

DOG OF WAR

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(Based on a true story)

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FADE IN:

EXT. OPEN WATER - DAY

Turquoise waves roll gently across the horizon.

His profile framed against a bright blue sky, FRANK WILLIAMS, 21, is more boy than man. He basks in the warm tropical sun as the breeze tousles his hair - inhales deeply.

SMITTY (O.S.)
No better scent than sea air.
Smells like home, don't it?

Frank could be enjoying a pleasant day at the beach. Except that he's not.

INTERCUT -- EXT. DINGHY/ EXT. OPEN WATER - DAY

Frank is huddled in a small rubber dinghy. Knees to his chest, Frank rocks to and fro while next to him, in a matching rumpled Royal Air Force uniform, SMITTY, 20, bats at a circling swarm of flies.

FRANK
Yeah. If your home is a blooming
privy stuffed with swine.

Frank glares at a PAIR OF YOUNG JAPANESE BOYS, no older than 14. In army-issued short pants uniforms, the Boys are covered in mud from head to toe - their hands bound to the tow ring of the raft.

SUPER:

*South China Sea
1942*

Frank and Smitty resume rowing the raft out of a secluded cove and towards the open water.

SMITTY
At least we're headed in the right
direction.

Back on shore, a scorched radio tower SMOLDERS.

FRANK
So you say.

SMITTY
Cap said he'd find a boat. That
he'd pick us up at the mouth of the
bay. He gave his word.

FRANK

Cap's word ain't worth a rat's ass.
If this war's taught me anything,
it's that there's only one person
you can count on, Smitty. Yourself.

SMITTY

If you truly believe that, then why
are you here?

Boy #1 softly WHISTLES a rendition of Japan's national
anthem, grating on Frank's last nerve.

FRANK

Quit it.

Boy #2 joins in. The tune reverberates and echoes across the
water.

FRANK (CONT'D)

This ain't summer camp. Stick a
sock in it.

Frank looms over the Boys - the whistling stops.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Last week they were playing jacks
in the yard. This week they're
setting mines in the field.

SMITTY

We should have left them behind.
They're just kids.

FRANK

Not anymore, they ain't.

Smitty sits up - points.

SMITTY

Look!

A local JUNK BOAT appears from around the cape - its colorful
sails a beacon of hope. On deck, a UNIFORMED FIGURE waves his
arms.

Smitty waves back as Frank eye's the boat warily.

SMITTY (CONT'D)

See? I told you that Cap would come
for us.

Behind Frank, a PING is followed by a slow, steady WHISTLE.
Frank scowls back at the Boys.

FRANK

I said quit it.

But the sound is not coming from the Boys. Frank notices a tear on the side of the raft - air WHOOSHES out.

Another PING - another hole. The raft starts to lose shape and take on water. Frank spins around - eyes the coastline.

At the mouth of the bay, a JAPANESE SNIPER sights the raft in his rifle - fires - the water around the boat erupts in shrapnel.

Frank scopes out the rescue boat. It's not fast enough to beat the bullets.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Bloody hell. We're gonna have to swim for it.

Frank turns to find Smitty fumbling with the knots binding the Boys.

FRANK (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

Tears stream down Boy #1's face.

SMITTY
Give me a hand. We aren't gonna leave them to drown.

FRANK
Watch me.

Frank dives into the water and starts swimming for the Junk boat. He stops to tread water - looks back.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Come on. Don't be a fool.

Smitty struggles with the knots, ignoring Frank. Frank looks to the rescue boat - to the raft - torn.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Sod it.

Frank swims back to the raft. He hauls himself aboard, more angry at himself than Smitty,

FRANK (CONT'D)
Out of the way.

Frank shoves Smitty aside. He pulls his Bowie knife from its sheath and saws at the ropes, freeing Boy #2. He turns his attention to Boy #1.

The Junk boat slows down.

Smitty stands to flag it forward.

SMITTY
Come on, Cap. Over here.

Frank's knife slashes through the rope - freeing Boy #1.
Another PING - Smitty crumbles to his knees - falls back.
Frank rushes to Smitty's side - cradles his head.

SMITTY (CONT'D)
Cap?

The Junk speeds up again - turns hard starboard - away from the men and out towards the relative safety of open water.

FRANK
Hang on, Smitty. He's almost here.
You're going to be okay.

SMITTY
Do you promise?

Frank swallows his sorrow - debates lying to Smitty - but before he can reply, Smitty goes limp in Frank's arms.

Frank stiffens - looks up to find the Boys staring at him.

The Boy #1 wipes at the tears on his cheek - in his hand is Frank's knife. He extends it towards Frank - menacingly.

