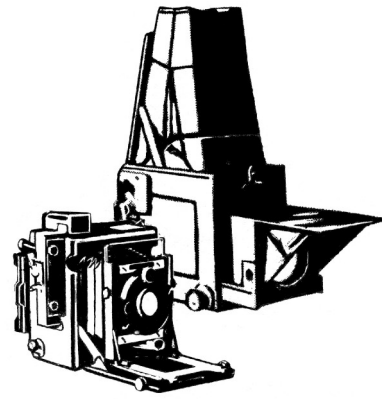


GRAFLEX HISTORIC QUARTERLY

Since 1996



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THIRD QUARTER 2013

FEATURES

Custom 5x7 Home Portrait Graflex by Douglas Frank.....	1
The 2¼ x 3¼ Revolving Back Speed Graphic by Jerry Spiegel.....	4
My Graflex Series C by Ronn Tuttle.....	5
Some Tales from My Trade by Ian Carron.....	6



CUSTOM 5x7 HOME PORTRAIT GRAFLEX

By Douglas Frank

During the 1970s, my home was located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I discovered large format photography in the early 1970s and have used view cameras of all sizes over the years, but the Graflex SLRs were of particular interest to me. I purchased two Graflex Super D cameras during that decade, one a 3x4 and the other a 4x5, both of which I still own. I continue to make portraits on roll film with the 3x4.

The city of Chicago contained many retail outlets during the 1970s which catered to the large format photographer. Altman's Camera, Central Camera and Standard Camera were three of the biggest ones downtown. I would frequent all three of these stores.

There was one on the near north side, however, called Darkroom Aids. This one was a bit different and far more interesting than any of the downtown stores. Darkroom Aids was owned by a man named Al Schwartz, and I believe Al had owned this business for many years. He was probably in his 60s in 1978 and was a walking

encyclopedia of large format photography with regard to equipment. I would make regular trips down to his store from Milwaukee and always enjoyed chatting with him and looking over his stock.

Primarily, Al sold used equipment....stainless steel sinks, tanks, contact print frames, big Elwood enlargers, as well as all manner of other equipment for large format photography. In the front of the store, he maintained a case of lenses and had pre-owned cameras of various sizes spread all over the store as well.

Up on a shelf during one of my trips down there, I noticed a 5x7 Graflex with a giant lens mounted on it. The lens was about 2 feet long, in fact! Although it was not for sale, Al told me all about it. Cameras such as this had been used by sports photographers from high up in a sports stadium. The focusing of the lens, known as a "Big Bertha," was accomplished by a lever resembling the shift lever on a car mounted on one side. This camera was a very heavy machine.

A photographer using a Big Bertha Graflex was able to zero in on a single portion of the athletic field, and with predetermined focus points and a remote control for setting the f/stops, the photographer could react very quickly to action on different parts of the field.

Also, with negatives the size of 5x7 inches, even a cropped photograph maintained a very high level of quality. Film packs or cut film holders were the usual types of film holders used, as they enabled the photographer to go to the next sheet very quickly.

These Big Bertha cameras were usually custom built to a given photographer's needs by companies other than Graflex, but they all were based on the Graflex Home Portrait 5x7 camera body.

As I had been chatting with Al Schwartz about these cameras one day, he mentioned that he might have something which would be of interest to me. So he went to another part of the store and came back with a large box. This box contained a brand new 5x7 Home Portrait Graflex body. It had been marketed this way so that it could be mated to a Big Bertha lens. Therefore, there were no focusing rails and only a rectangular hole in the front of the body. Otherwise, the mirror and revolving film back were normal for a 5x7 Home Portrait. This was a brand new piece, still in the original factory box from Graflex.

He offered this camera to me for a very low price, since sports photography was no longer dependent on the Big Bertha lenses, having several years earlier transitioned into the use of motor driven 35mm Nikon cameras. This particular body, however, was such a pristine

piece that I thought about how I could make it into a hand held portrait camera.

What I really was trying to do was justify to myself that I needed to purchase this particular camera body..... I really wanted this camera, but its practical value to me as it sat in the box was next to nothing. If I had wanted a 5x7 portrait camera, then I could have found an old 5x7 Home Portrait Graflex..... They were around.

