

ROUGH CUT

by Robert Rouveroy C.S.C.



Rough Cut man, Robert Rouveroy, filming during the shoot of **Death Weekend**

No doubt about it, these two months, December and January have been nice and profitable for me. Traditionally the two deadliest months of the freelance world have turned out to be the busiest yet since last March. It all started when, on an impulse, I bought a black cat from the Toronto Humane Society. I just walked in and found him cowering in cage number thirteen. So help me, when I brought him home I found a query on my answering machine from DAL productions asking whether I was interested in doing second unit camera on **Death Weekend** on the Kleinberg lot. I called them back and allowed, after checking my (blank) agenda that, yes, I was intrigued. And the next morning, at an ungodly hour, up to the Studio where Ivan Reitman of Cinepix fame had me galloping through misty heather trying to keep up with Don Stroud who was very busy indeed shotgunning Brenda Vacarro. Not having seen one foot of the rushes by Bob Saad, the DP of the epic, I really

had no idea what I was doing. The day was rather hectic, what with being required to shoot an approaching car from a mudhole in the road. The driver seemed to be very good, at least he didn't hit me when going over me twice. He turned out to be a stuntman from Hollywood. He carried his left arm in a sling however; makes you wonder how good he really was. He'd broken it during another take.

It was a pleasure to work with Don Stroud. He dropped dead for me four times (after being hit by the car), and never once touched the frame-line. Very convincing.

A-Track

Much later in the day I met Bob Saad. I'd worked with him before, years ago at some effort for ETV. He's one of those quiet, very competent men, who would only express mild surprise if a stick of dynamite exploded under his seat. He was very busy lighting an outside set in a gully and I was quite tired so I went home, thinking that is that, nice day, nice bread etc. So I was quite flattered that I was called back a few days later, for a week's work. My rushes

matched the stuff that Bob shot quite well, I was told. Some elaborate deal was concocted with Cinevision, so I had the benefit of a second Panaflex to work with. Well, just between you and me, I had to ask the assistant where the on-off switch was as I had never worked with that thing. Now before you speculate on my competence I'll have you know that I can strip a Mitchell BNC or an Arri IIC lefthanded and blindfolded. Of course there is the question of whether I can put them back together again properly, but you get the idea.

However may I report that I have become another convert to the Panavision system. That machine is so godawfully good I can't imagine how we ever were able to get pictures out of the old cameras. As the original gimmick man I can't for the life of me think of any improvements, unless one tacks on an automatic drink dispenser. Quite probably one is available on special order.

The bottles will give you near perfect pictures at idiotic lightlevels. Of course, at T 1.4, depth of field is practically non-existent, a fact that some directors take as an affront. I know of at least one who complained to the front-office that the DP didn't want to guarantee focus on two objects fifteen feet apart with a 50mm T 1.2. Somebody had to instruct him in the law of optics.

B-Track

As it is all the rage nowadays to shoot with ridiculously low lightlevels, the documentary cameraman has a bit of a problem. After completing my duties on **Death Weekend** I was asked to do a documentary on the set of **Breaking Point**. The difficulty lay in getting an image, even on 7247, with my trusty 16mm BL with a T 2.5 zoom, while the lightlevel was adjusted to the T 1.2 of the Panavision camera. Given also the wider shutterangle of the Panavision, I was seriously underexposed. PFA labs did a tremendous job of saving the footage but it was dicey indeed. I wonder what any lab could do for the poor documentary cameraman on the set of **Barry Lyndon** where several shots were made with a T 0.8 would you believe. I can't even figure out how many stops difference there

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photo Tony Bliss



Bob Saad, Director of Photography on **Death Weekend**, filming Brenda Vacarro in action.

is with T 2.5 Can anyone out there enlighten me?

Main Track

The reason for having a second unit cameraman on **Death Weekend** was primarily because the last week was devoted to total mayhem, destroying the set with assorted shot-guns, squibs and other devices. A third camera, a Mitchell R35, was used to cover yet another angle in slow motion. That movie gets too real sometimes. At last count we put one stuntman with rather bad burns in hospital, another had a broken hand, one of the actors had a few cracked ribs and yet another had his nose cut with some flying glass. Don Stroud barely escaped serious mischief to his vital parts when the stuntdriver was a bit too leadfooted on the gas pedal and hit poor Don where it hurts most. Yours truly had an anxious moment lying on the hood of the car trying to get a head shot of a murderous Brenda Vacarro, who was intent upon killing Don. The camera, an ARRI 35 with a "hard" front for Pana lenses, was mounted on a contraption belonging to Carmen McDiarmid,

the head grip. Pretty good rig too, but it had many screws and butterfly nuts striking up here and there for all kinds of adjustments. So there I was, trying to hold on for dear life while Brenda was gunning the car down a country road. No stuntdriver she, so when Ivan Reitman told her to stop she stomped on the brakes hard and a butterfly nut got caught in my fly. Another two inches and Carmen could have married me. Come to think of it, I felt safer in Vietnam.

All this happened while making this movie. What happens *in* the movie is worse. Following a rape, five guys get killed off in assorted ways. One gets his throat cut (while raping), another drowns in quicksand, the third gets blown up, the next one gets his head half shot off, and the last is hit by a car. The only one left is the lady, and that proves conclusively that the female is the deadlier of the species, when aroused.

I must admit I don't get off much on violence in films. Probably because the real-life violence that any documentary cameraman records during his lifetime somehow diminishes what bloodlust he has naturally. It is

a fact that all TV stations will heavily censor the footage that crosses their desks. After all, TV news is usually presented during the dinner hour and it won't do to observe a child with its head blown off, flopping like a decapitated chicken while one dips the asparagus in the hollandaise.

Up to a few years ago, death in feature films was rather ritual. The good guy shot the bad guy or vice-versa, and they dropped conveniently dead, quite proper and decorous, with nary a drop of blood. If wounded, a stiff upper lip was *de rigueur*, until guys like Sam Peckinpah got the idea to shoot the lip off. And as so often happens, one director has to top the other. For me, the point of sales resistance was reached some time ago with the film **Straw Dogs**. I left the moviehouse because it was getting too close to the stuff I had to shoot film on for a living. Why spend \$3.50 when a TV network would spend thousands of dollars to send me to a place where I could see the real thing, at first hand!

So I get my jollies with an old Claudette Colbert film on the Late Night movie and I still pink away a tear at **Bambi**. But you out there, if you like violent films, I highly recommend **Death Weekend**, to be released in late spring this year. It is written and directed by Bill Fruet, with Ivan Reitman producing and occasionally directing second unit stuff. Bob Saad was the director of photography and did a beautiful job getting it all on film, very ably assisted by Rick McGuire. Again, with the tendency to film at very low lightlevels, the job of Assistant is absolutely crucial with all that focuspulling, and he has a much heavier responsibility than ever before. □

Equipped for some fancy work.



photo Tony Bliss