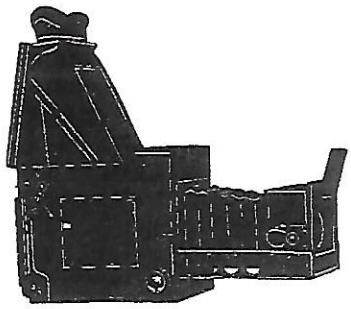
# GRAFLEX HISTORIC QUARTERLY



**VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1** **FIRST QUARTER 1997**

FEATURES



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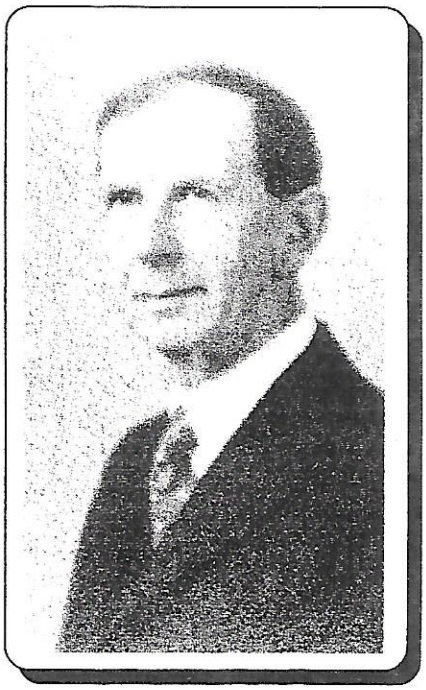
## A Famous Graflex Photo
by Don Tempel[le]

This is a story about a fine photographer, a Folmer Graflex camera, and a bridge called, with good reason, "Galloping Gertie." On a fateful November morning in 1940, circumstances brought these three elements together. In a split second a prize winning photograph was produced.

The photographer was James Bashford, a long time Tacoma, WA newspaper reporter, photographer, and [r]aconteur who wove many a colorful story with both [t]ypewriter and camera. Here is a more personal insight compiled by Mr. Bashford's namesake grandson, James Bell: "On Nov. 7, 1940 James Bashford used his Graflex to record the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. He had been employed by the Washington State Toll Bridge Authority to record the construction progress on the bridge. During the period from December 1938 until Gertie galloped to a watery grave, Jim produced four thick volumes of photographs. He related many anecdotes about the bridge to his daughter. Among those recalled is how the workers used to suck on lemons to keep from becoming seasick as the bridge swayed while they worked