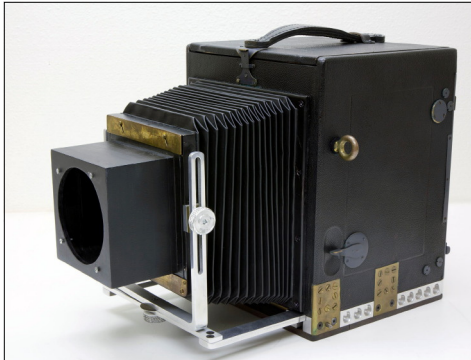
But, no, this was the one that I wanted. I had a friend with a machine shop and thought it might be interesting to modify this camera body and equip it with the necessary focusing mechanism and front standard.

So I purchased this Graflex from Al that day. It has a late serial number, 468552. The original factory box is long gone. In 1978, in fact, this camera body was simply an obsolete tool. It had no collector's value whatsoever.

The job of modifying this camera proved to be way more time-consuming than I had originally thought. My friend with the machine shop taught me how to use one of his milling machines, and I spent many evenings fabricating the parts necessary to convert this camera body into a workable 5x7 portrait camera. This was a challenge for me, although one that I enjoyed. It was fun to envision a design and then actually create the pieces out of aluminum and brass.

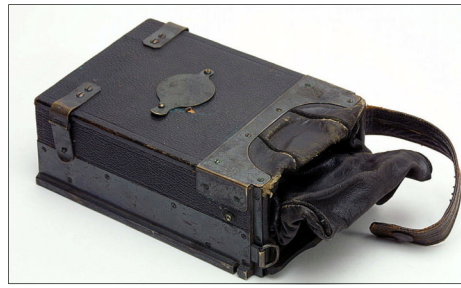
The bellows length needed to be long enough so that when the focusing rails were at maximum extension, the camera would provide a focal length of 16 inches. The limiting factor was the length of the body. My idea was to use a 12-inch lens for portraits. With a 12-inch lens and 16 inches of bellows draw, one is able to focus on a subject at 48 inches.

A better maximum focal length for portraits with a 5x7 camera was 19 inches, thus allowing one to focus closer, although the length of the body would not permit this. So I fabricated a lensboard that provided an extra 3 inches of length, thus giving me 19. With the extended lensboard and 19 inches of focal length, one can focus to 31 inches. I used the camera with and without this extender. The use of a 14-inch lens was another option, although I never tried one.



This is a very heavy machine to use, which is why I installed two heavy duty brass eye bolts on both sides. I would clip a large leather strap into these which went around my neck during portrait sessions. I also would use a tripod occasionally.

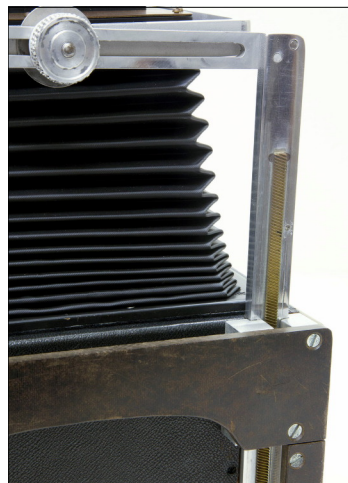
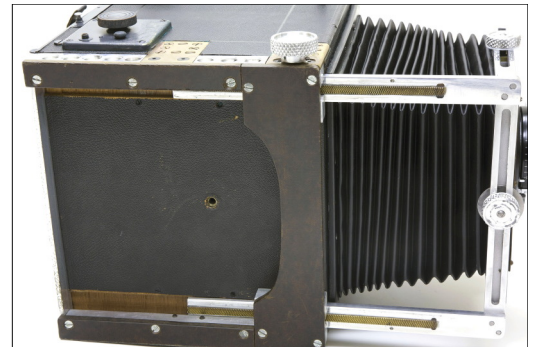
The film holder that I used was referred to as a "bag mag," which was the slang term used to describe the "Graflex Cut Film Holder," due to a leather bag being attached to the top. It held 12 septums, and each septum after exposure was changed by pulling it out mechanically up into the bag and then moving it to the back of the stack of septums. This system worked quite well and be-



fit only the Graflex SLR cameras and came in sizes ranging from 2x3 to 5x7.

As to the modification of the original camera, and as a collector of Graflex cameras myself now, I shudder to think of what I did to a valuable collector's piece, but at the time it was neither valuable nor useable. So I did what I did.

My idea was to build a false bottom onto the camera, thus making it necessary to construct flat aluminum focusing rails within this space. These rails fit into channels which



were cut into the original wooden body with the milling machine. Into these rails I used epoxy to attach the threaded parts of the rails, which I purchased separately. Then I fitted a shaft with the appropriate gearing perpendicular to these rails.

