

# ***D-DAY LANDINGS IN FRANCE, JUNE 6, 1944***

- ***THE TRUE STORY OF THE CINE COVERAGE OF THE  
FIRST LANDINGS CAPTURED BY AUTOMATIC CAMERAS***

I bring you a special story from the Photographic Historical Society of Canada, concerning the D-Day Landings in France, June 6th, 1944. I've published this story several times but cannot interest public media to pick it up. They favour "Back to the Beaches" or "The last surviving veteran." I hope with this distribution you will pass it on to local media. Or an Army or Veteran's magazine which might find it interesting. This new aspect of events may catch their eye.

#### **Permissions granted:**

Photographic Historical Society of Canada  
– Robert Lansdale



A COMMEMORATIVE DOLLAR MARKING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY

# D-DAY LANDINGS IN FRANCE

June 6th 1944

by Robert Lansdale

Little is mentioned who filmed the D-Day Landings in France on June 6th 1944. Short snippets flash by in newsreels as Allied troops prepare to storm the beaches in the first wave. These are mixed with later beach scenes and with clips taken during earlier practice exercises. It is never explained who the soldiers are... it seems they represent everyone who invaded that day. But it can be shown that it is Canadian troops crouching behind landing-craft doors then wading into the sea to begin the invasion. So who was the daring photographer to face the perils of death? Our tale will take a long route to reveal the real truth.

COURTESY OF CRITICAL PAST



Cine coverage of Canadian troops ready to land on the beaches of Bernières-sur-Mer on June 6th 1944.

*This story is repeated, it seems, every 10 years as new information becomes available. I will gradually unravel it as it came to light showing how different people understood the facts. I hope with this presentation we finally will understand the truth. Both still and cine cameramen from all Allied Armies and Navies risked their lives to record images of this epic event.*

I first heard of this story when I interviewed friend Ken Bell in 1994. He was part of the Canadian Film and Photo Unit that came ashore during the D-Day landings, arriving with the second wave. After the war Bell rose to Lieutenant Colonel as Commanding Officer of the Royal Regiment of Canada. MacLean Hunter Publishers had run a story in their *Canadian Industrial Photography* magazine wherein Sgt. Bill Grant of the Canadian Film Unit was given full credited for taking the thrilling footage of the first wave of troops to go ashore. I think Mr. Bell was somewhat incensed by this story and wanted to get the full story out.

He related: "It's about time the real story was told of the D-Day landing film clips. ...too many people are wrongly given credit for the photography. The first honours must go to Captain Colin McDougall who was in charge of photographers for the Canadian Film and Photo Unit. It seemed improbable to insert a photographer into the section of 22 highly trained soldiers (per boat) who had been intensely trained as a unit. 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 of the cameras were so installed.”

The Bell & Howell Eyemo 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

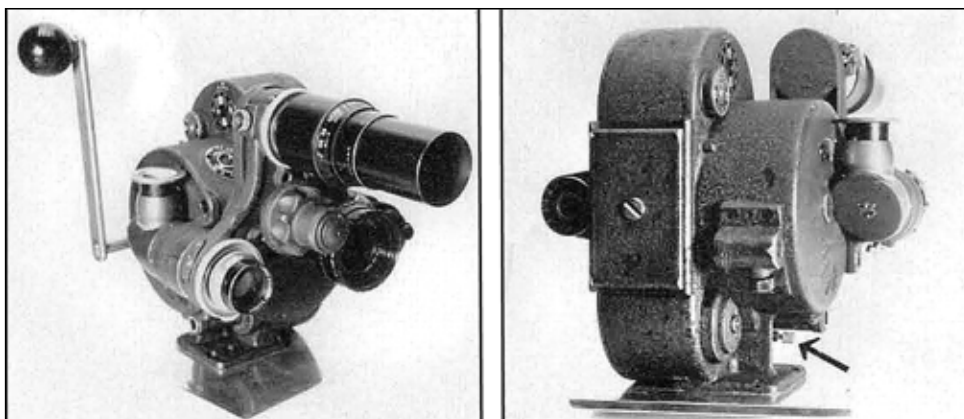
But then Royal Canadian Navy photographer Bill Poulis, in a speech before the Photographic Historical Society of Canada in 1995, indicated the film could very well be his own coverage as he accompanied the first wave of Canadian troops to hit the beaches then returned with the second wave in a larger 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



Depiction of Canadian troops landing on the beaches of Bernières-sur-Mer on June 6th 1944.