*James Bashford*

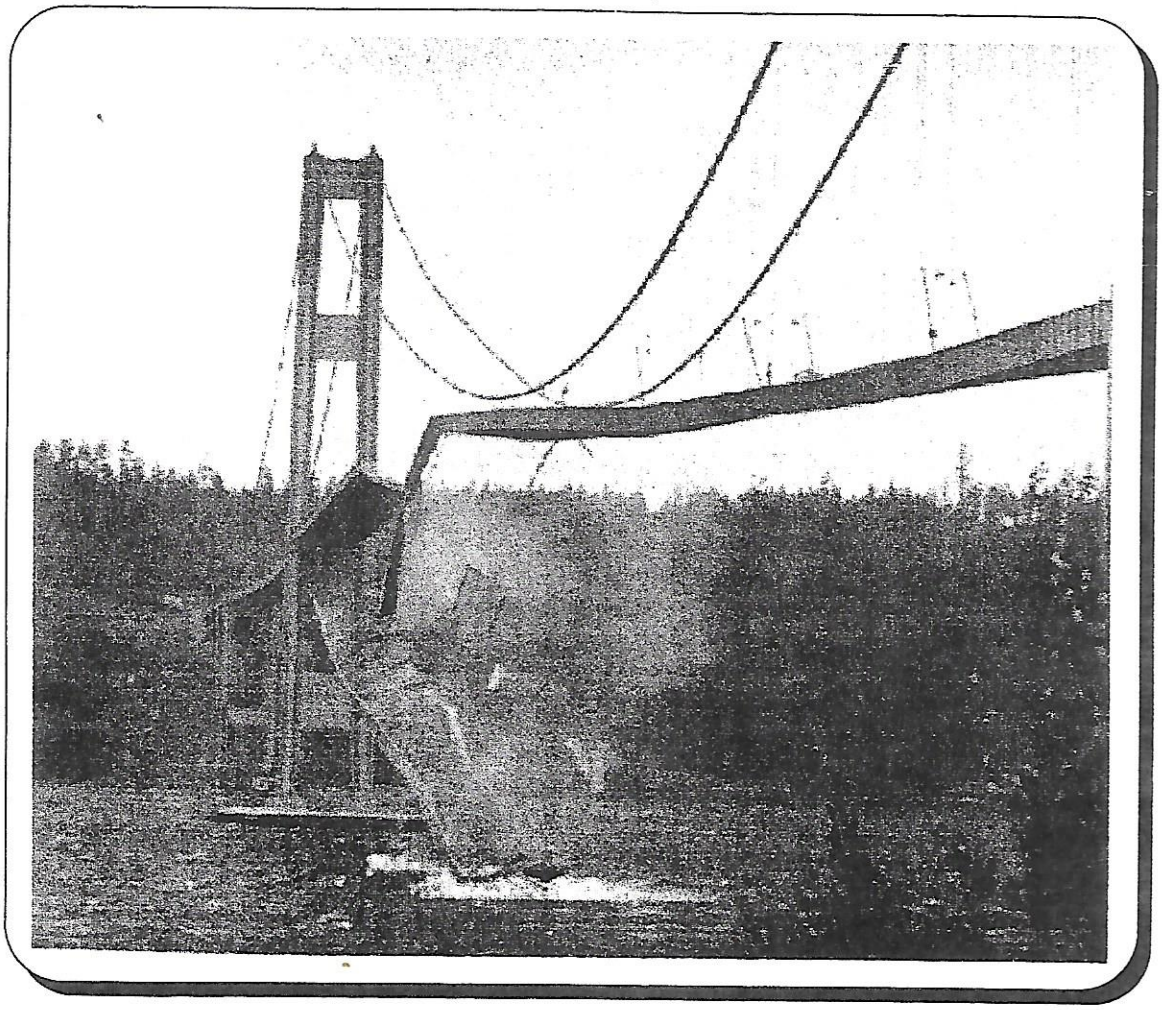
on it. Jim was in his sixties while clambering around on the bridge with his trusty Graflex.

Here is an excerpt from a letter to the editor in the Nov. 10, 1980 Tacoma News Tribune Robert J. Tresch responds to Howard Clifford's article "Galloping Gertie" (TNT 11-2):

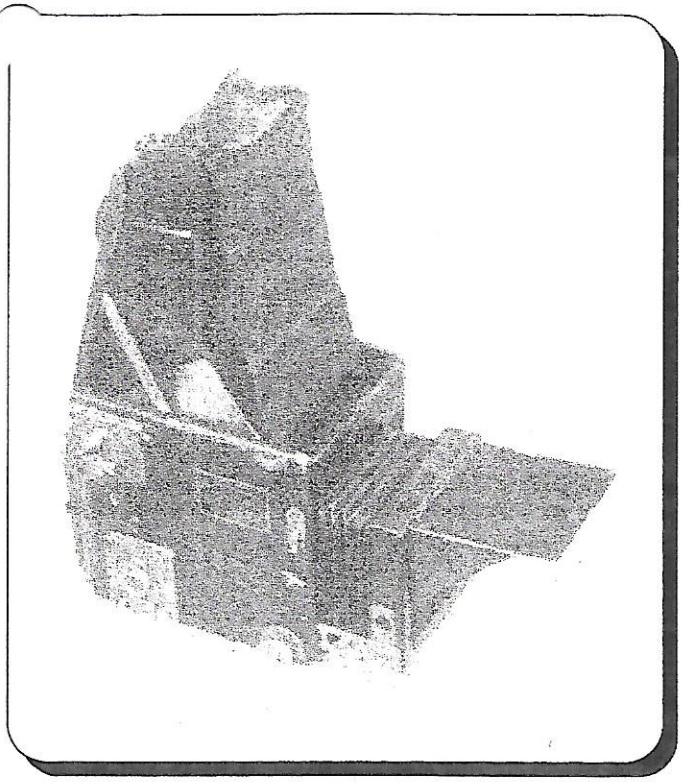
> James Bashford, an elderly, highly respected and courtly photographer made the TNT file photo accompanying Howie's article (Howard Clifford). Jimmy Bashford made the remarkable photograph with his mid-30's, four/five Folmer Graflex camera. This was the press camera of the day and came complete with revolving back and hand shifting 12-exposure cut film magazine. Needless to say, until the day Jimmy Bashford died, this spectacular photograph gave the old gentleman in the celluloid collar a new lease on life.
>
> As a fellow photographer, I feel it is unfortunate his name wasn't mentioned [in the article noted above]."

