

soldiers that "playing by the rules" is the essence of the American spirit. But the enemies are not American. They're a "gang of bandits with as much sense of fair play as a scorpion." There are no rules on the battlefield except the frightening axiom pronounced loudly in the title and on every front of the war.

NOTES

1. MacCann, Richard Dyer. *The People's Films: A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures*, (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 153-155. MacCann's book is a rich history of U.S. government filmmaking and provides much of the historical background of this essay.
2. Commanding General, Army Ground Forces to Chief Signal Office, Attention Army Pictorial Service, 10 September 1942, quoted in MacCann, p. 155.

— Abé Mark Nornes

The Fleet That Came to Stay

U.S.A. Production: Depts. of Navy, Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard, *Print*: 35mm, sd., English, b&w, 24 min., 1945.

"It was weird; it was savage."

The fleet of the title is Task Force 58, and the film documents the battle for Okinawa and the fleet's three month defense against *kamikaze* flying from the mainland. Along with *The Battle of San Pietro*, *With the Marines at Tarawa*, and *To the Shores of Iwo Jima*, this is one of the great American combat films. Neither their Japanese or Hollywood counterparts can compare to the visceral impact of these documentaries. Even with the help of special effects, Hollywood war epics rarely achieve the sense of scale found in the American combat documentaries. For their part, Japanese filmmakers remained far from the real action as a rule.



Fig. 24. Kamikazé attack.
(Credit: National Archives)

Of course, the Japanese military was on the other side of the firing lines in these battles, though one would not have guessed looking at their documentaries. Japanese filmmakers made many "war records" (*senki*) of this combat, but none of them are as effective as the American documentaries. By the 1940s, Japanese documentary had already become entrenched in restrictive conventions. They largely set out to show how something worked or an event unfolded...and little else. Elsewhere in this book, I discuss some of the reasons Japanese filmmakers didn't move closer to the war's violence. By way of contrast, *The Fleet That Came to Stay* shows how the American filmmakers plunged right into the combat and, trained as they were in Hollywood, could turn the vio-



Fig. 25. Approaching Tokyo — A sacred icon and the fleet that came to stay.
(Credit: National Archives)

lent spectacle of war to their advantage.

Perhaps the most crucial element of the Americans' success (in terms of filmmaking) was their command of narrative, and their ability to seamlessly marry it to documentary. When American filmmakers donned uniforms to make documentaries, they didn't leave the lessons of Hollywood behind them. They knew the importance of guiding audiences through story telling and the manipulation of desires and fears. For this reason, their films are incomparably more pleasurable to watch, if not vastly more effective in terms of propaganda value.

We can easily see the role narrative plays in the American combat documentary by examining *The Fleet That Came to Stay*. If a Japanese wartime documentarist were to make this film, it would certainly be a rather dry diary with a predictable structure: preparation, attack, banzai, and triumphant march down main street. While Japanese filmmakers relied primarily on external events to structure their films, American filmmakers attempted to strike a balance between history and its (fictionalized) telling. *The Fleet That Came to Stay* begins with sailors (actors) enjoying a peaceful night under the moonlight. They discuss how close they are to "the Jap home office" in terms of the distances between cities back home. In the next scene, the narration introduces a problem to be interrogated and resolved, the most basic device of narrative: in the past, distance has been against the Japanese, but now this huge American fleet was within reach of land-based enemy aircraft that threaten U.S. ships. Put simply (as such narrative is always at pains to do), "With Okinawa in our hands we could control the China coast, send swarms of planes to smother Japan; we were reaching for the throat of an empire. The risk must be taken." Having introduced the problem and its stakes, the film then proceeds to resolve the tension it's created with battle scenes of the Okinawa invasion.

The Fleet That Came to Stay gives a sense for the exasperation of the Americans in the face of the suicide bombers. It was "weird" and "savage" and "maniacal" and they didn't understand it. Watching the fireworks of anti-aircraft fire (at times strangely reminiscent of that over Baghdad), one can sympathize. Despite their

bafflement, they did realize an essential difference between the two sides: "It was a struggle between men who want to die and men who fight to live."

— Abé Mark Nornes

Civilian Victims of Military Brutality

U.S.A. Production: Rev. John Magee and George Fitch, Photography: Rev. John Magee et al, Editing: George Fitch, Print: 16mm, silent, English, b&w, 20 min., 1938.

Civilian Victims of Military Brutality is a bed-to-bed tour of a hospital in China. A doctor simply points out wounds on the bodies of Chinese peasants, with plain, grey intertitles explaining how they were inflicted by Japanese soldiers. It is not a pleasant experience to watch, however, the film's violence is a fact of war and we are morally obligated *not* to look the other way. The film confronts us with crucial issues about the relationship between documentary and history. At the same time, *Civilian Victims of Military Brutality* naturally raises other questions (and blood pressures) because of the fact of its (probable/possible/apparent) location: Nanking.

In August of 1991, Kyōdō News Service announced it had found 10 minutes of Rev. John Magee's 20-minute *maboroshi* Nanking film. "Maboroshi" is a favorite word of the media, for it means those things which are known to exist but whose locations are uncertain. They are phantom-like things, and thus are the subject of intense fascination, desire, and media attention. Magee was a member of the American Church Mission and Chair of the "International Red Cross Committee of Nanking," which was set up to manage the hospitals within the Red Cross' Safety Zone. This was a demilitarized zone (whose sanctity the Japanese soldiers largely ignored) that contained 25 refugee camps housing some 60,000 people, depending on the stage of the occupation. George Fitch, who eventually smuggled the film to Shanghai, was with the YMCA and helped the committee organize food relief for the refugees. The letters generated by this committee pleading to Japanese officials to control their men are collected in *Documents of the Nanking Safety Zone*. Interspersed among memos concerning the running of the camps are lists of hundreds of incidents involving looting, rapes, and shootings. This running log was sent regularly to the Japanese Embassy in Nanking, and it provides a feel for how the city's Westerners desperately attempted to intervene in the mischief of Japan's occupation forces. As we will see, this list's narrative style forms an important backdrop for the intertitles of *Civilian Victims*, and for this reason it's worth an extended quote. A typical excerpt:

25. On December 16 Japanese soldiers took two cows and two men from the Hsu Dairy at Yin Yang Ying. (Fitch)

26. On December 16 Japanese soldiers turned 40 volunteer workers with our armbands out of their residence at 9 Chih Pi Lu and would not allow them to take their bedding or baggage with them. Two of our trucks were taken at the same time. (Fitch)

27. On December 16 Japanese soldiers entered the residence of our chief sanitary inspector at 21 Kuling Road and took several motor-cycles, one garbage bucket and five bicycles. (Fitch)