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. Such does not prove valid when we later analyze the film footage.

Mr. Bell related: “With all the distractions, chances were slim that the film would capture key action of the invasion. After the landings Captain Jack McDougall hit the beaches and made a very dangerous search to retrieve the cameras. Two landing craft were completely destroyed but out of the rest came the historic footage.” Dispatch Rider Brian O’Regan is also credited with the same dangerous rescue of the film and cameras.



The Eyemo camera used by cine photographers. Arrow points out start button.

PHOTOS BY LARRY BOCCIOLETTI COLLECTION



cameras to be started by busy sailors – made it unbelievable in his estimation. Cameras were scarce at the best of times so gambling with six units would be questionable.

It was regulation for both Army and Navy photographers to shoot all scenes mounted on a very heavy tripod... no matter how dire the situation. Hand-held cameras resulted in jitters when the film was projected. Photographers soon learned that the use of the tripod meant more frequent acceptance by the editors. Mr. Poulis said he ditched the heavy tripod for a lighter civilian tripod bought in London but resorted to handheld 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 it was revealed that he would enclose the exposed roll 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 terribly noisy. He covered only the beaches seeking naval activities while “inland” was Army territory.

I published this basic story in *Exposure Ontario* for the Professional Photographers of Canada and in *Photographic Canadiana* for the Photographic Historical Society of Canada.

In the meantime, John Eckersley of Vancouver, a military history buff, took up the challenge in the 90s to find answers to the same D-Day story. He’s constantly kept me aware of any progresses as he reviewed all videos he could lay his hands on. He analyzed 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 different boats. *D-Day Plus Fifty* by the CBC with Knowlton Nash has spliced together footage from two boats with both boats unloading in roughly the same position, based on the location of prominent buildings. 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 boat ‘A’. It starts earlier and shows the first two men reacting to fire from the left. Spliced on to this footage, at this 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. *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’).

“In ALL three clips, the camera is in the same position - on the left gunwale of the landing craft, aimed slightly to the right. That seems to support the ‘clamped Eyemo’ explanation.” A tripod-mounted camera would be subject to the buffeting seas and the rough grounding of the boat as it neared shore. So by this evidence we have the images from THREE cameras and not by ONE photographer.

The idea of automatic cameras being used was certainly “in the air” as in a photo (LAC Negative PA-140097) Captain Robert O. Campbell (left) experimented in Italy in the spring of 1944 by attaching an electric drive and extended film cassette to an Eyemo ciné camera, using a remote trigger that he could press while safely inside the tank.



Tank with Eyemo, electric drive and extended film cassette

Chuck Herrick reports I’ve seen a few references to the subject, such as this from Lt. Barney Oldfield of the SHAEF PR division: “The photographic officer on General Bradley’s Public Relations staff, Lt. Col. Bertram Kalisch, had already seen to the mounting and testing of dozens of small movie cameras on the tanks scheduled to hit the beaches and on Navy landing craft from which the infantrymen would scramble to shore. He triggered the tank cameras to roll with the first machine gun fire, while the landing-craft reels were set to turn on as soon as the tiller man dropped the front end. There was no way to put cameramen ashore first, so all pictures of the first terrible moments of Normandy had to be of men’s backs as they plunged into the fight.”

Ben Moogk of Toronto came to my aid with new information as he has researched the same topic for some time. Research by Ben has found several more documents from 1944 that make references to the stick-on cameras. (a) A document on filming of the attack of Boulogne using surplus “stick-on” cameras, which were re-designated as “fixed” and were attached to tanks making the assault on the German fortifications. (b) A dope sheet for resulting footage that again explains the “fixed” cameras and the footage.

Other information shows a document from Dick Malone in May of 1944, who commanded Canadian Public Relations, and therefore was the person the Film and Photo Units answered to. The document indicates a lower number of stick-on cameras, but such could have been increased by June. John Eckersley of Vancouver, in his visual search concluded, that all the footage come from THREE static camera in different boats.

In the meantime Dan Conlin in 1986 at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, was working on his Bachelor of Journalism degree with a concentration in History. His Honours Research Paper was a history of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit. While working as a researcher at the National Archives of Canada, he was introduced to the work of the Army Photo Unit. Eventually he was encouraged to turn his thesis into a book and thus *War Through the Lens: The Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit 1941–1945* was published in 2015. Mr. Conlin gives much credit to others who assisted in adding to the overall data. We owe much history of the D-Day landings from interviews by many of the participants.

The Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit were given permission to insert both still and ciné photographers into the invasion crafts. A special harness was created of leather to brace the Eyemo camera close to the cameraman's chin and neck. According to Conlin Jack McDougall obtained 15 automatic "stick-on" cameras from the American Army. Cameramen could attach these to the side of their own assault craft to record the critical moments of the landings from a fixed point as well as attaching them to other assault craft in their Regiment. Nothing is offered about the make or model of these "automatic" cameras.

As Dan Conlin reveals in his book: "Dave Reynolds from the Canadian Film Unit was credited as the first Allied cameraman to land on French soil when he parachuted with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion with a stills camera and a 16mm motion picture camera. His 35mm camera and film were sent in with a different glider which crashed on landing. His film provided the first Allied coverage to get back from the airborne landings."

"Bud Roos was the first Canadian cameraman to hit the beach with D Company of the Regina Rifles. Roos relived experiences of explosions as his boat was lifted on a wave and came down on a mine. He was wondering where his 'stick-on' camera was flying to when a Navy fellow yelled 'For Christ sake, jump.' As he waded ashore other landing craft suffered the same fate with explosions. Roos carried his camera and tripod in his struggle to shore. Of the 30 men in his landing craft only Ross and two others made it to land alive."

Stills photographer Don Grant arriving with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles fell into deep water just as German machine guns raked the landing craft killing a dozen men. His Speed Graphic was drowned but his waterproofed Leica survived so he began shooting still photographs.

"Sgt. Bill Grant came ashore with the Queen's Own Rifles. A Bren gun carrier beside his landing craft blew up and sent a torrent of water all over Grant and men beside him. 'I was busy shooting everything – shooting the guys jumping out the landing craft and hoisting of the first signal flag.' Grant gathered up his film cans from his own camera and from the 'stick-on' camera on the other landing craft he had equipped. Grant's film reels went into specially marked PRESS bags that were picked up off the beach and dispatched to London by the fastest means. Since Grant implanted and rescued the "stick-on" cameras, that puts the credit for the D-Day footage with Grant and the Canadian Film and Photo Unit."

Conlin concludes: "Sgt. Bill Grant is singled out as the man who took the actual coverage. But Grant is reluctant to claim ownership of the coverage. 'I don't honestly know whether it is or not. I see a lot of shots and when I understand that the other two ciné guys did not get any stuff, so it must be me. I don't know.'"

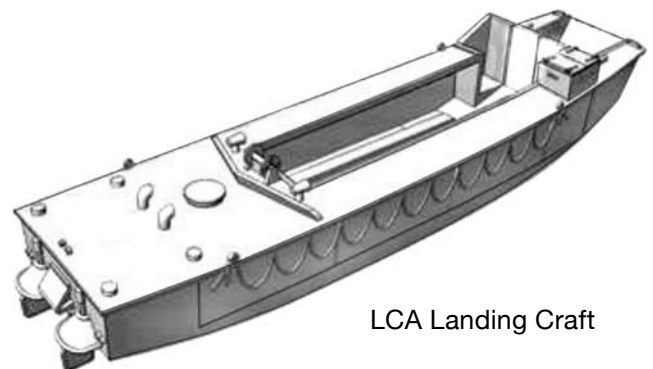
Films were dispatched by the fastest boats heading back to England. They were immediately rushed by motorcycle to London. "In London when the processed film was reviewed, Jack McDougall remembers officers and censors sitting through three or four thousand feet of rather dull stuff, mostly of preparations for embarkation. Then came the Canadian landing material and it was 'damned good.' There was much excitement getting 16 mm distribution prints to the United States as newsreels in the quickest way possible.

Unfortunately all original Canadian negatives were destroyed in a blazing hangar fire at Beaconsfield, Que. (suburb of Montreal) where the flammable nitrate film had been stored as a safety measure.

Well, I wondered there must be another way to analyze these films. Often in my research I take a "screen-grab" from the face of my computer. "Command-Shift 3" on my Mac records a png file of the image as seen on the screen. I pondered if this might be done while viewing the actual videos of the D-Day invasion. I chose to review a video by *Critical Past* which has one of the largest online collections of historic, royalty-free film footage and still images in the world. You may view it on YouTube at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=DAXwFIH6AsA>.

From a variety of "grabs" I was able to select several pertinent shots. Tests found the files could be opened with Photoshop and improved in sharpness and density. After cropping and improvement I was finally able to compare the frames at leisure for their differentness.

