

OPERATION DOWNFALL

Written by

Night Train

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - KANTO PLAIN, JAPAN - OCTOBER, 1946 - DAY

A long skirmish line of combat-gearred MARINES is moving noisily through the forest. The noise can't be heard far thanks to the constant WHIRRING of artillery shells flying overhead followed by the SHARP CRACKS of the explosions impacting on the far side of the forest.

Their camouflaged uniforms -- "utilities" -- are frayed and dirty. Their faces are unwashed and sport varying degree of beard stubble. Only their M1 riles are clean and shiny in the streaks of morning light spearing down through the branches.

LOUD VOICE (O.S.)
Echo Company, halt! OPs out!
Everyone else rest in place! The
lamp is lit!

Every tenth man jogs out to the edge of the forest, out of sight. The rest drop their packs and collapse to the ground. Many of them start lighting cigarettes.

SGT RORKE sits on his helmet, setting free his short, dirty hair. At 22, he's the oldest man in his platoon. He takes a swig from his water canteen, shuts his eyes tiredly for a moment, then looks around him.

SGT RORKE
Squad leaders up!

Corporals OWENS, CORTEZ and NOWICKI trudge up to his position and drop to the ground. All three are smoking, clearly enjoying the ritual.

CPL CORTEZ
(indicating edge of
forest)
Don't you want to see our
objective?

SGT RORKE
We'll see it soon enough. Make sure
your men keep their spacing.
Yesterday's push was pretty ragged.
That mortar round took out three
guys at once. No excuse for it.

The men nod, ad lib agreement. Their attention is drawn to a big man with long mustachios who's staring daggers at all the indolent men he's passing. The indolent couldn't care less.

GUNNERY SERGEANT ATTLEE stops in front of Rorke and the Corporals and glares at them for a moment, then drops down to a knee. He takes off his helmet and runs his fingers through his unkempt, dusty hair.

GUNNY ATTLEE
Your platoon looks like shit,
Rorke.

CPL OWENS
That's an improvement from
yesterday.

GUNNY ATTLEE
Shut up, Owens.

CPL NOWICKI
We have a new company CO, yet,
Gunny?

GUNNY ATTLEE
Naw, Top Marcus is still in charge.
Regiment's trying to scrounge up an
officer from the hospital tents.
Any officer.
(beat)
You guys really ought to stop
saluting them out here.

The men laugh at this accusation.

GUNNY ATTLEE (CONT'D)
Alright, let's do a time check.
(looks at wrist watch)
Ten forty-one is the mark.

The other four men adjust their watches and wait for Gunny's command.

GUNNY ATTLEE (CONT'D)
Mark!

The men click down on the winder, starting their watch again.

GUNNY ATTLEE (CONT'D)
Fires lift at eleven-hundred.
That's your go signal. The
objective is the road two-hundred
yards the other side of this
forest.

SGT RORKE
Opposition?

GUNNY ATTLEE
Mostly regulars, but some PCs.

SGT RORKE
Those "patriotic citizens" are
fucking crazy.

GUNNY ATTLEE
Says the man with the Navy Cross...

SGT RORKE
Hey, I had all kinds of shit in my
eyes -- I stumbled into that
pillbox!

The men laugh. Gunny checks his watch, stands up. The others
also stand.

GUNNY ATTLEE
Oh, there's an army truck on that
road. Army wants it back.

CPL NOWICKI
How'd it get out there?

GUNNY ATTLEE
That's one of the great mysteries
of this war. Anyway, try not to
blow it up.

CPL CORTEZ
Maybe it's that secret weapon we're
supposed to have.

CPL OWENS
Shit, if we had a secret weapon,
don't you think Roosevelt would've
used it by now?

CPL NOWICKI
Maybe it's too nasty to use, even
on Japs.

CPL OWENS
Nothing could be too nasty for
those fuckers.

SGT RORKE
What about ammo, Gunny? We're low.

GUNNY ATTLEE
(shakes head)
Those one-man kamikaze subs are
hitting the resupply convoys hard.

SGT RORKE
 Transport ships, too? We need
 replacements.

GUNNY ATTLEE
 The army lost ten thousand men to
 those subs last month.
 (shrugs)
 There are no replacement troops in
 the pipeline.

SGT RORKE
 Well, hell...

