

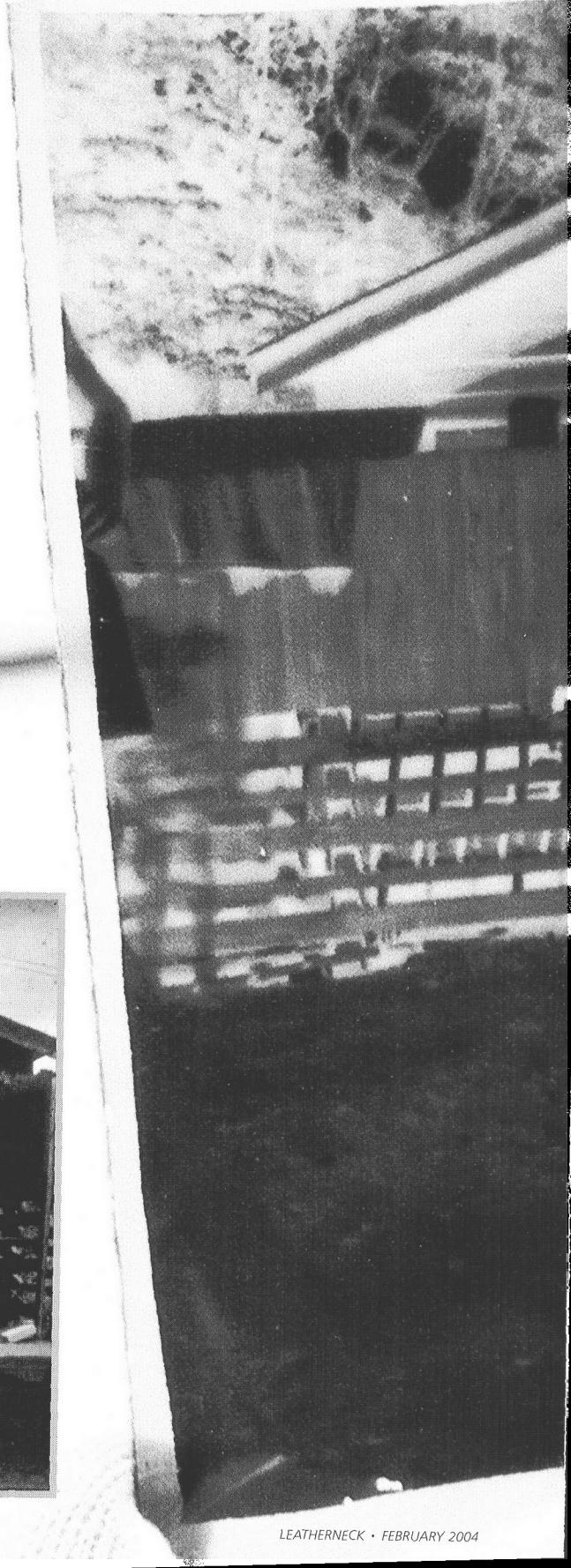
The Secret POW Camera

By R. R. Keene

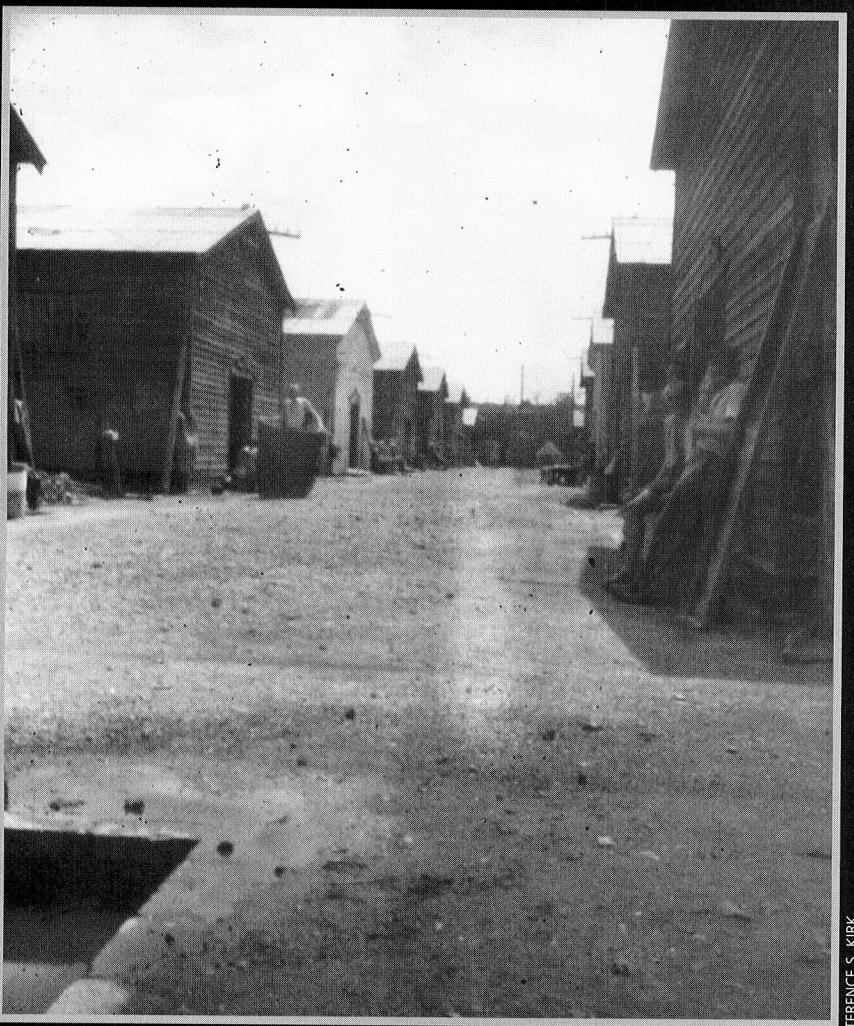
Fukuoka, with its 5 million Japanese, sits on the island of Kyushu surrounded by high hills of the Sefuri, Sangun and Inunaki mountain systems and facing the Genkai Sea. It has alabaster high-rise buildings and elegant hotels all scrubbed continuously by platoons of cleaning employees. It is typical of Japan: orderly and polite with residents in expensive freshly pressed suits who bow graciously to foreigners.

It is a place that lends itself to pictures: rock gardens and bonsai greenery set in the wooden architecture of Japanese temples and Torii gates. There are plush shops, and restaurants offer everything from the traditional noodle *soba* to *fugu*, or blowfish, a potentially deadly dish that melts in one's mouth while simultaneously filling one with fear. Above the freshly pruned flowers adorning its avenues and boulevards is Fukuoka Tower, 240 meters tall with its 8,000 mirrors and potentially 56,000 years of bad luck.

The photo (below) and the accompanying glass negative (right) show three emaciated prisoners. The center man, suffering from dry beriberi, had to be supported from behind. The man on the right was suffering from wet beriberi. (Inset photo by Terence S. Kirk, larger photo by Joseph R. Chenelly)







TERENCE S. KIRK

The prisoners—forced to labor at a nearby industrial steel complex and brutalized by their guards—dubbed Fukuoka prison camp, photographed covertly by Kirk, the “Pittsburgh of Japan.”

It was in Fukuoka a few days after Christmas 1944 when Marine Corporal Terence S. Kirk, a prisoner of war for 1,037 days as near as he could figure, watched Japanese soldiers mercilessly beat Max Neuse, a fellow North China Marine. Neuse had violated one of the “Regulations for Prisoners” posted by the commander of the “Prisoner Escort,” which stated: “Prisoners disobeying the following orders will be punished with immediate death. . . .”

Damn beans! Neuse’s crime was owning up to being the recipient of a small sack of beans. One of the younger undernourished POWs was caught smuggling them. Neuse saw him as a sickly fellow and figured he could take a beating a lot better, so he stepped forward and told the Japanese the beans were his. It didn’t take long for Kirk and the other POWs to realize it was a gesture with horrible consequences. The Japanese not only viciously beat Neuse but also poured a bucket of ice water over him and forced him to stand in an icy cistern for three

hours. Once the punishment was over, his fellow POWs did their best to warm Neuse, but pneumonia started filling his lungs. Two days later he drew his last breath.