My captured images show three distinct boats and on the subsequent pages are images taken from EACH clip. Clip "A" establishes the scene at Bernière-sur-Mer and appears to be from a camera mounted on the left decking of the landing craft. Schematics of a LCA shows compartments/shelters at the front of the boat – to the right in a protected cubicle for the boatswain and left for an assistant/observer. There is no similar opening at the back of the boat where a photographer might position himself to get this exact view showing the top of the decking.



LCA Landing Craft

## *Clip "A" Sequence from first boat....*



Identified as the North Shore (N.B.) Regt. The LCA approaches the community of La Rive Plage part of Bernières-sur-Mer. The soldier getting the "pat on the back" (last image) is identified as Private Baker of A Company. No port-holes are open on doors. Helmsman and compass are seen prominently.

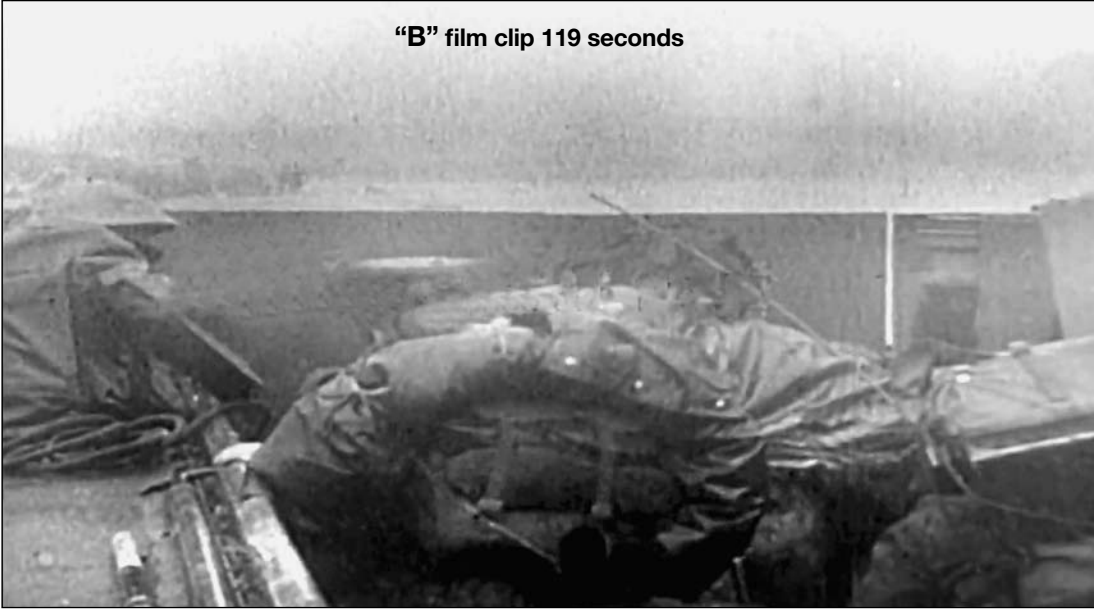


ALL IMAGES  
COURTESY OF  
CRITICAL PAST



## *Clip "B" Sequence from second boat....*

"B" film clip 119 seconds



Different smoke bound background. Photoshop brings forth a single building that swings across the scene to the left. Steady image. Radio equipment is seen on the back of soldiers. Medical group of soldiers as part of second wave. Helmsman not seen. Gatekeeper at left assists troops to leave.



ALL IMAGES  
COURTESY OF  
CRITICAL PAST



## *Clip "C" Sequence from third boat....*

"C" film clip 151 seconds



Ben Moogk corrected me: This is the Chaudiere Regiment that came in the second wave to pass through the Queen's Own Rifles. The large house, designated as Nan Red Beach was their objective. Middle picture shows troops from other boat (to the right from clip A) passing into view as they go ashore. Slot in door is open, Helmsman is high and looks to side to see other boat approaching. Something round is stored behind helmsman... not in others. Only in the final image do we see satchels removed from the side gunnel where the camera is mounted like the others.



ALL IMAGES  
COURTESY OF  
CRITICAL PAST





This first clip is 124 seconds long which defies the test by Sammy Samuels on his Eyemo camera which showed one winding of the clock-work motor would only last 20 seconds. So the “automatic” cameras obtained from the Americans must have been some other camera which could run longer and continuous.