It was standard practice in those days for progress photography to be done on large format negatives, enlarged to 8x10 inches, and mounted on linen. Some of the more scenic views were often toned, and upon completion the entire record was loose-leaf bound into individual volumes. As I study these beautifully produced volumes some fifty-six years after the fact, it is evident that this is a priceless record. The detail, the human interest, the composition and careful craftsmanship are the evident marks of a true professional.

The historic camera that Jim Bashford used to record the end of Galloping Gertie was a workhorse of the era, a 4x5 Graflex RB-D. The camera has passed down through the family to Jim Bell. Jim has graciously entrusted me with the camera to take pictures with and examine in detail. The lens on the camera is a magnificent Schneider Xenar,



*The famous photograph, taken by a Graflex*

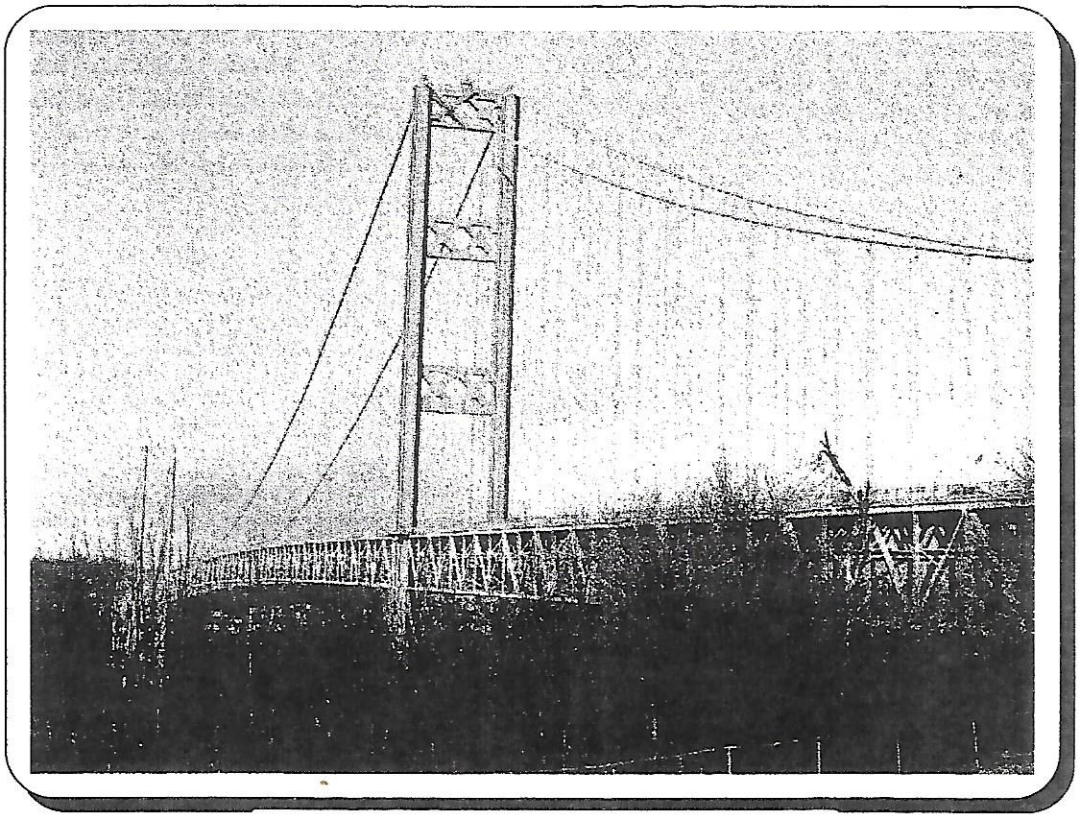


*Jim Bashford's RB-D*

21 cm. f3.5. The lens serial # is 222601 which places its manufacture in late 1928. The glass is exceptionally clear with the front element showing only minor cleaning marks. The camera has had a long and productive life as attested to by the amount of gray paint worn off all working [metal] surfaces. There are no less than 34 screw holes all around the body where accessories have been added and removed over the years. The camera serial number is 161574 and is stamped under the front edge of the hood cover. As might be expected, the shutter tension springs are weak and the curtain is stiff, so allowances should be made for exposure.