Gunny nods, starts to walk off, but stops and looks back.

GUNNY ATTLEE
 You have steel. Use it.

Rorke and the corporals stare at Gunny's back as he walks
 away, the expressions on their faces blank.

L/CPL ADAMS (O.S.)
 Hey, guys! I'm back!

The four look around and see two men, LANCE CORPORAL ADAMS
 and "DOC" BAKER, jogging up, faces red from exertion. They're
 clean-shaven and wear clean utilities. Adams is eighteen, Doc
 is twenty-one.

DOC BAKER
 We've been trying to catch up all
 morning.

SGT RORKE
 Hey, Doc. What are you doing here,
 Lance Corporal Adams?

L/CPL ADAMS
 A little scrap metal in the
 shoulder doesn't get you a boat-
 ride home, anymore.
 (beat)
 Those horse doctors said my arm
 shouldn't fall off for another two
 or three weeks.

CPL NOWICKI
 Horse doctors?

DOC BAKER
 The Navy's re-trained a bunch of
 veterinarians as field surgeons.

CPL OWENS
You're kidding.

DOC BAKER
I kid you not. The Navy also wants
to take a bunch of us corpsmen and
train us as physicians.

SGT RORKE
That's not acceptable.

DOC BAKER
(chuckling)
That's what that crazy general of
yours -- "Howling Mad" Smith? --
said. He threatened to start
punching admirals.

The men laugh, turn their attention to PFC STOVER who joins
the group, a big grin on his face. Stover is seventeen.
Allegedly.

PFC STOVER
Hey, Jimmy!

He and Adams shake hands. Best friends.

SGT RORKE
Owens, you need a warm body, don't
you? Take Adams.

CPL OWENS
I was hoping for a woman...

He claps Adams on the shoulder -- making the L/Cpl wince.

CPL OWENS (CONT'D)
PFC Stover show the lance corporal
where we're at.

Stover and Adams start to walk off, but stop at Rorke's
voice.

SGT RORKE
Private First Class Stover. We are
conserving ammunition. Stop
shooting with your eyes closed.

PFC STOVER
But, Sarge, I shoot better in the
dark.

Rorke and the others are brought up short by this comment and
can only stare at the two younger men as they jog off.

DOC BAKER
That guy's crazy.

CPL CORTEZ
Yeah, he'll have your job in no
time, Sarge.

SGT RORKE
(sniffing)
Rumors of my mental instability
have been greatly exaggerated.

The other men snicker. Then, as one, check their watches. A slight tightening around the mouth or eyes is the only sign of their rising tension.

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)
Any news back at the hospital?

DOC BAKER
A lot of news. All bad. I got drunk
with this newspaper reporter --
sorry, war correspondent -- last
night. Things are getting worse in
the ETO. The Russians have taken
most of Germany. The allies are
trenching in, from Belgium down to
Switzerland.

SGT RORKE
Just like in the "war to end all
wars."

CPL OWENS
Well, the French have the
surrendering part down pretty good,
if it comes to that.

DOC BAKER
Oh, yeah, and Patton's army group
surrendered.

This news stuns them into silence for a beat. Then they give a collective shrug.

CPL NOWICKI
So what tactics are we going to use
today, Sarge?

The other corporals snicker. Sgt Rorke reaches into a pocket.

SGT RORKE

Well, let's see what the Official
United States Marine Corps Combat
Operations Manual has to say.

He pulls out a bubble-gum wrapper and studies it.

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)

Number one is "Frontal Assault."
(checks back side)
Hmm, there doesn't seem to be a
number two.

He puts the manual away as the corporals nod knowingly.

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)

Alright, get your guys ready.
Emphasize spacing and shot
selection -- those PCs aren't going
to be scared by guys sprayin' and
prayin'.

The three corporals disperse with alacrity.

DOC BAKER

You run a tight ship, Sergeant
Rorke.

SGT RORKE

It's my sparkling personality. Did
you restock your bag?

Doc pats his bulging aid bag.

DOC BAKER

I was stealing stuff left and
right. Shore Patrol will probably
throw me in the brig when I return.

SGT RORKE

MPS will break you out.

Doc nods.

Sarge checks his watch, takes a deep, calming breath, then
bellows out:

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)

Put 'em out and saddle up!