This entire mechanism was extended downward from the original camera bottom with aluminum and brass. The actual new bottom of the camera was made out of a composite material. All of these modifica-

tions added 15/16 inch to the height of the original camera.

The two focusing rails needed to have a cross piece connecting the two. This needed to be made of aluminum also. Then a piece in the shape of a "U" needed to be constructed with which to hold the front standard. I wanted this piece to be connected to the body with a single knob, thus enabling the front standard to both shift and swing. It also can rise, fall and tilt by loosening the two knobs on either side.

This camera still works just fine, but if I were to do it over again, I



would somehow make the front standard more rigid. Other than this issue, I greatly enjoyed using this camera. In any case, it is a unique piece of gear, based upon an historic camera body.

I do not believe that any digital camera original file can rival a high resolution scan from an original 5x7 inch negative. I might get some arguments about this, but I am, at my core, a film photographer. I grew up with film. I learned my craft with film. Film images have a different feeling to them relative to original digital images, perhaps somewhat like the difference between a vinyl LP recording and a digital audio disc. There is so very much information on a 5x7 silver negative. Once this information has been transferred to a digital file via a high-end scanner, then any print size, from e-mail to billboard size, can become easily achieved.

I have included several photographs within this article, all having to do with the construction of the original modifications to the camera. In conclusion, I am including three of the portraits that I made with the camera.



Marnie, Mt. Hood, Oregon, 1979.



Self-portrait, Wisconsin, 1979.



Marnie, Wisconsin, 1979.



THE 2¼ x 3¼ REVOLVING BACK SPEED GRAPHIC

By Jerry Spiegel

According to Richard Paine's book The All American Cameras a Review of Graflex (page 51), the 2¼ x 3¼ Revolving Back Speed Graphic was "Probably the most rare Graphic ever manufactured..." having been in production for less than two years, 1937 and 1938.

Tim Holden lists the following job orders for this camera:

Job Order	Number of Cameras Scheduled	Date Job Order Placed	Starting Serial Number	Ending Serial Number
6541	500	06/29/37	225988	226487
9832	500	10/14/37	227849	228348
9832	4	03/22/38	231567	231570

A total of 1,004 units were scheduled for production, but with the drop in demand, when the 2¼ x 3¼ Miniature Speed Graphic was announced, it is probable that fewer were made and sold. The serial number of this camera is 228,336 – together with the Registration Card, a provenance of its authenticity.

Unlike other production entries, these were made for the 3¼ x 4¼ Speed Graphic, and not the 2¼ x 3¼ revolving back, suggesting that some could have left the factory with the larger back. In fact, some samples from these batches have the larger fixed back.

One of these units surfaced on, of all places, eBay in mid-July, and, after a week, went for the opening bid to the only bidder – me. It seems that the seller had little or no background in cameras, so the description was incomplete and inaccurate, and the photography tended to conceal the revolving back feature. Included with the camera were an Abbey

Flash and Solenoid, a German Rollex roll film adapter of the time, an assortment of sheet film holders, the ground glass back, and a pre-printed Registration Card (showing the serial number of the camera, camera and lens type) that had never been returned to Graflex.

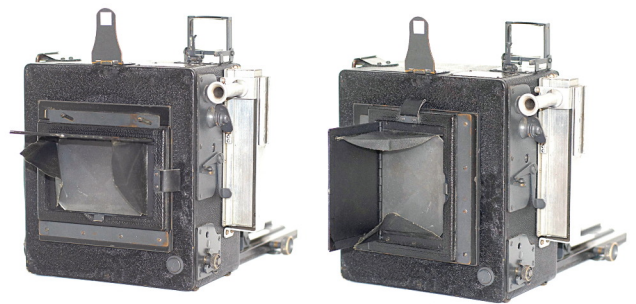


Discussion with the seller revealed that this 2¼ x 3¼ RB Speed Graphic was acquired by and used in a photo studio in Wausau, Wisconsin, and stayed with them until it closed many years later. Examining this camera, the ghost of a round tripod head indicates that it probably spent most of its life on a tripod in the studio. Shortly after purchase, the original owner acquired an Abbey Flash and Synchronizer, requiring the dial-set Compur shutter to be rotated to where it is today.

The lens is a 5½" f/4.5 No. 31 Kodak Anastigmat lens and is original to the camera. The shutter is a typical dial-set Compur of the time, made for the American market, with the usual sticky slow speeds due to lack of use. The focal plane shutter is as new, without the dried fabric common in older Graflex products.

