Ethical considerations presented by the movie Bridge on the River Kwai

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HISTORICAL FACTS

- British command ordered a surrender of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942 [1]
- This action created 60,000 - 80,000 POWs; a number that far exceeded the Japanese capabilities [2,3]
- The Bataan Death March soon followed; a 63-mile, forced march sending POWs to work camps; “no died during this march? Whistling? No [3,4]
- Prisoners were divided into camps and forced to build the Burma RR, also called the Death RR – ~16,000 allied servicemen died
- LTC Toosey was the leader of one of the camps; he took numerous beatings for asking for better conditions, and at the end of the war, LTC Toosey saved the life of Sergeant-Major Saito [5]
- Allied servicemen were regularly beaten by their Japanese capturers and Japanese soldiers were regularly beaten by their superiors if goals were not met [5]
- The POW, including LTC Toosey, regularly sabotaged all work [5]
  - Made loose joints
  - Harvested termites and released them on the timbers
  - Caused as many delays as the beatings would allow
- Japanese engineers were highly educated and skilled
- Some bridges that the POWs built are still in use today

British Commandos sabotage the bridge with explosives. LTC Nicholson, blinded by the legacy of his bridge, exposes the commandos to the Japanese – the bridge and a train are detonated

A fresh group of POWs march into camp whistling a crisp tune

The camp commander, COL Saitu, orders all men, including officers to work – the senior ranking POW, LTC Nicholson refuses due to a line in the Geneva Convention that protects officers from doing manual labor

After surviving the punishment for his position on the issue, LTC Nicholson takes charge of the bridge-building operation.

LTC Nicholson chooses to make a “proper bridge” because it will benefit the local community long after the end of the war

LTC Nicholson proudly builds an immense structure, ensuring all men, even his officers, worked manual labor to meet a deadline

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An entire economy was created in Sri Lanka from the making of this movie

The bridge was built twice because the cameras were not rolling when the order was given from the director

The train had to be raised from the river, cleaned up, and sent down the tracks again

It is believed that the train still resides at the bottom of that river

References:
1. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/10382906/Burma-Railway-British-POW-breaks-silence-over-horrors.html