The bridge in this story is the first Tacoma Narrows, begun in 1938 and opened to traffic on July 1, 1940. Even before the span was completed it had a reputation of galloping in the winds which whistled through the ventouri of the narrows. The problem was so severe that stabilizing cables were added to both bankside spans and ironically contributed to the ultimate failure of the design. It is not recorded who coined the sobriquet "Galloping Gertie," but gallop she did. Local residents were fascinated by the antics of Gertie.

Young people used to pay the ten cent pedestrian toll to take dates on the bridge and experience the thrill of



*The replacement bridge (photo by Don Tempel)*

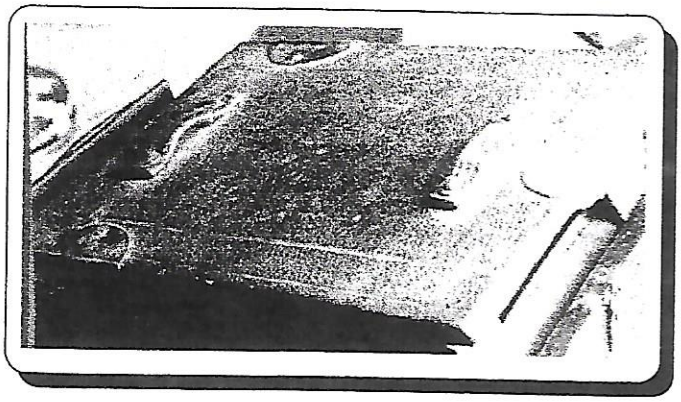
watching one's date disappear in the trough of one wave and reappear on the crest of the next. It was only two days after Franklin D. Roosevelt had won an unprecedented third term that Gertie dropped politics off the front page. On the morning of Nov. 7, 1940 the word went out that the bridge was really bouncing. Many residents and news people assembled to watch and record the action, and of course Jim Bashford was there with his Graflex.

About ten o'clock the bridge took an alarming 45 degree rocking motion due to the slipping of one of the stabilizing cables. This coupled with the spanwise oscillation exceeded the design limits, and the roadway began to tear apart. Two men on the bridge at that time literally had to crawl to the safety of the shore. The only casualty was a dog that refused to leave a car trapped near the east tower. If you check page 256 of The Graphic Graflex Photography Manual, 8th Edition, 2nd Printing, you will see two photographs that Jim Bashford took on that historic morning. The car carrying the dog can be seen in the lower photograph.

