

Pooneryn death toll rises amid confusion. (1993, November 21).
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Pooneryn death toll rises amid confusion

Army appoints own probe team

More than 675 security forces personnel are feared to have been killed in the November 11 attack and siege of the Pooneryn sector defence by Tiger terrorists. The Sunday Times understands.

But defence authorities are unable to give exact figures since there is no evidence to establish the deaths of a large number who cannot be accounted for although they are presumed dead. Hence the official death figures have been accounted on the basis of what the authorities have been able to confirm.

In terms of this, around 421 soldiers and some 75 Navy personnel are reported dead. "This may be much higher. But in view of the lack of evidence, they will remain classed as Missing in Action (MIA)," one high ranking security sources who did not wish to be identified said last night.

The sources said that reinforcements who re-occupied the Pooneryn sector had carried out a thorough search. "Besides three separate groups of sizeable numbers whom they relieved, a few stragglers too

showed up when they arrived. Therefore, there are fears that missing troops may be dead. However we still do not know how many have been taken prisoner by LTTE," the source explained.

The official figures of both dead and missing in action were placed at 17 officers and 620 men in the case of the Sri Lanka Army and two officers and 115 men in the case of the Sri Lanka Navy — both adding up to a total of 754.

While security officials believe Tiger terrorists may have taken some officers or soldiers as captives, there was still no word on the numbers. One foreign news agency had put the figure at 70 but the authorities have not received confirmation on this figure so far.

The Sunday Times learns that there were at least 2100 men in the Pooneryn sector at the time of the attack although the total strength there had been between 2300 to 2600. However, some have been on leave whilst others have been assigned on various security details.

The First Battalion of the Gajaba Regiment and the First Battalion of the Sri Lanka Light Infantry were the two main Army battalions that have been stationed in the Pooneryn sector in addition to Naval units. Other supporting Army units had been from the Armoured Corps, Artillery Regiment, Engineering Corps, Signals Corps, Supply Corps, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and the National Guard Battalion.

In addition, a group of new recruits had also been posted for training in the Pooneryn sector just a few days before the attack took place.

Meanwhile, Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne, has appointed his own departmental inquiry team to probe the Pooneryn disaster. The team comprises Brigadier Nanda Silva, Brigadier Sathis Jayasundera and Col. Sarath Fonseka.



Pic by De

Anxious relatives scan specially put up notice boards outside Army Headquarters in Colombó this week in search of information about their loved ones.

These notice boards list the names of Army men wounded in the recent Pooneryn battle.

LTTE admits 411 deaths

Amidst conflicting reports over the number of security forces casualties, the LTTE has claimed that more than 1,000 Army and Navy personnel were killed in the attacks on Pooneryn and Nagathevanthurai.

armaments include two tanks, five waterjet boats, one 106mm recoilless gun, 61 machine guns, 15 50 calibre guns, 44 mortars, 35 RPGs, and 10 pistols. Two armoured vehicles were destroyed.

The statement acknowledged that 411 LTTE fighters, including Black Tiger Major Ganesh were killed.

In a statement issued by its political wing, the LTTE said the captured