

The Missing Shovel

In *Miracle on the River Kwai*, Ernest Gordon tells how Scottish soldiers were forced by their Japanese captors to work on a jungle railroad. They worked in deplorable conditions under barbarous guards.

One day, the officer in charge became enraged over a missing shovel. He pulled his gun and promised to kill all the men unless the guilty party stepped forward.

After several tense moments, a man finally stepped out of the line. The officer put his gun away, picked up the shovel, and beat the man to death right in front of the other prisoners. They were allowed only to pick up his bloody corpse and carry it with them to a second tool check. There, the tools were recounted, and all shovels were accounted for. There had never been a missing shovel. There had simply been a miscount at the first checkpoint.



Word of the incident quickly spread through the entire prison camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others. The episode had a profound effect, binding the prisoners together in deep loyalty. It was that loyalty, in part, that gave the men strength and will to survive until they were liberated.

That volunteer soldier paid the supreme price. A wise leader realizes that personal sacrifice of one kind or another is often necessary to inspire others. Leaders are watched carefully, and judged by what is observed. Whether it is personal time, energy or resources expended – going the second or third mile in dedication to the organization or cause – a perspective and impact are created.

Sacrifice brings hope and encouragement to weary souls. It produces growth and maturity. There is no true leadership without some kind of sacrifice.

– Beecher Hunter