It is a shame that the association that Jim Bashford had with the first Tacoma Narrows Bridge did not end on a high note. There is no doubt that the body of work he produced during the construction phase aided in reconstructing the bridge in 1950. I had the pleasure of photographing the new bridge with Mr. Bashford's camera from about his vantage point. Considering film speeds in 1940 and converting to "Graflexese," I guess he might have used a tension number of 5 or 6 and a curtain aperture of 3/8 inch. This would have been a shutter speed of 1/235th second with f8 or f11. Whatever the numbers were, Jim stopped the collapse in mid-air and recorded that split second of history alluded to earlier. By any standard it was a job professionally done from start to spectacular finish.

Correction to last issue's article, "Graflex Strobe Repair:"

Reader Dale Perrill suggests that the capacitor in the diagram labeled "0.5 ufd" should read "0.05 ufd." He also recommends reading the "ARRL Radio Amateur Handbook" for further help in repairing electrical gear.



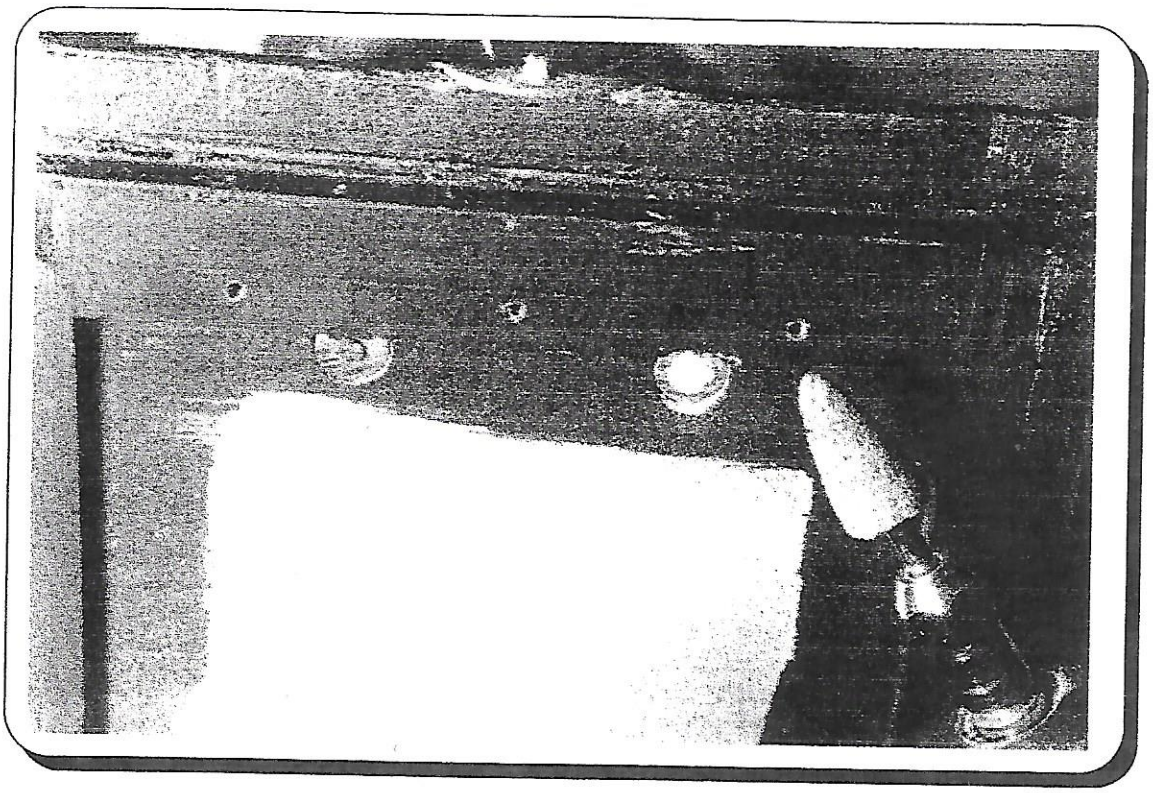
Broken Handles - What to Do
by J.C.Welch

Collectors and users of old cameras delight in finding pristine examples of their quarry. All too often, however, one comes across lessor examples ranging from parts cameras to some with one or more defects. My experience at camera shows is that many of the latter, perhaps culls from collections, appear most often. If priced accordingly, I delight in finding a parts camera, such as the one that still had at least one last donation to make for this article.