“The Great Japanese Empire will not try to punish you all with death,” stated the Regulations for Prisoners. “Those obeying all the rules and regulations, and believing and . . . cooperating with Japan in constructing the ‘New Order of the Great Asia’ which leads to the world’s peace will be well treated.”

Horse hockie! In 1944 there was nothing picturesque about the prison named Fukuoka 3-B, which was part of a dirty but huge industrial complex, sometimes called the “Pittsburgh of Japan” by those POWs who slaved there. There was nothing gracious or polite about the Japanese soldiers who arrogantly looked down on the POWs as slaves and brutally abused them. Slave is really the only word that described them. They were forced, under the penalty of death, to work for the Japanese steel industry, which fed the Japanese

war machine, which by 1944 was being defeated soundly throughout the Pacific.

It was a vicious cycle. The Japanese military lost battles and needed more planes, ships, rifles and accoutrements of war. The steel mills, already suffering from a lack of raw materials, drove their POW labor-slaves harder. As essentials such as food and medicine became precious to the Japanese military and population, less if any was allocated to the POWs. The POWs became weaker and sicker. Production fell even more. Their Japanese guards, whose feudal system brutalized them, in turn brutalized the POWs even more in a futile effort to increase production. The POWs—Marines from North China, Wake Island and the Philippines mixed with American sailors, soldiers and airmen—existed in a cruel cycle where they worked, suffered and eventually died.

“Every day, there was a pile of dead kids being taken away by a two-wheeler to be cremated,” Kirk would write years later.

There was no “Stockholm Syndrome” infecting guests of the Emperor. They were being starved to death and became infected with the diseases related to incarceration under less-than-humane conditions.

Kirk, frustrated, noted that the prisoners who were dying were “not ordinary men. They [were] soldiers, sailors and Marines. When captured they were perfect physical specimens—the flower of their country’s youth.

“Someone should be held accountable for their slaughter,” he told an interpreter named Nishi, who also happened to be an American from San Francisco. Although free to come and go, Nishi, too, was a prisoner of sorts. He’d been duped into returning to Japan before the war by a telegram, which stated his grandmother was dying. The telegram included money to book passage to Yokohama. When Nishi arrived he was immediately pressed into military service.

Kirk examined and cogitated the situation and broached the subject with Nishi. If indeed the war ended and there was to be an accounting of their captors, it would surely help seal their fate if there was visible proof, such as photographs of the sick and dying.

Nishi pondered where one could get a *shashinki*, or camera, and wondered who would be foolish enough to take the *shashin*, or photos?

“I will do it,” replied Kirk. “I can take pictures without a camera, that is, without a conventional camera. All I need is a few photographic plates.”

Kirk was an amateur photographer. He kept his interest even while he was sta-

tioned in China with the American Legation Guard at Tientsin prior to the war. But it was back before Kirk entered the Corps in 1937 that his brother took the time to show him how to make a camera.

To be discovered taking photographs would mean certain death, and it would likely not be quick, as the Japanese would want to set an example for other prisoners harboring similar ideas. Who would ever forget the Christmas present they had given Max Neuse?

Kirk knew enough about photography to realize he could, with materials in the camp, fashion a light-tight box to serve as a makeshift camera. What Kirk could not fashion or create were the photographic plates or negatives that would fit in the camera and serve as film. Nor did he have the capabilities to process and develop his photographs. He hinted to Nishi that he would need help.

Nishi sucked air through his teeth and said nothing.

"With a little luck, we can pull this off and nobody will be the wiser," Kirk offered as encouragement.

"Luck?" Nishi was incredulous. "With my past history of luck, they may let me use a blindfold after they make me take it off your bullet-riddled body."

Kirk built his camera, which was simply two 4-inch-by-5-inch cardboard boxes: One box was slightly smaller than the other, so it would fit snugly inside the larger, making the "camera" light-tight except for a pinhole in the end of the smaller box, which was covered by a piece of black tape. Both boxes were in plain sight and served as repositories for Kirk's Japanese-issue toothbrushes, toothpowder and a spoon.

