

puzzled us,
as did the Air Force's mandating
the labelling of every last plastic bottle in the shop
whether it contained cutting fluid or soap or water,
until the supervisor at the meeting considerably explained
that we probably had trouble understanding
the importance of these new Air Force rules
because all we ever thought about
was producing aircraft parts.

COPING

After the 6:00 a.m. start-work buzzer
blares Mitch begins humming and la-la-ing
cha-cha rhythms louder and louder
as he fills out his time card at his workbench
until he turns toward Bobby
on machine #451 next to him and shouts, "Suck my cock,
BobBEEE!" in cha-cha rhythm
cha-cha-ing his feet back and forth and beating out
a rhythm with his fists at his side as if he were
holding maraccas,
turning around to face Alan
on machine #462 and sing out, "Bend...over, AaaaLAN!"
as he grins and cha-chas his feet
then turns to face Tom across the aisle
at machine #456 and shout, "Suck me off, TomMEEE!" and go
into a prolonged
near hysterical giggle until he has to grab the edge of
his workbench to keep from falling over.

Some machinists
take having to be away from their wives 8 hours each day
pretty hard.

LUCKY

I am machining
2 blocks of sawed aluminum bar stock
into 2 identical parts,
and filling out separate First-Time-Conformance cards
on each one
because each one came with its own separate
manufacturing order
bearing different part numbers, serial numbers,
and issue numbers,
and I am spending most of my time
confusing the 2 parts and then trying to re-identify them
and record
their different dimensions to the thousandth of an inch
in the tiny little boxes
all over the separate First-Time-Conformance cards,

and getting angry
over the fact that Goodstone Aircraft Company
didn't put the identical parts on one manufacturing order.

Of course, it could have been worse —
Goodstone could have followed its usual procedure
and sent me 1 part on 1 manufacturing order and then,
when I had finished the part and torn down
all of the complex set-ups and sent back
all of the special tooling and cutters
for the job,
sent me the second identical part on a separate
manufacturing order.

FAN CLUB

Whenever Maintenance arrives
to work on one of our machines,
we make a point to gather about
the machine they are working on and stare at them,
munching apples and
leaning back with arms folded
elbowing each other in the ribs
as we crack jokes
at their expense,
chuckling and shaking our heads
and whistling the Laurel and Hardy theme
as the Maintenance men
sweat and strain and grapple,
turning and pushing and hammering
machine parts,
turning red with embarrassment
and cursing and having fits
because they know they must do a good job
if they don't want to endure
having us watch them all over again.

NOT AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS

Graveyard shift machinist
Gus springs at me the moment I arrive
at the beginning of my day shift
to take over for him,
shoving the part he is working on
under my nose
and rattling off with speeded-out-of-his-mind baggy-eyed
intensity,
"You can put the head on an 8-degree 42-minute angle to
go in on the Y axis and hold the 35 thousandths radius on
the A datum, well actually you can go in 100 thousandths
extra because of the 4-degree 12-minute angle on the B
datum, but you don't want to go past the middle of the