Frank reaches for the pistol in his holster - only to find it empty.

Boy #2 points the US-issued pistol at Frank.

Frank slowly raises both hands over his head in surrender.
The blazing sun beats down--

EXT. CAMP GLOEGOER - GATE - DAY

--On a line of blindfolded ALLIED PRISONERS as they are marched through the jungle by JAPANESE SOLDIERS. Downtrodden and defeated, the captured men have been reduced to the numbers painted on their uniforms.

SUPER:

*Gloegoer Prison Camp
Medan, Sumatra
1943*

EXT. CAMP GLOEGOER - JUNGLE - DAY

Hidden in the tangled undergrowth, a bedraggled liver-and-white spotted Pointer DOG crouches down on its haunches for a better view of the men's feet as they march by.

The Dog inches forward under the brush. Hopeful big brown eyes search the POWs for a friendly face.

EXT. CAMP GLOEGOER - YARD - DAY

CLING-CLANG-CLING-CLANG. From the watchtower, a bell tolls, calling all to assemble.

As the new Prisoners enter the yard, they remove their blindfolds.

The former Dutch Army post is well past its prime. With glass blown out of all of the windows and surrounded by barbed wire fences, it looks every bit the bleak brig it has become.

Surrounded by human bones in a make-shift cemetery, GRAVE DIGGERS subconsciously speculate on the next casualty while they watch the recruits march by.

As the fresh POWs continue their march to the center of the yard, they pass COUSENS, 30s, a natural-born target for bullies, being beaten by the rifle-toting GUARDS.

CAPTAIN NISHI, 30s, smiles, enjoying himself as he takes a whack at Cousens with a bamboo pole. Cousens cringes but does not defend himself.

Appalled, Frank pauses.

Nishi leers at the new men. He raises his pole to strike home his point - when out of the jungle - the Dog SPRINGS between Cousens and Nishi - baring its teeth.

The Dog narrows its eyes in hatred towards Nishi. It growls menacingly.

NISHI
(in Japanese)
Get it.

Cousens is forgotten as Nishi unleashes his rage on the poor creature.

The Dog attempts to fight back but is outnumbered as the Guards join in, hitting it with the butts of their rifles. Crying out in anguish, the Dog breaks free and scrambles back towards the jungle.

Sickened by the spectacle, Frank stumbles into formation.

Nishi passes by the men. In a show of strength, he jabs at Frank with his stick, but on instinct, Frank grabs the pole mirroring Nishi's hatred.

From a neighboring row, LES SEARLE, 50s, rumpled Royal Navy uniform, roguish master of flying under the radar, whispers.

LES

Leave it. Not worth it, kid.

Frank releases his grasp, and Nishi whips him across the shoulders. Frank tries not to cringe as Nishi moves on.

JAHN, (pronounced: *Yahn*) 30s, a flat-faced Dutch Major, on Frank's left interjects.

JAHN

You got lucky. Men have been killed for less.

Beside him, GUNNER, an arrogant Australian private in an ever-present bush hat, 40s, joins in.

GUNNER

You must show obedience.

FRANK

Bugger off.

LES

Tough to bugger without bollocks. Nishi's got both of theirs in a jar on his nightstand.

A hush falls over the crowd as a regal-looking Japanese officer in an impeccable uniform, LIEUTENANT COLONEL HIRATERU BANNO, 50s, ascends a platform. He blows his WHISTLE.

The prisoners bow down. Reluctantly, Frank follows suit. Colonel Banno addresses the prisoners in accented English.

BANNO

Good morning, new detainees. I am your caretaker, Colonel Banno. I welcome you to Camp Gloegoer. This shall be your new home until the great nation of Japan is declared victor of this war.

Banno brandishes an impossibly large ceremonial sword. Beside him, a melon rests atop an overturned bucket.

BANNO (CONT'D)

While you are my guests, please think of me as your father. You must obey me as you would him. You shall earn your keep by contributing to the expansion of his Imperial Majesty's royal air force by clearing a section of jungle in preparation for an airstrip. For this honor, I expect you to be grateful. No misbehaviors will be tolerated. I run a clean, calm, orderly camp. So we are clear, the men who lose their heads...

Nishi makes a slicing motion across his neck.

BANNO (CONT'D)
Shall lose their heads.

Banno SHRIEKS a samurai war cry before slicing through the melon with his sword. Calmly, he re-sheathes his blade.

BANNO (CONT'D)
Please, let us all join in a special banquet to welcome the new arrivals.

EXT. CAMP GLOEGOER - OFFICER'S MESS - DAY

JAPANESE OFFICERS dine on a table set with linens and china.

Gunner places a succulent roast duck on the officer's table and then kneels to await the next request.