With wood and leather cameras, such as Graflexes, broken handles are a common problem. Just as the camera is showing its age, and has leather in need of some oil, it gets lifted by its handle, naturally, and snap - the damage is done. Since Graflexes mostly had tough handles, it's often the hold-downs that break. In either case, the repair starts the same: find a replacement.

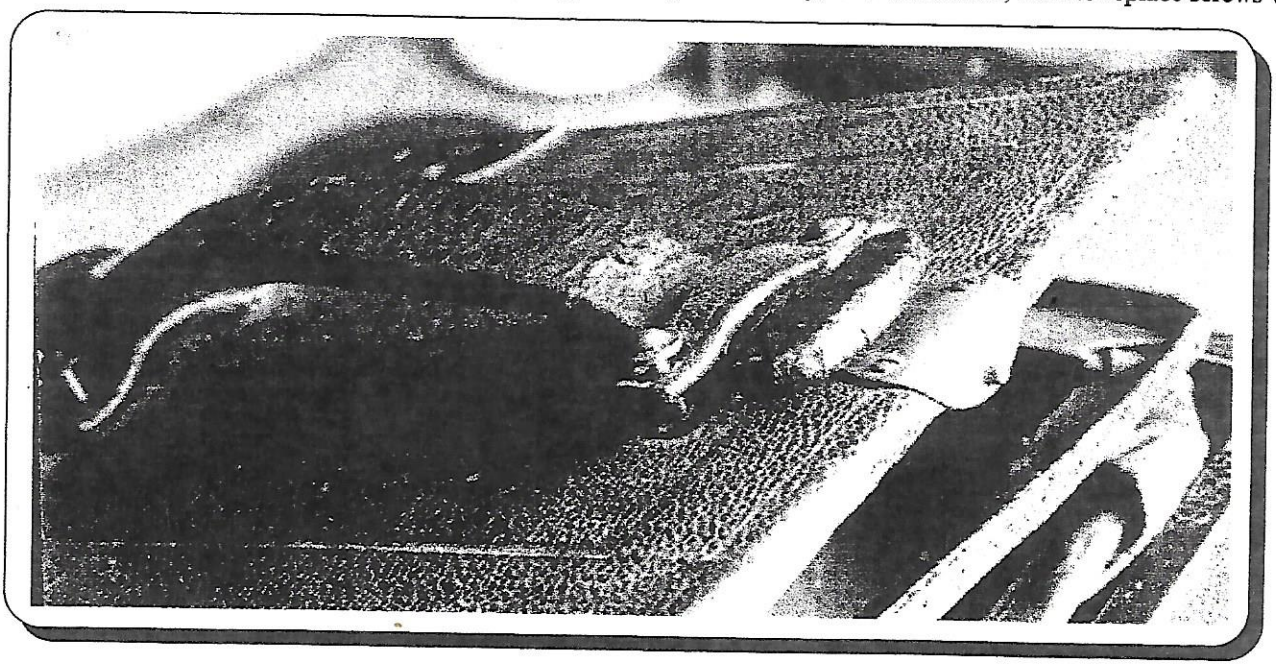
In the example, that part was an unusual one: not just a handle for an accordian-hood Auto 3x4, but a *molded* one, appropriate for the era. (Later handles were flat-cut and stitched. ) An odd feature of this particular camera was that the hold-downs showed almost no wear! How, then, could a replacement handle be slipped under the intact hold-downs?

