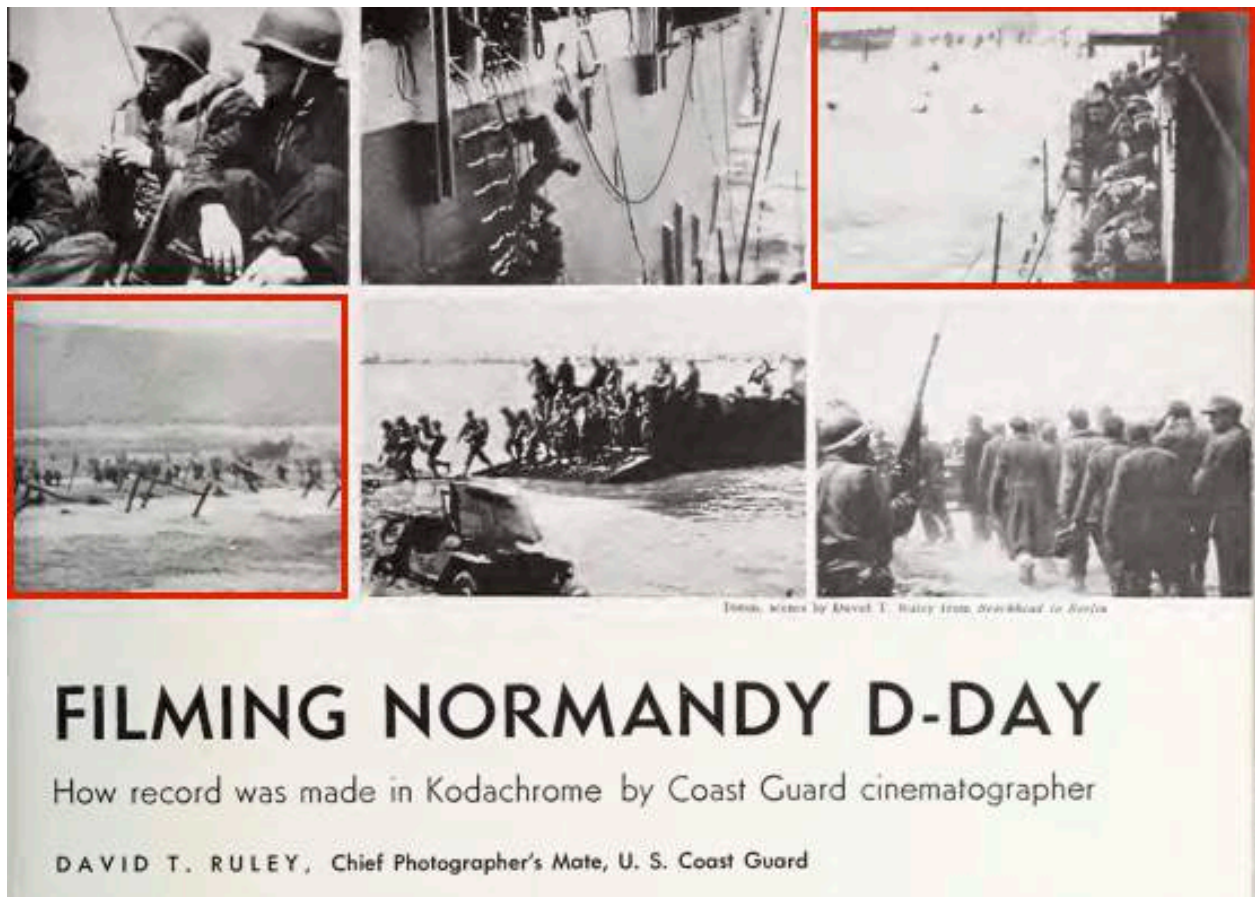


Ruley, David T., "FILMING NORMANDY D-DAY," *Movie Makers* 20:6, June 1945, pp. 213, 228-30.



[Caption for group of 6 images] 16mm. scenes by David T. Ruley from *Beachhead to Berlin*

## FILMING NORMANDY D-DAY

How record was made in Kodachrome by Coast Guard cinematographer

DAVID T. RULEY, Chief Photographer's Mate, U. S. Coast Guard

### *Editor's Note*

*Movie Makers* is privileged to present the terse and salty report of the United States Coast Guard filmer, Chief Photographer's Mate David T. Ruley, who had the important

*assignment of recording the Coast Guard's part in the greatest invasion of all history — the landing on the Normandy Coast in June of 1944. In this cinematographic feat, 16mm. film proved its worth. Every personal movie maker may be proud of the fact that what once, was called "amateur width" did, on D-Day, a thoroughly professional job. In Chief Ruley's understatement of his own deeds one may read, between the lines, some hint of what it meant to keep filming, unable, to fight back. Much of the footage which he exposed on D-Day provided the principal material for the United States Coast Guard's fine picture, Beachhead to Berlin, which Warner Brothers assembled, edited and released for theatrical showing.*

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JUNE of 1944 was an eventful month for me, as for millions of people everywhere.

I began it in a small channel port in Southern England. One thing which was in every one's mind back in those days was the coming invasion of Western Europe. It certainly was foremost in my mind, for I knew that, when it came, I should be a part of it.

I had left the United States Coast Guard Motion Picture Unit at New York in February, armed — you might say — with a Cine-Kodak Special, an exposure meter, a tripod and 6,000 feet of 16mm. Kodachrome. My assignment was to record the coming invasion of Western Europe, or, more specifically, the part which the Coast Guard played in that invasion. For this purpose I was assigned to a Landing Craft, Infantry, Flotilla which was largely Coast Guard manned.

