selling his shows."