All along the line, men get to their feet, throw away
cigarettes or put away canteens. They slip on their backpacks
and helmets and heft their rifles. OTHER VOICES in the forest
repeat the command.

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)

Move out!

SGT RORKE

Strides through the forest, a beast on the prowl.

DOC

Trails behind him. He glances left and right, taking in the long of Marines flanking him and shakes his head.

EDGE OF CLEARING

Sgt Rorke stops next to one of the men that was dispatched to keep watch. He holds an arm up and other men stop at the edge of the forest.

ACROSS THE CLEARING

Two-hundred yards distant, and paralleling the forest is the dark smudge of road. A battered trucks list forlornly on the road.

The artillery rounds impacting on the far side of the road sound LOUDER.

SGT RORKE

Bellows another command:

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)

Fix bayonets!

OTHER VOICES repeat the command. Men pull bayonets from sheaths clipped to their utility belts and lock them to the end of their rifles.

The only sound is the WHIRRING of the shells overhead and the EXPLOSIONS they make when they crash to earth.

THEN COMPLETE SILENCE.

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)

Go!

He's the first to break from the forest, but in a second the entire company is rushing across the clearing, ROARING AND SHOOTING.

THE BATTLEFIELD

GUNFIRE erupts from the brush next to the road and hidden MORTARS launch their shells.

It's a flat-out sprint across the chewed-up ground. The only zigging and zagging the men do is to avoid obstacles, such as the pits the mortar rounds punch into the ground.

SGT RORKE

Fires from the hip as he runs and simultaneously screams encouragement:

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)
Go! Move! Shoot that weapon!

A MARINE

Is flung headfirst into the ground as his legs are shot out from beneath him.

ANOTHER MARINE

Disintegrates as a mortar round makes a direct hit.

L/CPL ADAMS AND PFC STOVER

Stover is desperately putting a compress to a bullet wound on Adams' leg.

PFC STOVER
(over his shoulder)
Corpsman up!
(to Adams)
Stop getting shot, Jimmy!

Echo's of "Corpsman Up!" come from every quarter of the battlefield.

Adams pushes himself up one elbow, his face greasy with sweat and dirt.

L/CPL ADAMS
This is the first time, asshole!

A bullet PINGS! into Stover's helmet and sends it flying. Stover follows its flight path in confusion. Adams laughs uncontrollably at the look on Stover's face.

CPL OWENS

Grabs a Marine who stumbles and propels him forward.

CPL OWENS

Attack!

A bullet impacts Owen's in the hip and he flops to the ground.

GUNNY ATTLEE

Gestures at a pair of pinned-down Marines:

GUNNY ATTLEE

Get up, goddamnit!

The Marines get up, start charging.

Gunny Attlee turns to the front and his chest blossoms a red mist.

THE ROAD

The Marines are in line again as they CRASH into the line of JAPANESE SOLDIERS that emerges from the brush. These men -- and a few women -- attack with rifles that have long bayonets attached. A few of the officers wield swords.

The Japanese fight furiously but quickly fall to the bullets and bayonets of the bigger, battle-hardened Marines.

SGT RORKE

Bats aside a bayoneted rifle and slams his own bayonet into a SOLDIER's neck. He kicks the man free from the bayonet-

- and knocks aside another rifle -- this one wielded by a WOMAN -- and sticks her in the belly. He shoots her body free of his bayonet-

- and fires again at an OLD MAN behind her, taking most of his head off.

It takes him a moment to realize there are no more people to kill.

THE ROAD

The Marines are frozen in a tableau of disbelief. And finally relief. All are exhausted, physically and emotionally. Some go down on their knees; others reach for cigarettes and light up with shaking hands.

The SCREAMS, CRIES, and MOANS penetrate the survivors' consciousness, breaking the tableau.

SGT RORKE

Don't just stand there! Get the OPs
out and help with the wounded --
the Docs can't do it all!

Every tenth Marine pushes through the brush and moves and take up position on the other side of it.

The rest scramble to help the wounded, friend and foe, alike, under the direction of the SEVERAL CORPSMEN, including Doc Baker.

THE TRUCK

The truck body and tires are full of holes, and the canvas top is in tatters. In the bed of the truck are scores of wooden crates.

Behind the truck lies an open crate, its top lying next to it.