A nice touch is an eye-lever finder with the glass etched for both horizontal and vertical formats, and the Kalart rangefinder, being spot on, with a clear and contrasty image.

Overall, a memorable eBay experience that has happened to very few collectors.



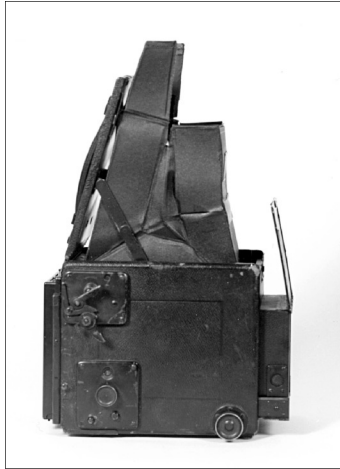
Revolving back in horizontal and vertical positions.

Additional panels from registration card.

MY GRAFLEX SERIES C

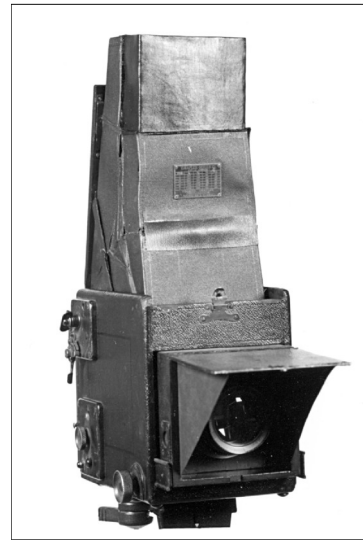
By Ronn Tuttle

My wife and I were in Branson, Missouri, the self-proclaimed “live country music show capital of America,” for the first time in several years. We were enjoying the music of Mickey Gilley, Marty Stuart, Marty Haggard (son of Merle), a stage full of Presleys (none named Elvis), and the many restaurants... “y’all want the buff-aye, right?” Of course! About midweek we ventured to the small town of Ozark to visit the many antiques malls that have provided me with several nice collectible cameras over the years. This visit was no different, because I found a “project grade” Graflex Series C. The body was pretty decent, the shutter and mirror worked well, and the strap was in nice condition, but the viewing hood was brittle with pieces missing, and the seams were taped on the inside to hold it together. Of course, the lens was also missing.



Since Richard Paine, in his book on Graflex, said the “Series C is unquestionably one of the most desirable Graflexes ever produced,” and both McKeown’s and Kennedy’s price guides list it as “rare” (a term I hesitate to use because it is overused by eBay sellers), I felt the seller’s price was fair enough, given the condition it was in. If it had been mint with the correct original lens and priced like one on eBay a few months ago (\$1,200), it would have been beyond my budget limit. I doubt that it still rates as rare without the original lens, but I do enjoy the “projects.” I cleaned and polished the body, replaced the missing rounded feet (found some at a sewing center), and made replacement lens shields. I used black pigskin leather (Tandy’s) to make the shields and the missing sections of the viewing hood. I cut a file folder to size and covered it with the pigskin using white carpenter’s glue to

bond it. I removed the very old, dried tape from inside the hood and reinforced the entire inside with the same pigskin. The pigskin is the thinnest leather I could find, but it is still a little thicker than I would like. The hood probably will not fold, but at least it is held together in a usable open position. The photos of the repairs show a distinctly different texture than the original parts, but in reality it doesn’t look that radically different. The other option I considered was to cut down the remaining parts of the hood. That would have been easier, but a feature of the Series C was the slightly taller hood as compared to other models. I originally thought I would simply switch the hood with one from another 3x4 Graflex...that didn’t work out...the C hood seems to be a unique size, at least when compared to others in my collection. I finished the project by adding an attractive brass 8" f/4.5 Cooke anastigmat lens.



While being in less than perfect condition, the camera is still an interesting addition to my collection. The serial number, 145810, is in the first group of Cs produced, according to the serial number book. The book entries would indicate the main manufacture date between 1925 to 1927 with a few being produced as late as 1935. The entries indicate around 1,200 cameras were produced.

Regardless of the exact number produced, and the less than mint condition, I am still pleased to have yet another working 87-year-old example of good old American craftsmanship.



