

Sabotage!

Manshu Kosaku Kikai Kabushiki Kaisha (MKK) was the huge military Industrial Complex in Shenyang. It was first run by Japanese, then by Chinese under Japanese control. As the Chinese wore out, more help was needed, and Mitsubishi put out a call for white industrial workers. 1400 Americans from Cababatuan were sent on the Tottori Maru to Shenyang to work in the factories. They were joined by 100 British and Australian POWs from Singapore. Of course this was against the Geneva conventions, but Japan insisted they had not signed them. Thus the POWs at Mukden found themselves making armaments and planes to be used against their fellow Yanks, Brits, and Aussies.

However, the men continued to fight even though they were prisoners. How?

Sabotage!!!!!!

As Casey Bazewick Jr. put it, "POWs risked their lives at Mukden -- in China -- sabotaging production at the factory and taking other action against the enemy, and in so doing they assisted China. My father's told me about the chances they often took. Their resistance was active not passive. His Purple Heart Certificate reads: ". . . for wounds received in action while a POW . . ." The inclusion of the phrase "in action" is deliberate and very significant, because the Purple Heart is specifically a combat decoration. The U.S. thereby recognizes the active, combative role against Japan my father took while a POW -- wherever he was, whether in the Philippines, at sea, or in China. China may or may not share this recognition of the role POWs played in China. If it does not, it would demonstrate a most regrettable failure to appreciate and acknowledge what POWs did in China against Japan -- and in some cases died doing."

Most POWs of the Japanese tried to sabotage any Japanese plans if they could do so without getting killed. Beatings seemed to be an OK price to pay. Men who worked in mines had fewer opportunities to sabotage, since their actions could also kill POWs. However, the men of Mukden made many opportunities to sabotage the Japanese war effort. They had a "safer" job to start with.

The men still relish telling stories of how they outsmarted the guards or turned out inferior items that looked functional but would break immediately. At every gathering of former POWs, the stories get repeated amid much quiet, satisfied laughter.

It also helped that the Japanese, indoctrinated to their own unthinking obedience to any order, even if it meant their own death, did not understand the minds of formerly free men,

The book, *Just One More Day* by Lillian Wuttke de Giacomo, describes it like this:

"When the POWS arrived (at MKK) they had to finish the construction of the plant, including pouring concrete and setting machinery. Some of the ways the POWs hindered progress, was to throw tools into the area to have concrete poured. There is even story about burying an entire lathe under the concrete. Other ways to stop the effort was to set the machines "off level" which always made the finished products "out of tolerance". Sand put into the oil of machinery with moving parts caused machinery to become inoperable very quickly. Some machines were designed to build aircraft parts, while others were made to make screws. The machines were from different countries which Japan had conquered." They expected the POWs to help reverse engineer the machines so they could make copies.

This story of burying tools has been repeated by a great many of the former American and British POWs, but some of it may have been legend. When the MKK factories were destroyed in the late 2000s to make way for housing, no signs of machines, parts, or tools were seen in the foundations. But Bob Vogler, POW #138, he may have an explanation for that. He says there was a heavy layer of sand under the concrete and many tools went into that.

While still at the old camp, the 5 mile hike to the factory became a chore for the guards, so they would pay a POW ½ a cigarette to carry their rifle. One day on the march to the camp, a Japanese officer passed the straggling line in a cart. The men knew enough Japanese to shout out “Eyes Right” as he went by and the officer was startled to see American POWs carrying Japanese rifles. The guards who had let the POWs carry the rifles were badly beaten.

Once precision machines were assembled, they needed to be moved. To do this, the POWs lined up logs to roll the machine into place. The POWs were careful to pick logs of various sizes so the machinery was jolted out of alignment.

The Japanese used soybean oil as machine oil. The men discovered this and stole the oil to drink. The Japanese put cyanide in it so the men would not drink it.

One rather sensitive machine had funnels in the openings for oil, so anyone could see at a glance if the machine needed oil and easily add it. The men plugged the bottom of the funnels so they always seemed to have plenty of oil. The machines used up their oil, overheated and burned up. When repairing the damage, the men managed to put small kinks in the line feeding the oil to moving parts and the machines continued to fail.

Arthur Christie tells the story of three machines that were being assembled in a large building which needed to have doors put in so the assembled machines could be removed. After much measuring, the doors were slowly built, and as the Japanese tried to remove the machines, the doors were somehow an inch or so too small. The correct measurements were on the final plans.

Bob Vogler tells of the time he was sitting on a bench made of 2 cans with a board across them. A guard kicked one of the cans out from under him and he fell to the ground. The next day Bob put a cement block in one of the cans and sat down, encouraging a repeat performance. The same guard kicked at the can again and broke his foot. He was not seen back at the factory.

Harold Carter, when he was assigned to a lathe at MKK, tells how he took a larger piece of metal to put on the lathe to make fresh metal filings to fool the guards when they came around to check, but somehow he didn't get much done other times

Some of the men had electrical skills and rewired some of the MKK plant so that one night, when the men were safe in their barracks, there was a huge fire at the plant. The men enjoyed the view from their barracks.

More examples: If a Japanese was working on one end of a huge machine, a passing POW could “accidentally” lean on the off switch and be gone before anyone spotted him. Part of one machine was produced at MKK and another part was produced elsewhere. When the machine was assembled, the ends of the tube that ran through it were 2-3 inches off from each other. Someone reversed the wires on a machine. When it was turned on, it blew parts through the sheet metal sides and all over the factory. Sometimes machines were wired to run backwards.

MKK sent in spies to try to catch the men goofing off. They dressed in typical Chinese Working man's clothing, but forgot their dress shoes were a dead giveaway, so no one was caught.

At one point, the Japanese guards were heard lamenting that the Americans were such lousy workers that they couldn't see how they could build anything. They had a culture of doing whatever they were told, both promptly and accurately, and it never seemed to occur to them that the POWs, especially the Americans, might not have the same tradition.

The men insist that not a single working machine left the MKK factory. The Japanese were very disappointed in the abilities of the Americans. Since it never would have occurred to them to disobey orders, it never occurred to them that the Men of Mukden would not also slavishly follow orders.

There were other factories where Mukden POWs worked. At the leather factory, the men reversed the chemicals in the vats. The leather looked OK, but the not being properly tanned, it damaged very easily and did not last as it should have. At the canvas factory, the men managed to cause spindles and looms to break on a fairly regular basis.

If caught, the men knew that they would suffer a terrible beating or days without food or blankets in cages so small they couldn't stand up or stretch out. The weather dropped to -50 degrees on some winter days in Manchuria and the sun blistered the area in the summer as sand storm blew in from the Gobi Desert. A long sentence could be a death sentence, but they were determined not to help the Japanese.

Not only did the men not want to help the Japanese war effort, but the psychological lift they got from messing with the Japanese gave them the strength needed to endure the abuse, the weather, and the lack of food.