The landing craft in clip “A” sways and lurches with the waves as it nears the beach but the camera remains absolute steady to the horizontal-top of the doors. The camera surely was securely fixed to the deck. Anomalies seen in image “A” and “C” are: no square portals in the front doors that are seen in clip “C”. The compass in front of the driver in “A” is completely round while that in “C” has a ring added to the top. The storage area just behind the driver in “C” has a round something stored there... not so in “A”.

This clip “A” in its later stages has one of the soldiers pat his friend on the back for good luck. The man turns to the side so that two veterans of the regiment have verified that this is Private Baker of A Company of the North Shore (N.B.) Regiment. This Regiment is credited with the capture of St. Aubin-sur-Mer on the eastern flank of Nan Red beach. This would show that they went ashore at the seaside community of La Rive Plage which is part of Bernière-sur-Mer.

The second clip “B” is 119 seconds long and has a different view devoid of the usual houses but with Photoshop one lone ghostly building crosses the scene as the boat swings to the right. The driver sits low and can’t really be seen while the observer at the left turns and smiles to the camera. He pushes the left door open. According to Ben Moogk, these are Royal Army Medical Corps and Beach Group. The RAMC have the red cross brassards while the Beach Group have a white stripe around their helmets. The soldiers of the initial assault were under orders to leave the dead and wounded for these RAMC medics. The Beach Group was there to take control of the beach and keep it organized as more men and material were landed. The fighting soldiers would move inland. The last images show buildings which might locate them at the mouth of a harbour or river outlet.

For the third clip which is the longest, Ben Moogk corrected me and identified them as the Régiment de la Chaudière. The Chaudière arrived with cine photographer Bill Grant and stills photographer Frank Duberville. Moogk points out that many Queen’s Own were on the same landing craft with the 14th Field Artillery to provide security for the guns. The Chaudières subdued a German 88 gun on the outskirts of Bernières, but not before the much feared weapon reduced three self-propelled guns of the 14th Field to flaming wrecks. It is not until the last 5 seconds of the clip that haversacks are removed from the left portion of the image that decking can be seen. So this camera too was mounted on top of the deck and was not recorded by a photographer but by one of the automatic “stick-on” cameras. The references to “stick-on” must indicate a magnetic attachment.

That Bill Grant and Frank Duberville were **said** to be with the Queens Own Rifles is understandable. The 14th Field was the artillery assigned to QOR. The 14th Field **would have** officers in the QOR who could call upon the guns of the 14th Field to support the infantry. Wherever the infantry battalion went so did the artillery. This is why Bill Grant’s film rolls 37 to 41 are in Anguerny, the furthest forward the QOR went inland on D-Day. Grant and Duberville also landed right in front of what became the QOR headquarters on

the beach. After completing his roll 32, Bill Grant packed it in a special press mail bag and handed it to the first person he saw headed back to Southampton. People in Southampton were warned to keep an eye out for such bags. Cameramen Jack Stollery, Lloyd Millon, and Hugh McCaughey were already filming prisoners and wounded landing in Southampton. Once the bag was located, it would be despatched by motorcyclist to Merton Park Studios in South West London for processing.

It seems Bill Grant’s footage of Bernières and the automatic films made it to London likely in the same press bag. This footage of Juno Beach after processing was screened together and the mixing-up/merging of the several scenes seems to have started there in the screening room. Everyone wanted a copy. Other footage of the action would eventually arrive from across the Channel but only the sharp footage from the three “stick-on” cameras was recognized as best and released as newsreels. The footage is notable because it was in the public theatres of the world before anyone else’s footage of D-Day beaches.

Moogk also provided a news clipping. *Variety* of July 5 1944 (one month after D-Day) revealed some 400 uniformed lens men (210 cine and 190 stills) were assigned to cover all aspects of the D-Day landings. Only **two** of the American newsreel pool went in on the landings. It mentioned that some **50 cameras** were mounted “as a stunt” on both landing craft and tanks and reported 47 were smashed or had their films spoiled (or were deemed un-publishable by the censors)... or possibly personnel forgot to trip the shutter at vital moments. The swimming tanks sank in the rough surf while landing craft were blown up by mines or damaged by machine-gun fire.

Most vital to our story was slate information on the three surviving clips indicate “Special Installations O.S.S. – U.S.N., Armistead” covering roll 27 (A), roll 9 (B), and roll 26 (C). The combination of OSS and USN points to the Field Photographic Unit under Hollywood director John Ford. Each of the installed cameras was given a separate number and by that at LEAST 27 cameras were supposedly



Slate of film #27 designating US Navy installation.

installed. It would indicate that the installations were carried out by “Armistead.” A dope sheet found by Moogk identifies him as a cameraman for the OSS. The rolls of film for the stick-on cameras were likely loaded and slated by him.