SOME TALES FROM MY TRADE

By Ian Carron

While I may appear to be reminiscing about days of old in the photographic industry of Melbourne, Australia, these were the days when the cameras we now regard as collectible were nothing more than tools of the trade to those who used them. Memories of my days working with Athol Shmith and John Cato are still alive with amusing anecdotes. Athol's favourite camera for weddings was the 5x4 Speed Graphic, and, for much of his external fashion work, he used the 1/4 plate Graflex. All of the equipment here was either American or British. Being a Jewish family, German equipment was just not on. Most studio work was done with a pedestal camera, using a bulb release shutter, and both Athol and John could accurately squeeze that bulb for exposures from 1/10th downwards. (*You try doing that while shooting a 5x4 Ektachrome transparency!*)



Crown Speed Graphic 5" x 4".

My mates used to go green when I'd relate a day's work assisting fashion shoots of lingerie and underwear and say, "you're *paid* for that?" I must admit that my first experience with scantily clad models was a little mind bending, but they soon became just an object in front of the camera. One must bear in mind that, back then, some sixty-odd years ago, the permissive society was yet to be invented and, as far as four-letter words were concerned, even muttering *damn* in mixed company was severely frowned upon in polite circles.

One such fashion shot we were doing had a husky young male model posing in nothing but a pair of jocks, beside a shapely female model in her underwear. While we were adjusting the set, apparently the heat from the studio lamps (no studio flash back then) and the comely lass next to him got the better of him and his best friend decided to take a decisive interest in things and decided to come to life! Talk about consternation in the camp! The female model had to be hurriedly ushered out of the studio and back to the dressing room for a 'coffee break' (I can still hear her asking, "*coffee break already? We haven't even taken a shot yet!*") Then Athol, John, myself and a most embarrassed male model sat around drinking coffee and waited for things to "return to normal!"

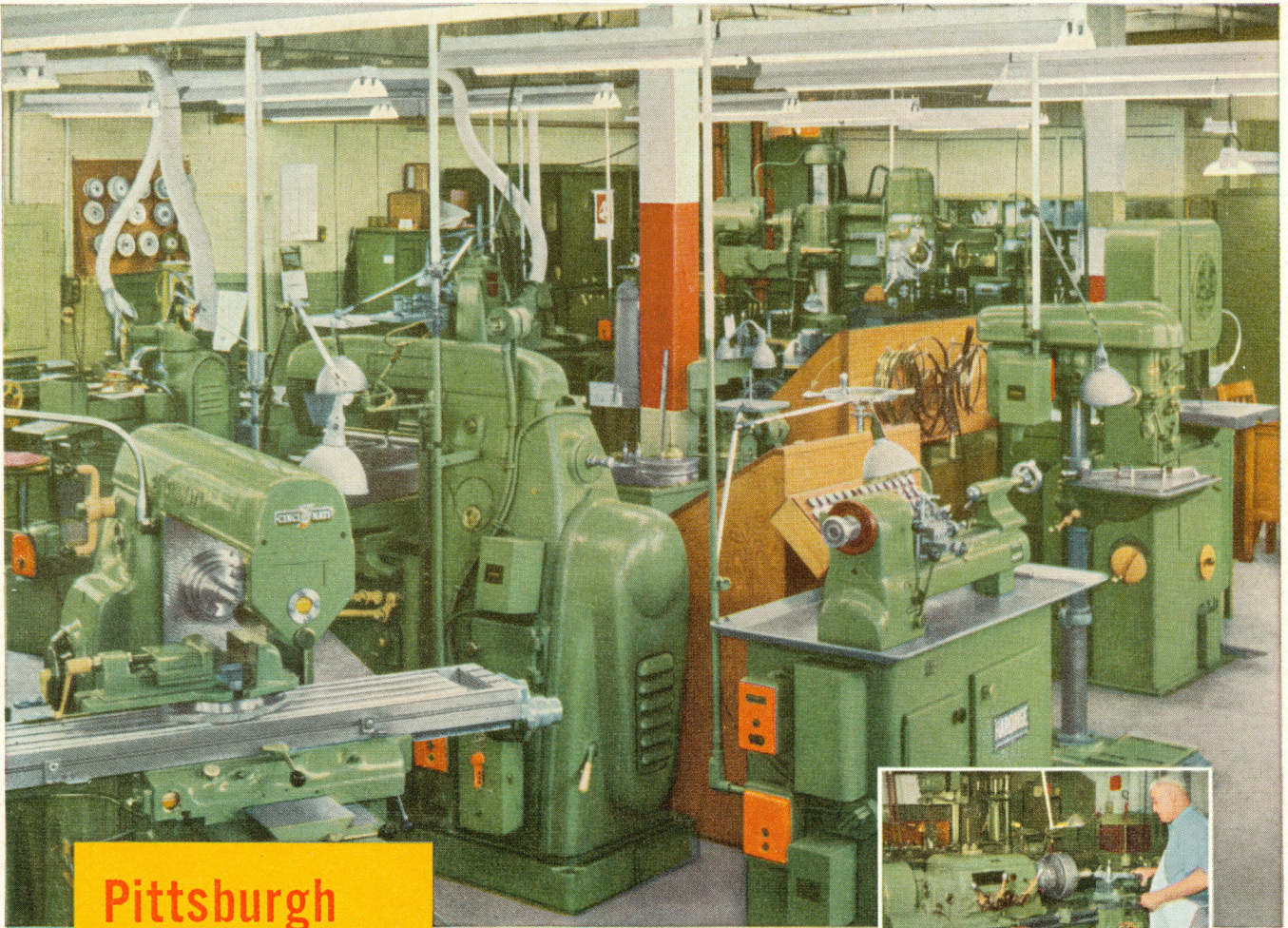
Coffee and John Cato remind me of the time when a group of us were sitting around over morning tea break in a room used for storage, etc. Hanging on a rack behind John was the Gown of the Year, having just been photographed, a regular studio job from the top fashion houses. John, having just finished a smoke, flicked the butt at me, landing neatly into my nearly empty coffee cup. Without thinking, I flicked the remnants across at him, the silly sod ducked, and they hit this dream, mega-buck creation of red satin fair smack in the middle! Kiddin' the brown didn't hit the fan! Took both of us weeks of deductions from our wages to pay for the cleaning.