Although a handle miraculously was found with a parts camera of that vintage, the design of the early Auto made up for the handle troubles by making neat replacement easy. In this model, a mirror is mounted on the underside of the camera top, for aid in eye-level shooting (although this inverts the image again!). After loosening the hood retainer where the leather attaches to the top, and carefully loosening the leather, a bar with screws can be seen holding the mirror in. Washers lie under it anchoring the large rivets that fasten the hold-downs. Rivets can be a nuisance, since replacements can't generally be found that

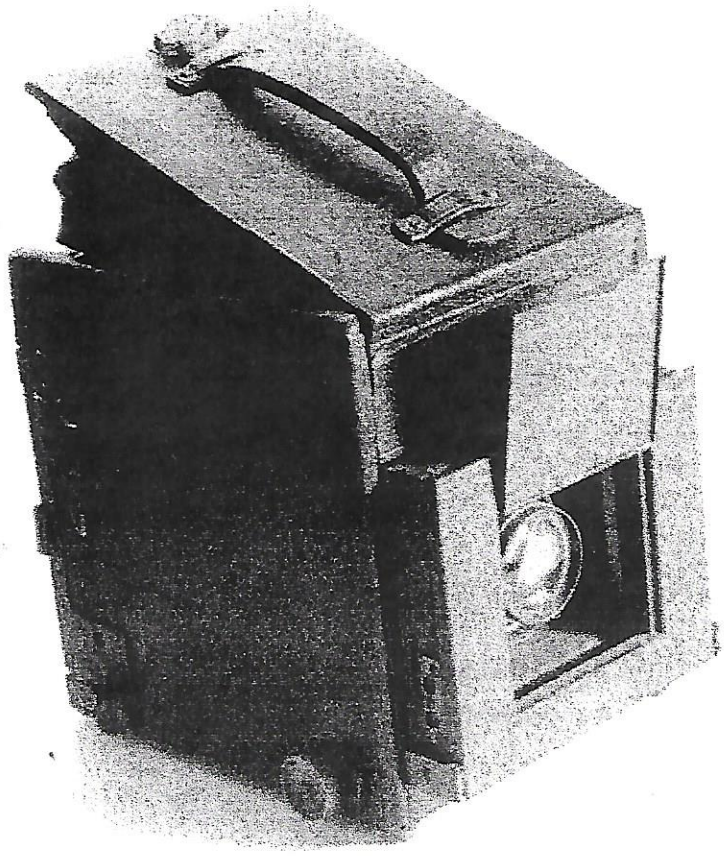


*Removing the old rivet washer*

k correct. However, the old ones can often be re-used, if the hidden ends are worked on. A Dremel (TM) or similar tool grinds off the rivet ends, enabling the long rivets to be pulled out carefully from the top. With the hold-downs raised, the replacement handle - already oiled - can be easily slipped under them. Epoxy or other cement fastens the replaced rivets, after they are pushed back down (water clear epoxy is available). A little flat black touch-up is handy, too, as well as long nosedspring clamps. The mirror and viewing hood go back easily, and those little, hard to replace screws were



*Re-installing the rivet*



*Job done and handle in!*

kept carefully in a closed jar, weren't they?

The mirror covers all evidence of the work, and the job is done. On later reflexes, the viewing hood also covers the rivets. Since in other repairs, it's usually the hold-downs that are broken, it is advised to replace the unbroken one, too, so that they match. Then oil that leather, using genuine neatsfoot oil, not neatsfoot compound, a hint published often but worth repeating.

*(Editor's note: This is the first of several articles on flashes. Graflex had a long history of interesting flash innovation)*

## Flash Guns
by Bill Baker

In 1937 flash synchronization became a reality for the working professional and press photographer. The flashbulb had been introduced in 1930 but was only designed for open flash. With the advent of synchronized flash, several companies began offering flash equipment that could be attached to the Speed Graphic. General Electric solved the problem of the duration of the flash.

Among the companies offering flash equipment was Kalart with their Sisto gun designed to operate with focal plane shutters and long peak flash bulbs (i.e. nos. 6 and 31). They also marketed the Master Automatic Speed Flash which was a mechanical synchronizer capable of synchronizing the [shorter duration] SM, SF, nos. 5 and 11 flash bulbs.