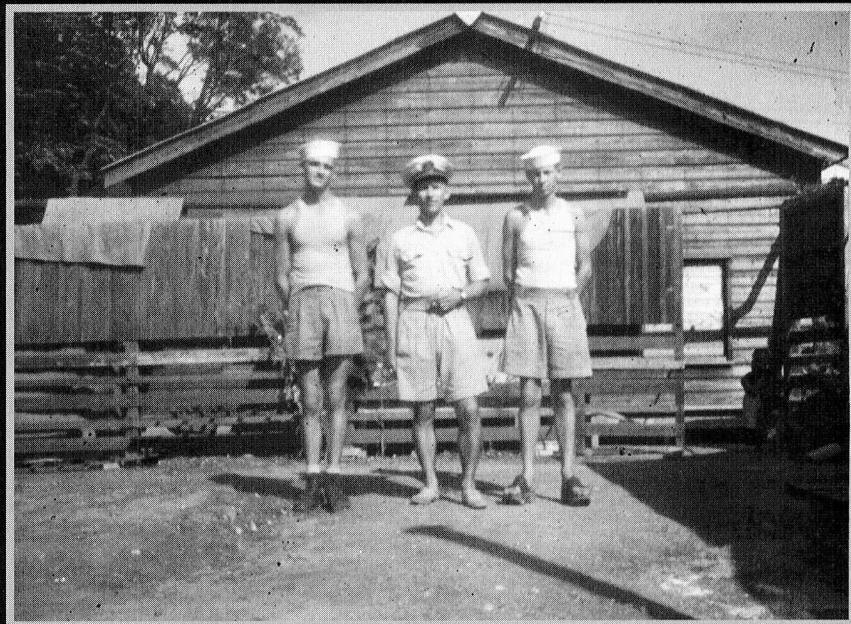
A couple of weeks later when he was sure no one was listening or looking, Nishi said, "Kirk, if you still want those photographic plates, they are in the briefcase at your feet. There is nobody watching. Take them now."

There was one problem: the plates were 8 inches by 10 inches, and Kirk had built a 4x5 camera. He would have to cut the plates.

"I need a diamond glass cutter," he said. Nishi complained of the plot becoming "more complicated all the time," but went off to find a diamond glass cutter.

In the meantime Kirk located a tank with a plywood cover in the Japanese soldiers' bathroom. They only used the room to bathe in the evening. It made a perfect darkroom to load and unload the plates in the pinhole camera after making an exposure.

Nishi came through with a diamond cutter. A moment of potential disaster occurred during a routine shakedown when



TERENCE S. KIRK

Although Navy doctor Markowitz and his two corpsmen had little to no medical supplies, they improvised and bartered for what few medicines they could obtain.

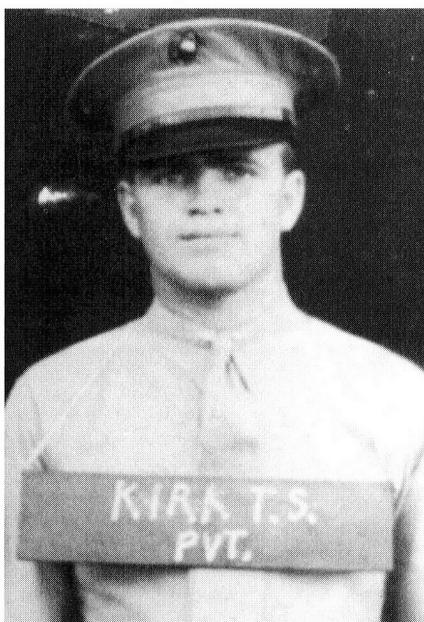
a Japanese soldier examined the boxes, but did not see anything beyond them being receptacles for toiletries and eating utensils. The real scare came when soldiers pulled back the blankets of bedding covering the mat where Kirk had hidden the plates. They did not, however, notice a raised anomaly in the mat.

Photographing his fellow prisoners was quite another problem. Kirk enlisted the help of the camp doctor and emaciated prisoners who volunteered to serve as subjects of the photographs. Other prisoners offered to serve as lookouts.