During the months preceding the invasion the LCI's, including the ship to which I was attached, maneuvered constantly with the various other landing craft and transports which were to be used in the invasion. Day after day we would carry out practice beaching operations and practice landings on the shores of Southern England.

I got plenty of footage of these maneuvers and practice beachings, for I knew that, if a story was ever to be told in pictures of the invasion, the preliminaries would be important. I also filmed my shipmates going about their various duties aboard the ship, with a few sequences of them on shore leave. English weather being what it is, I did not have very much time to do all this, because there were many days of waiting for good weather in order to shoot in color. However, as spring advanced, the weather seemed to get better for a while.

On Sunday, June fourth, the weather was very bad. It was raining, and the sky looked menacing. I knew by then that D-Day must be close at hand. My ship, as well as all the others, was loaded with troops, K rations and all the gear that the soldiers would use on the beach. These supplies were wrapped in watertight packages and the guns were in waterproofed covers; so, I knew that they were expecting to have a wet landing. My ship was loaded with medical corpsmen, combat engineers and military police from an infantry division.

Late in the afternoon of June 5 we left England in a convoy bound for "Omaha Beach," which was the combat name of the designated area in which our group was to land. The Channel was rough [Continued on page 228]

### Filming Normandy D-Day

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that night, but I had too much on my mind to worry about the state of the weather. I lay down in my bunk and actually slept until dawn. I knew that the next day would be one that I should never forget.

Early in the morning of June 6 I came up on deck with my camera loaded and with an extra magazine of 100 feet of color film. I did not expect to have much time to do any reloading. I wondered if I should be able to hold the camera steady while I shot pictures. At 6:30 A. M., the naval barrage had stopped and, except for some noises on the beach, it was pretty quiet. The LCI's left the transport area and started toward the beach. About an hour later, we had contacted the control vessel off the shore and had received orders to beach and to disembark the troops. There was a lot of firing and noise now on the beach, but I saw nothing close enough for a picture.

At 7:40. we reached the first line of obstacles which stopped us. The soldiers started to go down the ramp and into the chest deep water where they began to wade to the beach. Many smaller landing craft were discharging, and the water was filled with wading soldiers. Those in the water were under machine gun and light artillery fire, and many of them never got to the beach. Several of the landing craft in this area hit mines and others were impaled on the outer series of obstacles.

Here was much to film. I realized

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that I was shooting but was not remembering what I shot. It was too much to remember. I did not use my tripod at all during this time, for very obvious reasons. In order to keep the camera steady I usually braced it against some part of the superstructure, which served as cover. Other times, when I hand held it, I held my breath for the duration of the take. But I spent a great deal of time holding my breath while we were in on that beach, anyway, for one reason or another.

One of the incidents that I remember quite clearly occurred when our LCI was beached. Our troops were disembarking, and at the time there was quite a little small arms and machine gun fire coming over the ship. During the worst part of it. I had ducked down behind the enclosed conning platform. Our signalmen, who was watching me, said, "You won't get very good pictures from there."

I got up then and aimed my camera at the beach and started shooting. Our skipper, in order to ease my mind about the small arms fire, said, "You know our heads don't make very big targets up here, for all they can see is the tops of our helmets." I looked at him; as he said, only the top of his helmet stuck over the edge of the rail, but he was a short man who stood about five feet three. When I stuck my camera and head — or, at least, as much of it as was necessary to make the shot — over that rail, it seemed to me to make a big enough target for the entire German Army to shoot at.

This same signalman, who was wiser than I in the ways of taking a beach and who had been in the landings at Sicily and Italy, noticed one of the soldiers on the beach crawling up through the sand ahead of the other troops and then crawling back behind the sand spit where most of the soldiers were taking cover. Suddenly a plume of purple smoke appeared where the soldier had placed a demolition charge. Our observant signalman told me that I had better make a shot of this, for the smoke indicated that soon there would be a terrific explosion.

I argued with him that I had taken a shot of this same type of smoke signal on a maneuver back in England and that nothing happened, not remembering that perhaps things might be done differently on a maneuver than on a real landing. Just as I had made a bet with the signalman that nothing would happen, the demolition charge exploded. That was one shot I did not get. From that time on, I listened to any and all advice that the crew would give me and had many good shots pointed out that otherwise I should have missed.

After we had disembarked about a hundred troops, the tide, which was

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very strong, started to swing the ship in toward the row of mined obstacles. The skipper, seeing a clear space down the beach, backed off and ran down opposite an obstacle whose mines had been detonated. He drove the ship over this and over two rows of hedgehog obstacles. This maneuver was a big help to the troops, and it aided me in getting a medium shot of them fighting on the beach. Until then I had taken nothing but long shots, besides some footage of the troops disembarking and wading ashore in the water. These soldiers were under machine gun fire, but, because of our close positions, more of them succeeded in getting to the beach.

Just as the last of the troops had gone down the ramps and into the water, the ship was hit three times in rapid succession by an anti-tank gun from a shore battery on the beach. Two of these hits were made in the pilot house and our steering gear was put out of commission as well as the bridge communication system. Our helmsman and also two other seamen were killed. Three were wounded.

I had to leave my camera for a while, because the ship was, to use a sailor's expression, all fouled up. How we came off the beach in all that fire I honestly don't know. I did not think that we should make it. However our skipper did a very good job, and, after shifting to hand steering from the emergency steering room, we backed off the beach.

I spent the next three weeks in Normandy. The nights were sometimes pretty violent from air raids, but nothing I saw in France ever matched the fury of the first day. Even if the individual incidents are blurred into inexact memories — because there was too much to fix anything clearly in mind — it is a day that I shall never forget.