Sgt Rorke's walks up to the truck. He steps onto the running board to check the cab's interior for bodies, but it's empty. He steps down and makes his way to the back of the truck.

He bends over the crate and pulls out a long, black plastic bag with a zipper down the middle. He holds it up to his nose, makes a face, and tosses it back. He turns the crate top over:

INSERT - CRATE TOP

Stenciled on it: "US ARMY, BODY BAG, 100 COUNT"

SGT RORKE (OS) (CONT'D)

What the hell...

BACK TO SCENE

Sgt Rorke drops the crate top in disgust. He sees TOP MARCUS approaching and stands straighter.

Top is 45, built like a lineman, and has a long scar decorating the left side of his face.

A RADIO MAN follows him, but keeps his distance, eyes constantly moving, searching for snipers.

SGT RORKE (CONT'D)
Master Sergeant Marcus.

TOP MARCUS
Well done, Sergeant Rorke.

SGT RORKE
Pardon?

TOP MARCUS
Hell, Rorke, you led the damnedest charge I ever saw. Scared the hell out of me.

SGT RORKE
I didn't mean to take over. Sorry.

Top laughs, pats him on the shoulder.

TOP MARCUS
I'm too fucking old to be leading bayonet charges. So was Gunny.

SGT RORKE
Was?

TOP MARCUS
Gunny Attlee's dead. Took one right in the heart.

Sgt Rorke looks away as he absorbs the news. Finally he nods:

SGT RORKE
Best way to go, I guess.

Top takes note of the crate, picks up the top bag.

TOP MARCUS
What are these things? Sleeping bag covers?

SGT RORKE
Kinda. For those who never wake.

TOP MARCUS
Shit.

SGT RORKE
What do you want us to do with 'em?

TOP MARCUS
If you can't drink it, eat it, or
kill with it, burn it.

Sgt Rorke nods, then gets an idea:

SGT RORKE
Top, what if we trade 'em back to
the Army for some ammo?

TOP MARCUS
Genius.

Top looks at the battlefield, where knots of men are gathered
around the fallen.

TOP MARCUS (CONT'D)
We'll get a casualty count in a
couple of minutes...

SGT RORKE
I'll write the letters, Top.

TOP MARCUS
I'll show you how. You'll need the
experience.

SGT RORKE
What? Why?

TOP MARCUS
Soon as we get off this island,
you're getting a field commission.

SGT RORKE
The Corps must be in worse shape
than I thought...wait a minute, did
you say we're getting out of here?

WITH SGT RORKE AND TOP MARCUS

As they walk down the road, visually inspecting the wounded
and dead. The Radio Man trails at a distance.

TOP MARCUS
Th investment of Tokyo has been
called off. The Air Force is going
to take care of that problem.

(MORE)

TOP MARCUS (CONT'D)

Fifth Amphib has already broken off contact with the Japs. Third Amphib -- that's us -- is pulling back in a few days.

Sgt Rorke thinks through the implications.

SGT RORKE

So we pull out of Japan, only to get sent to the bottom of the sea by kamikaze subs?

TOP MARCUS

Negative. The Army has thousands of shiny new giant transport planes. They're flying us to a secret naval base in a secret country named New Zealand. And get this: they're being flown by all-women crews.

Sgt Rorke's face expresses surprise, then his eyes catch sight of a dead Japanese female soldier, whose intestines are spilled out on the ground.

SGT RORKE

Well, I guess American women have as much right to die in horrific ways as Japanese women.

(beat)

Any idea where we're going? The ETO, right?

TOP MARCUS

No idea. But scuttlebutt has it that this secret invasion fleet is sailing with Coast Guard icebreakers.

SGT RORKE

Fuck. I don't suppose France is surrounded by ice?

Before Top can answer, a DRONE makes them look up at the sky.

THE SKY

A long line of aircraft appear over the horizon. The DRONE GETS LOUDER as the mass of airplanes proceeds across the sky.

THE ROAD

The Marines stare in awe at the air armada. The DRONE BECOMES DEAFENING. Men cover their ears, but they can feel the vibration deep in their bones.

The unending mass of bombers and fighter escorts occults a large part of the sky, bringing preternatural darkness to the land.

SGT RORKE (VO) CONT'D) (CONT'D)
(s sigh)
Good Night, Tokyo.

FADE OUT.