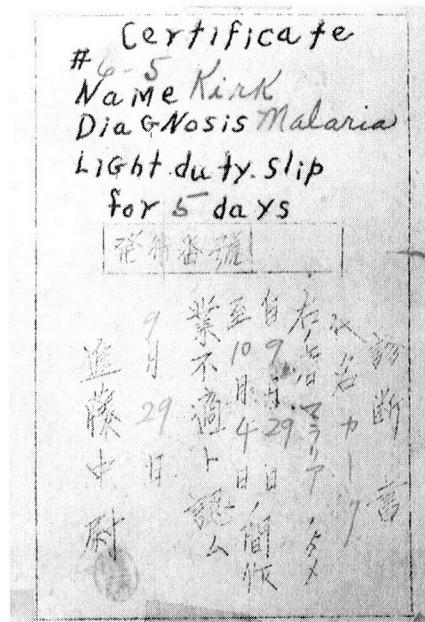
It was through the vigilance of look-

outs that Kirk was allowed to take four exposures in less than an hour. The camp doctor brought out his patients and stood them naked in the sun. Kirk steadied his camera by resting it on the edge of a concrete cistern, aimed it at his subjects and removed the patch from over the pinhole.

Kirk had used similar glass plates at the photo lab in China to copy line drawings. It was very slow photographic material and good for his purpose. However, finished prints tended to lack contrast, but there was no time to worry about that. Kirk counted, "One second, two seconds, three seconds" up to 10, and covered the



COURTESY OF TERENCE S. KIRK



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Terence Kirk, photographed prior to incarceration. In prison the ravages of diseases such as malaria, which did get Kirk five days of light duty, were not uncommon. More than 500 American POWs died at Fukuoka prison camp.

Murder on Palawan

Sadistic Treatment of POWs A Common Thread

It was not a massacre. It was murder, evil and despicable—sanctioned murder by men wearing the uniforms of their country.

Palawan is the long island on the outer rampart of the Philippine archipelago bordering the South China Sea. At Puerto Princesa in December 1944, the Japanese had penned behind barbed wire approximately 150 American prisoners of war at Camp 10-A. The POWs, prodded by beatings with pick handles, were “volunteers” constructing an airfield.

Overhead, American aircraft were often observed. Two months earlier American B-24 Liberators sank two Japanese ships and damaged or destroyed more than 60 Japanese aircraft on Palawan.

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur landed at Leyte on 19 Oct. He quickly signed a directive to the commander of Japanese forces in the Philippines warning him that he and his command would be held responsible for the abuse of prisoners, internees and noncombatants.

An American invasion was coming to Palawan. No one knew for sure when, but the Japanese garrison had no doubt that the Americans would come.

“What to do with the prisoners” was a rhetorical question for the Japanese. The high command had in essence said to dispose of prisoners by any means available.

More specifically the garrison had guidance in an order: Formosa POW Security No. 10 issued by the Chief of Staff, 11th Unit, Taiwan POW headquarters in August 1944. It spelled out the time and method of disposition of POWs. Even today the method as it was written is as starkly callous as it is damning: “Whether they are destroyed individually or in groups, or



COURTESY OF JOSEPH E. DUPONT JR.

Americans murdered on Palawan eventually were laid to rest in St. Louis. Although their common grave listed their names and date of death, nothing explained how they had died. POW survivors of the 4th Marines provided a marker (above) that commemorates the deaths.

however it is done, with mass bombing, poisonous smoke, poisons, drowning, decapitation, or what, dispose of them as the situation dictates. In any case it is the aim not to allow the escape of a single one, to annihilate them all, and not to leave any traces.”

It was a policy the Japanese at Camp 10-A unerringly adhered to at approximately 1400, 14 Dec. 1944.

“An air raid was sounded and we were told to get into shelter [pits] because hundreds of American planes were coming,” stated POW Marine Private First Class Glenn W. McDole, who had been with the Fourth Marine Regiment when he was captured at Corregidor. He was one of approximately 30 Marines sent to work at Palawan. His testimony was recorded in 1945 by Corporal John McLeod, a correspondent with the Army’s *Yank* magazine: “We all figured that the Americans were going to land so it made it safer for ourselves too. We did as commanded.”