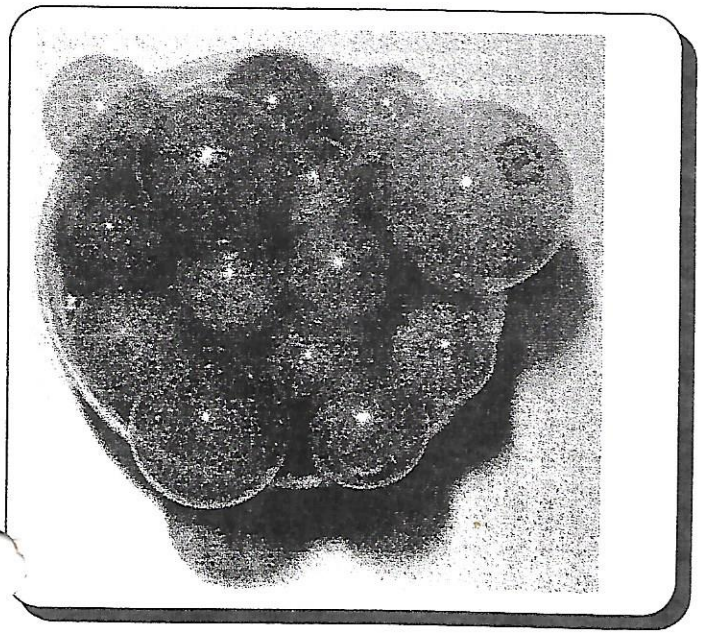
The Mendelsohn Speedgun was one of the first introduced which used a magnetic tripping device that could be installed on the lens boards of the larger Speed Graphics and on the front standards of the Miniature Speed Graphics. There were several types of magnetic Speedgun trippers available, the size of the camera determining the tripper ordered.

Heiland introduced its Model S flash equipment with a three cell [battery] handle and an Electromatic Coil Tripper. The Tripper was mounted on the lens board. The reflectors were adjustable for the various height bulbs. They also offered a Type 45A Flex-Focus reflector which was designed to use midget bulbs.

King Sol introduced a three cell unit which could be used with a solenoid or attached to the focal plane contacts of the Miniature Speed Graphic.

Last but not least, Graflex offered flash equipment with two and three cell cases. They offered extension tubes to increase available power when multiple flash was required. The flashguns were all furnished with brackets or clamps that could be attached to the Kalart rangefinder housing [this rangefinder was commonly added to older, "pre-anniversary" Graphics.]

In 1947, Graflex redesigned its flash equipment and named it Graflite. This was furnished with an encircling bracket firmly attached to the camera body and a quick release bracket mounted on t he case. The new equipment became more sophisticated with various combinations of options which fired the flash bulbs.



"Mr. TT Holden once remarked that a friend found a spider in his Graflex. He turned the lens toward sunshine *(Ed.: presumably to see it better)* and FRIED the insect (sic) before he could open up the lensboard. Danger - if your mirror is up and you do this towards the sun with curtain down in back it will burn a hole in the curtain!
*- submitted by Cliff Scofield*

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WANTED: Graflex or Graflok back wih graphic roll holder, or a Graphic back spring kit for roll holder; this for use with a 2-1/4x3-1/4 Minitaure Speed Graphic. Would buy a parts camera to get the back. Jim Messenger PO Box 414, Kasson, MN 55944. Tel. 507-635-5350

WANTED: Stereoscopic Graphic, Stereo Graflex, Auto Graflex Jr., Naturalist Graflex, Early 1A Graflex, Miniature Speed w/folding finder, Banquet Camera, 180mm Sonnar for XL, Zoomars and mirrors for Norita, wide angle for 70 Combat Camera., and any unusual Graflex items. Send description and price. Harry D. Porter, 505 Sunlight Dr., Arlington, TX 76006

WANTED: 47mm Super Angulon focussing barrel for Graflex XL. Would trade bbl. for 100 or buy outright. M. Hanemann, Box 22374, Milwaukie, OR 97265. Email hanemann@europa.com

WANTED: lens door with side flaps for a 3x4 RB-D. Does your parts camera have it? J.C. Welch, 1777 Lake Dr. Eugene, OR 97404.

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