I wonder why there were only three cameras saved. The greater the number then surely there would be a better survival rate. Cameras were mounted on tanks as well as landing craft. The casualty rate

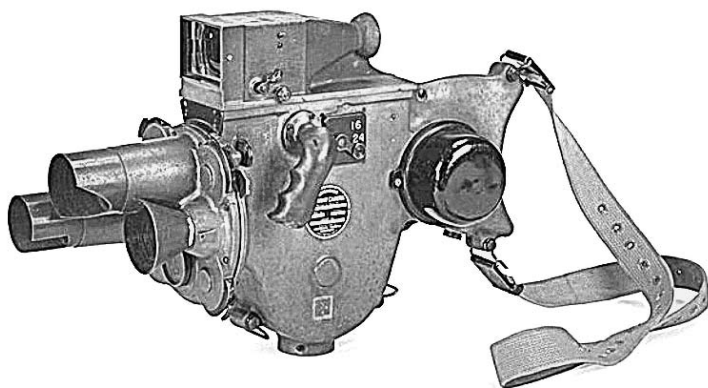


Late scene of Bernières-sur-Mer beach as troops and tanks unload from larger landing craft.

of the first landings might suggest the ferocity of machine gun fire that would rake the craft and destroy anything in the way. The tanks had their sorry history of sinking. And why were they ONLY of Canadian troops? Did the Canadians have a better plan of retrieving the cameras? And were there other cameras of which the footage showed so much death that it would never be released by the censors... or were there others lost at sea returning to England?

Now this is not to indicate that there was not film coverage contributed by photographers who had to endure the perils of the day – both Army and Navy. Their hand-held reportage probably was full of blurred action and had the “jitters” from NOT being mounted on tripods... impossible under the circumstances. The film editors were always looking for sharp steady images and always recommended the use of a tripod. In the rush to get the invasion images out to the newsreels the editors would pounce on the sharp film clips and not bother with any other images provided by the photographers.

My search continues to look for that elusive “stick-on” automatic cine camera obtained from the American Army. Research has narrowed it down to the **Cunningham Combat Camera** (US Army PH530PF) and the British **Vinten Cine Camera**. Both were developed as combat cameras but came into service late in the war.



American Cunningham Cine Camera

A September 1945 article in *Popular Photography* hails the Cunningham as a NEW camera. But documented evidence from John Downs (*PhotographicWorld*) says that Cunningham was working on the camera before 1942 and had units for sample testing as reported in *American Cinemaphotographer*, November 1942. So the finished camera or prototype should have been available for June 1944. But criticism says the camera was too bulky/heavy and “its viewfinder so placed as to expose too much of the photographer’s body.” So the camera may have had little use and could have been

on stand-by, readily available for use. And there still is the possibility that a 16mm cine camera was used as our mystery camera but the use of 35mm cameras was preferred for regular processing where release positives could be made by contact print. Eyemo cameras have been noted as being equipped with 200 foot magazine and electric motors.

We commend the personnel of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit and all allied cameramen for their diligence in pursuing their task of recording history which was not without risk of death. Deaths were recorded in the group and it heavily effected personnel. On more than one occasion Canadians scooped other units with invasion coverage. But the D-Day films will remain the epitome of newsreel coverage even though credit is rarely given to the Canadian Photo Unit or to Canadian troops who are the subjects in the images.

But then Ken Moogk added yet another mystery. In his research he came upon a “lost film” that has never been brought to light. We will have to wait for further revelations on that film!

I do hope readers will disperse this story to other media and I hope some American researchers will pick up the challenge to find and unlock the D-Day coverage of their own troops in action. Somewhere in CIA vaults and the Library of Congress other film remains to tell their story. Censorship may prevent release of the films but release of just the slate information would add proof to our story.

## ADDENDUM

A commemorative silver dollar was struck by the Royal Canadian Mint for 2019 marking the 75th anniversary of D-Day. The theme was taken from the D-Day landing clips showing the reassuring pat on the shoulder by a fellow soldier. A fleeting act of camaraderie shared between two Canadian soldiers seconds before they stormed Juno Beach. Researchers identified the depicted soldier as Private George Herman Baker of Liverpool, Nova Scotia. He was a member of the No. 3 Platoon, A Company of the North Shore Regiment.  
/by Robert Lansdale