But even the greatest weren't beyond the odd gaffe. A top fashion house flew Athol and two models to Sydney for a two-day fashion shoot, using the famous Harbour Bridge as a background. He took the trusty 1/4-plate Graflex and four magazines. I should explain that even now, Sydney is a 1-hour odd flight by jet from Melbourne. Back then, by DC-3, (no discount airfares in those days) plus accommodation, this was one expensive excursion. On his return, I did a test process run on locally shot film just to make sure all was well chemically and then processed the Sydney shoot. As soon as they had been in the fixer for long enough, I turned on the lights for a look-see..... and then had to give Athol the bad news! Two of the magazines were unexposed, and the other two were double exposed. That was one of the few times I heard him really swear!

Ed: Mr. Carron is a retired commercial photographer, professional sales rep. (first to go "on the road,") long-time member of the Australian Photographic Collectors' Society <http://www.apcsociety.com.au>, and co-creator of their highly regarded magazine, Back Focus.



Series D 1/4 plate Graflex. Also in 4x5, its focal plane shutter gave a choice of 25 speeds to 1/1000 plus T.



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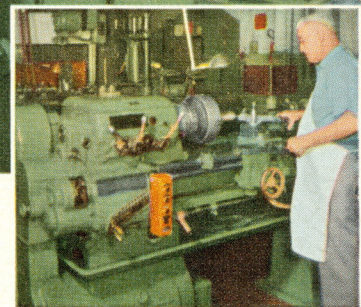
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Photographic equipment made by this pioneer maker is known to press and cameramen for its versatility and reliability. Industry and military use its identification and microfilming cameras. Telephone companies use its meter-recording cameras. To the Armed Services, Graflex is a leading source of combat and aerial cameras, artillery telescopes and fire-control devices.

The many ways in which operators in the Graflex plants benefit by the use of COLOR DYNAMICS are best summarized in this comment of M. B. Moore, vice president and factory manager:

"Because of the precision our production requires, it is important that our operators have the best possible seeing conditions. By painting walls and ceilings in eye-



rest colors and by using colors on machinery that differentiate working from stationary parts, according to COLOR DYNAMICS, we have relieved eye strain and reduced physical fatigue. An appreciable part of the reduction in re-work and scrap can be attributed to this improvement of our operators' environment.

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Theo Servetas, a Quarterly author, let us know that he has just released his e-book on Amazon.com titled:

*War Paint: A Pictorial History of the 4th Marine Division at War in the Pacific
Volume One: The Marshall Islands (Roi & Namur)*

Over eight years in the making, this is his first release of a four-volume series released for Kindle. It is profusely illustrated with photographs and artwork and thus a great value for \$8.99. Future volumes will also cover: Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima. You may find it on Amazon.com by simply typing the author's name: "Theo Servetas."

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U.S. President Harry Truman and a Graflex promotional shot of press photographers with their Anniversary and Pacemaker Speed Graphics.