McDole heard several Japanese yelling. “I looked out of my pit and saw a Japanese captain come running out to our area

pinhole. He then returned to the Japanese bath to remove the exposed plate, insert a new plate and return to his subjects.

He took three photographs of prisoners suffering from malnutrition and beriberi, and one photo of the camp doctor with two corpsmen. Kirk later photographed the main street of Camp #3 and then photographed the hydroelectric plant less than a stone’s throw from the prison. According to Kirk, the Japanese reasoned that putting the prison camp so near the plant was basically like saying, “You blow up our plant, you’ll kill the prisoners of war.”

In the end it was Nishi who convinced a sympathetic Japanese to process the film and hand over the prints. The results were surprising.

Retired Marine Master Sergeant Donald L. Versaw, who also was a POW, had been a Marine Corps photographer with the Fourth Marine Regiment at Shang-

hai. He was captured on Corregidor on 6 May 1942.

He saw the pictures in 2003. “I am really amazed at [Kirk’s] success with [a] pinhole camera,” Versaw said, recalling that his attempts Stateside at making such a primitive photographic device were never completely successful, “and I was working under some pretty easy conditions.”

It was by all accounts a bold, daring and an amazingly lucky effort. It might have been a forgotten effort. In the end, Kirk and his fellow prisoners lined up in front of a Japanese colonel who emotionally proclaimed, “The war is over. Japan is a poor nation. We have lost the war.”

“I could see he was having difficulty maintaining his composure,” said Kirk, who had been a prisoner for 1,355 days. When the camp at Fukuoka opened in 1943, there were 1,200 prisoners. Only 678 were left to hear the Japanese col-

onel. “I could feel absolutely no sympathy for him.”

The Japanese military would do a lot of explaining to the American occupation force. Many would be sent to prison and a number would be hanged as war criminals. Kirk does not know if any of those tried by military tribunal were from the Fukuoka prison camp. He was able to keep his plates and was granted permission to publish them at “his own discretion.” He went on to retire in 1957 from the Marine Corps as a master gunnery sergeant. In 1982 he wrote his book, “The Secret Camera,” an account of his experiences as a POW. The book includes the photographs taken with his pinhole camera. It helped bring to light the reality of the treatment of the U.S. troops captured during the war.

It is from his book that quoted dialogue in the prison camp was used with permission. Unfortunately, Kirk never saw

followed by about 50 or 60 Japanese soldiers armed with light machine guns, rifles and buckets. I ducked back into my pit not yet knowing what was coming off when all of a sudden an explosion sounded, men screamed and there were sounds of machine-gun fire.

"One man looked out of the pit and said, 'They're murdering the men in A Company pit.' I looked out and saw one man coming out in a sheet of flame. He was cut down by machine-gun fire," McDole said the Japanese cheered and laughed.

"On seeing this we began digging our way out. All the men had gotten out of the hole except one. Before we got out, we saw a torch thrown into the pit and a bucket of gasoline thrown in. The man in the pit screamed. I suppose the flame got him."

McDole estimates that about 40 to 50 prisoners tried to stealthily make their way toward the beach hoping to swim to freedom. The Japanese discovered or caught up with many of the escapees. McDole and others who were still hiding witnessed wanton murders. Those caught were bayoneted in the stomach. Some were buried alive. In one incident on the beach, McDole said: "I could see six Japanese with an American in the center being slowly tortured with bayonets while another Japanese joined the group with a bucket and torch.

"The American began begging to be shot and not burned. He screamed in such a high voice I could hear him." The Japanese poured "gasoline on one of his feet and burned it, and then the other. He collapsed. The [Japanese] poured gasoline on his body and set it off."

Those POWs who made it to the water were picked off from the beach by rifle and machine-gun fire. Once clear of Japanese bullets, some drowned. Still, 11 escapees were able to swim and eventually were rescued by Filipino guerrillas. Three of them were Marines: PFC McDole, Cpl Rufus Smith and Sergeant Douglas Bogue.

