

The Shot

By Ed Martin

This summer Barb and I went out west. We wanted to go back to the Black Hills and Yellowstone, plus visit a few more parks that we had missed on our last trip.

While in the Black Hills, we had planned to stop at Mount Rushmore and The Crazy Horse Memorial. We had been to both back in the 80s on a trip similar in scope to this one, wanting to see if there were any changes made to The Crazy Horse Memorial.

The brochures and other literature we read suggested that we schedule the tour of Mount Rushmore to coincide with the flag lowering ceremony. So we did as they suggested, getting there a few hours before sunset so that we could hike the trails in the area. We then trekked up to the outdoor auditorium and found a good location to shoot pictures of the carvings, especially after they were illuminated. I disgorged some equipment, which included my tripod, camera and remote shutter release from the heavy backpack I had been carrying all afternoon. I mounted the camera to the tripod, connected the remote and began composing a shot of the monument. I noticed through the viewfinder that I could also include the flag in the shot. I decided to include

the flag to increase the impact, even though I knew it would make the eye flit between the flag and the Presidents. I wasn't going for a competition shot.

I snapped off a few practice shots as we sat there just for verification. This led to stopping down the lens to make sure both the flag and the mountain were sharp. The brochures also stated that the ceremony would include lighting the carving and almost immediately thereafter the lowering of the flag. I knew there wouldn't be much time to get the shot, so I was ready and waiting for my one opportunity to take the shot!

The place started to fill up for the flag lowering ceremony. Everyone was courteous enough not to sit directly in front of me. The lights came on the stage as the sun set, and I took the opportunity to snap a few more shots. So far all the shots looked pretty good.

The ceremony started with the calling for all vets to come up on stage. Expecting only a few, we were surprised to see over one hundred men and women of varying ages heading towards the stage. This prompted the master of ceremonies to change the scheduled activities from a talk with each Veteran to hav-

ing each of them give their name and branch of service. The ceremony was quite moving and I found myself struggling to keep from getting so caught up in it that I would forget to press the shutter. The sun was now down and the ceremony nearly complete. All that was left was the lighting of the Presidents and the lowering of the flag. My thumb was positioned over the button; the moment was almost there!

The lights were switched on! Everyone, including myself, made the appropriate noises. Right at that moment as I was about to press the button; they asked us all to stand for the National Anthem and the lowering of the flag. I pressed the shutter release and stood nearly topping the tripod, realizing that I barely left any standing room between the tripod and me. I then watched helplessly as a gentleman in the next row down started to move in front of the camera. He was in the shot! This was turning into a catastrophe! My only chance and the picture was going to be ruined – the shutter was still open.

The shutter closed just as the flag lowered. I pressed the release button again in hopes of getting the shot. It was too late by then. The flag was

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gone and the difference in the light intensity between the Presidents and the flag was much too great. Exposure was impossible. All I managed to get was one image. I didn't even look to see what the shot looked like.

Later, after returning from the trip, as I sorted through the thousands of pictures I had taken, I came across the series of the flag lowering ceremony,. Most of the early shots were technically good, but the lighting wasn't quite right. Then I saw the one I feared would

look awful. It did look awful, with a smear of a man in the lower left corner, but there was still impact in the shot. By sheer luck he managed to not get in the way of my shot, the man hadn't come between the camera and the subjects. There was still hope.

I loaded the image in the PhotoShop RAW editor and reduced the exposure by 3/4 of a stop. The man was gone and the shot was good! Most of all, I was happy that I got the shot!

