

combat film at the battle of Leyte. He never returned. We may say that his life journey symbolized the fate of documentarists during the war.

The theme song, which gives the film its subtitle, was written by Umeki Saburō and composed by Takagi Tōroku. The song made a big contribution to the film's success. The disc of the song issued by Victor Co., Ltd. spread all over the country immediately, and the words "sacred soldier" came to mean paratroopers.

Following the film on December 3, Tōhō's feature film titled, *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya* (*Hawai Marē okikaisen*, 1942, under the direction of Yamamoto Kajirō) was released on the occasion of the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Japan-America War. It did record breaking business, which may have been influenced by the success of *Sacred Soldiers of the Sky* and *Malayan War Front*.

At any rate, almost all movie companies then rushed to make warfare films. Those concerned paid great attention to the influence cinema affected over young people and actually produced a number of such films aimed at stirring up their dreams. The success of *Sacred Soldiers of the Sky* confirms such influence. The documentary on cadets in the Naval Air Force, *Young Soldiers of the Sky* (*Sora no shōnenhei*, 1942) had strong repercussions among young people. After that, there were many drama films classified in the same category, such as *Toward the Decisive Battle in the Sky* (*Kessen no ōzora e*, 1943) which is about trainees in the Naval Air Force, and *Suiheisan* (*Marines*, 1944), which is about the recruitment of sailors. In order to recruit new Air Force cadets in 1944 two other films were produced: *Teki wa ikuman aritotemo* (*The Enemy Will Be Legion, But We Will Fight*) and *Kimikoso tsugi no arawashi da* (*You Are The Next Wild Eagle*).

— *Yamane Sadao*

Kill or Be Killed

U.S.A. Production: Signal Corps, Army Ground Forces, Print: 35mm, sd., English, b&w, 10 min., circa 1944.

The lesson to be learned in this training film is stated baldly in the title, *Kill or Be Killed*. The narration contains the ostensive theme, "use the weapon that fits the job," but the more likely training this film performed was to prepare green soldiers for the violence of the battlefield. In scene after scene, the spectators' faces are shoved into images of throats slit, heads bludgeoned, testicles kicked, and bodies shot and bayoneted. This is hand to hand combat and it's nothing pretty. Most of the scenes consist of one or two medium shots, but the violent impact is accomplished through slick editing as well. The last image of the film is a composite of three shots: the close-up of a Japanese soldier, the overlap of an American GI thrusting a rifle butt into the camera, and an enormous explosion. Because *Kill or Be Killed* was not designed for public consumption, it could be free of any beautifying rhetoric about honor and glory, and is thus one of the straightest films about the essential brutality of war.

The American military began using films for troop orientation before the war started. Pre-war subjects include *Personal Hygiene*, *Military Courtesy*, *Safeguarding Military Information*, and *Sex Hygiene*. All of these films were produced in Holly-

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wood. *Sex Hygiene*, for example, was directed by John Ford and contrives an onscreen audience of soldiers grimacing at images of diseased penises in a training film within Ford's training film. (Needless to say, people looking for Fordian touches would be frustrated by *Sex Hygiene*.) Initially, the studios made the training films on a non-profit basis, but once the war was underway the demands became too high and the Signal Corps began farming out work by contract. This was how Darryl Zanuck (then the vice-president in charge of production at Twentieth Century Fox) became a lieutenant colonel in the reserve. The participation of Hollywood filmmakers increased when the War Department bought the old Paramount studios in Astoria, Long Island (originally built by Famous Players-Laskey), and converted it into the new Signal Corps Photographic Center. By the end of 1942, all production of training films was centered there.¹

Kill or Be Killed is one episode from the *Fighting Men* series, which was initiated shortly after the establishment of the Signal Corps Photographic Center. Other examples from the series include *Crack That Tank*, *On Your Toes*, *Wise Guy* and *How to Get Killed — In One Easy Lesson*. In official correspondence, one general promised the *Fighting Men* series would be "short, highly dramatized, and hard hitting. Presentation will in general be by a soldier speaking typical soldier language."²

Japanese viewers are always impressed by the informal tone of American documentaries' voice-over narration. Films released to the public were couched in the casual speech of middle America, as though Uncle Sam were shooting the bull over the back yard fence of American movie screens. It stands in stark contrast to the stiff formality and patriarchal tone of Japanese narration and on-screen speeches. The *Fighting Men* series uses the rough language of wartime buddies. This "soldier language" is fascinating for its use of worn clichés and their variations as necessitated by war, and is worth an extended quote from *Kill or Be Killed*:

"You're seeing more than a half-back going for a touchdown, a south paw burning a strike down the inside corner, a sharp shooter nailing the basket from midcourt. [Over images of football, basketball, tennis, boxing, and hockey.] You're seeing more than a cannon ball serve and a neat right cross to the jaw. You're looking at the spirit of America. This is the way we like it: fast and hard-hitting and clean. Instinctively, Americans love fair play. It's built up from childhood; give the guy an even break, play the game on the level, don't hit a man when he's down. There's a 15-yard penalty for clipping, and a fighter that hits below the belt gets tossed out of the ring. We like it fast and hard hitting, and we like it clean. [Dissolve to combat scenes.] When you step from the gridiron to no-man's land, the rule book is buried and forgotten except the one for losing. And it's not measured in yards; it's measured in life and death. War is the law of the jungle: kill or be killed. It's played to win. *Any way*. The goal is destruction, pure and simple. Your mind must be tuned to a new pitch. To go for your enemy all out — no holds barred — to hurt, to cripple, to kill. This is war."

In this spirit, *Kill or Be Killed* deploys countless clichés to draw a comparison between war and sports, a connection that is implicit in much war documentary (including television coverage of the Gulf War). After all, most sports are essentially organized violence. They channel and control humans' most violent impulses, regulating them with rules and abstract concepts of "fair play," thereby making violence a socially acceptable spectacle. Here the comparison serves to assure

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. Kamikaze 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-