

Shattered dreams & broken toys

By Shelani de Silva

Janaka Kahandawela, as a baby, loved toy soldiers and planes. In love, his parents gave him lots of them. At Royal College, Janaka cut short his studies and joined the Air Force, though he was underage. Many times after that, he escaped death.

On Wednesday, fortune did not favour the brave. Janaka went down with the AN 32 B military transport plane.

Although he was underage to join the Air Force, Flt. Lt. Janaka Kahandawela had been determined to become a pilot, and he succeeded at the age of 18.

Having been crazy about the

Armed Forces from his childhood, Janaka had given up his education to achieve his ambition.

"He applied to the Air Force when he was in his Advanced Level class. He had only a few months more for the exam, when he applied. We did not object at first, because we were sure that he would be rejected as he was underage. But he was called for the interview. This worried us, as we wanted him to complete his studies. As he was determined to go ahead, we did not want to stop him. He kept telling us that there was no point in completing his studies as it would take many years to complete his University education", Janaka's father said.

With time the Kahandawelas had got used to their son's daring job. "We still cannot believe that he is no more, because Janaka had escaped death many times. He used to come and tell us how his plane escaped enemy fire. Although it made us upset, he was never worried", the father said.

With tears, Janaka's father said from the time he could remember, all Janaka insisted was that he be given toy soldiers, and planes. "We too gave him all these because we loved him. But in return we have to undergo this heartbreak", he said.

It had been only two months since Janaka entered wedded life. "It's such an unfortunate way to

lose him. He was only 27 years old."

The last time his parents had seen him was when Janaka and his wife Rashnie had visited home on Sunday. "He spent the whole day with us. He even brought some vegetables from the pola", said Janaka's father.

A product of Royal College Colombo, Janaka had excelled in both studies and sports. "He captained the school football team, and took part in boxing and baseball. He had a very good personality", he said.

The Kahandawelas' only wish is that their son's body will be brought home, where they can pay their last respects to a fallen hero.



Janaka Kahandawela