The war ended several months later. The Japanese military, proud, disciplined, honorable heirs to the ancient Samurai class, and the chivalrous way of the warrior code of *bushido*, did not fight or commit suicide. Their officers disappeared; a good majority of the enlisted men also made themselves scarce.

Nishi again and only knows that Nishi was last known to have settled in Chile.

Kirk recently told reporters, "I was more of an American when I came home than when I went in [to prison]. There's no place in the world like America."

It was in 1990 and partly through the efforts of Richard A. Long of the History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps that Kirk's photographic plates, prints and other artifacts from his incarceration went to the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps University's General Alfred M. Gray Research Center, Quantico, Va.

The pictures, however, still serve to help Kirk's fellow prisoners.

In a 17 July 2003 speech before his governing body, Senator Orrin G. Hatch of Utah spoke of the difficulties met by the ex-POWs and stated that claims by POWs were being "barred by the 1951 Treaty of Peace with Japan and the War

Of those caught and brought to trial for the Palawan massacre, 10 were given sentences ranging from two years imprisonment to death. Six Japanese were acquitted of war crimes related to the murders on Palawan. GEN MacArthur later commuted one death sentence to 30 years of confinement at hard labor.

There is an old Japanese proverb: "Duty is heavier than a mountain. Death is lighter than a feather." It is something the Japanese at Palawan never comprehended, but those Americans who survived instinctively understood. They never forgot their duty to those left behind in shallow graves at Puerto Princesa. Following the end of the war the bodies were exhumed. Several went to family plots Stateside, but 123 were buried in a group gravesite at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, St. Louis. However, the gravesite was marked by a large, stone slab with only names, ranks and branches of service inscribed on the marker along with the date "December 14, 1944."

"There was nothing that said how that many U.S. servicemen could have all died on the same day," said Marine veteran Joseph E. Dupont Jr., also a former POW of the Japanese, now Vice Commander of the 4th Marine Regiment (Bataan-Corregidor) Association. The discrepancy was noted during a 2001 reunion.

The Marine veterans contacted the then-Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Lieutenant Colonel Robin L. Higgins, USMC (Ret). The veterans asked that an additional marker that further explained the terrible events be installed. LtCol Higgins helped make it happen. The Marines of the association kicked in the \$1,600 for the plaque and associated costs.

On 4 Oct. 2003, the 4th Marine Regiment Association held a dedication ceremony for the Palawan Memorial Marker. It was a heavy duty carried by a few and owed to comrades who died 59 years earlier.

"The Japanese tortured them and nothing was told to anyone," said Dupont. "That's what upset us, that the world doesn't know."

Perhaps it does.

--R. R. Keene

Claims Act. Personally, I don't think the government had the authority to waive these claims. Unbelievably, the Justice Department continues to argue in these cases on behalf of the Japanese companies and against our POWs."

In 2001, the Senate attempted to rectify this situation by including a revision in the Department of Defense authorization bill to allow payments of \$20,000 to POWs who were forced into labor camps. It has been an uphill battle. Earlier efforts have failed, according to the POW-MIA InterNetwork.

"Unfortunately," said Hatch, "the provision was stripped in conference, due in large part, I believe, to pressure from the previous administration."

In August 2002, Kirk published the third edition of "The Secret Camera."

Time is running out for the former prisoners of Japan. U.S. government statistics state there were a total of 27,465 U.S.

forces taken prisoner in the Pacific; 11,107 died as prisoners. It was estimated that 5,745 former POWs of the Pacific were still alive at the turn of the century.

"Each month that justice is denied us, another 50 survivors will die," said Lester Tenney, a survivor of the Bataan Death March in the Philippines who testified before the House Judiciary's Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims, which reviewed a POW reparations bill. "We don't have much time left."

Senator Hatch presented the Senate an amendment to the Defense Appropriations Bill to give each surviving POW of the Japanese in WW II a payment of \$10,000. It also admitted Kirk's "The Secret Camera" to the Library of Congress, making it a piece of America's permanent history. The bill passed 95-0. The bill is still waiting to be approved by the House of Representatives.