Banno downs a saké - clearly not his first. He pushes back from the table - wobbles over to a rose bush - urinates.

Nishi generously salts his plate - tosses Gunner a neck bone. Gunner gnaws on it.

EXT. CAMP GLOEGOER - POW'S MESS - DAY

A long line of dirty, ragged prisoners holding tin dishes wait to receive rations.

A glob of rice porridge and a slice of maggot-covered melon is slopped onto Frank's plate. It's better than nothing, but barely.

Frank scans the crowd as other soldiers cluster into groups.

Frank tentatively pulls up a stump to join a troop of men.

JAHN (O.S)
You're in my spot.

Frank relinquishes his seat to Jahn. The men tighten their circle.

Nearby, a maimed but merry Cousens limps over to Les. Cousens, worse for wear with a broken pair of glasses, coughs. Seeing Frank searching for a spot, Cousens waves him over.

COUSENS
You're welcome to join us. It helps to have friends in here.

Frank takes a seat on the semi-secluded outskirts - within earshot.

FRANK

I'm not going to be here long enough to make friends, thanks anyway.

LES

If I had a sixpence--

COUSENS

--You'd be a richer man for it.

Cousens frowns a warning at Les. He raises his tin cup in Frank's direction.

COUSENS (CONT'D)

We wish you every success, friend. Cheers!

FRANK

If the Japs call this a banquet, I can't wait to taste a regular meal.

LES

Pickin's are slim. Get 'em while you can.

Frank looks to where Jahn sits with his fellow Dutch POW's. In addition to their rations, the men are roasting a pigeon over a spit.

LES (CONT'D)

The Dutch. Japs don't hate them as much. They pretty much do as they're told.

Jahn and Frank lock eyes before Jahn turns away and bites into a tiny drumstick. Cousens approaches Frank.

COUSENS

Private Cousens.

Cousens holds out his hand. Frank hesitates - shakes it.

FRANK

Frank Williams.

Cousens gestures over to Les.

COUSENS

And all else what's left of the gunboat *Grasshopper*, Lieutenant Les Searle.

LES

Don't forget Judy. She should be over any sec.

FRANK

Judy? There's a girl in here?

COUSENS

Oh yeah. She's a looker too.

LES

One bat of them eyelashes, and you're done for.

COUSENS

I can't wait to have a bit of a snuggle with her tonight, me'self.

LES

Last night was your turn. Tonight she's mine.

COUSENS

The bitch has a mind all her own. She can choose whomever she fancies.

LES

We shouldn't squabble. Judy's a full member of the Royal Navy and deserves respect as such.

FRANK

The Royal Navy allowed a female crew member on a gunboat?

COUSENS

Heck, they're the ones that bought and paid for her.

Cousens purses his lips and makes a SMOOCH sound.

LES

Speak of the devil...

Frank turns to see the Dog; aka, JUDY, crawl out from under a building. She is still bloodied from the Guard's beating.

Judy scampers towards the group, but seeing Frank, she curls her lip into a low GROWL.

LES (CONT'D)

Looks like we won't have any competition for cuddles tonight, Cousens.

The men chuckle - Frank eyes their camaraderie.

FRANK

All yours, fellas. I prefer my ladies with less hair on their legs.

Judy gives Frank a wide berth as she takes a spot beside Cousens. Cousens pinches some maggots from his plate and offers them to Judy. She laps at them hungrily.

COUSENS

Atta girl.

FRANK

How the hell did a dog get in here? Are the Japs saving it for their stewpot?

Cousens covers Judy's floppy ears.

COUSENS

Shh! She understands everything you say, and she hates 'em enough as it is.

FRANK

Does it have a home?

LES

The only home that Judy ever knew is twenty meters below the Yangtze River, now. She guarded our gunboat for six years until the Japs shot it down. We couldn't in good conscious leave her behind.

Frank's expression suggests otherwise.

COUSENS

Ain't you ever had a dog?

FRANK

Nope. Never saw the sense in it.

COUSENS

Purebred pointer is what she is. Ain't you, Judy.

FRANK

So which of you does it belong to?

LES

Over the years, Judy's said goodbye to so many men... I think she knows better than to favor just one.

Judy's unblinking brown eyes size up Frank, warily.

INT. CAMP GLOEGOER - BARRACKS - NIGHT

In claustrophobic quarters, restless men toss and turn on narrow wooden bunks.

Frank pins a *linen handkerchief embroidered with a single rose* to the underside of the bunk above him. He lies back and stares at it - extends his hand to touch it but can't quite reach.

Men's laughter echoes in the steamy night air. Frank peers out at the courtyard.