

## Pooneryn debacle as outlined by Cecil. (1994, November 28). *The Island*.

# Pooneryn debacle as outlined by Cecil

Former Army Commander, Cecil Waidyaratne told former President D. B. Wijetunga on December 31, 1993 that the "Army officers were very complacent with the firm conviction that no amount of indiscipline or ineptitude will bring them to book.

In a report titled 'Pooneryn debacle', by General Waidyaratne, he has also cited a senior army officer for allegedly lying to the court of Inquiry (Pooneryn) with malicious intentions, and diabolically lying to court in regard to four counts. The full report is as follows:

The Court of Inquiry appointed by me in respect of the LTTE attack on the Pooneryn army camp on 10/11 November 1993, chaired by Brig. T. N. de Silva forwarded its report to me on December 29, 1993 setting out its Observations, Special Comments, Opinion of Court, Recommendations and Degree of Neglect and Blame.

Amongst the various general observations, the following can be highlighted:

Villagers within Pooneryn defences provided a haven for LTTE infiltrators.

Artillery troop commander in Pooneryn given leave when the attack was imminent.

Headquarter not properly located. Priority has been given to the personal comforts of HQ staff.

Ground to air and communication with Navy gun boats have been very poor. Communications failed completely due to non-availability of serviceable batteries. No alternative communications have been made.

Visits by the senior commanders have been few and far between.

The battalion commander has not made any satisfactory arrangements for the security of the T55 tanks.

Ammunition with new battalion was low on arrival. Battalion Commander did not take any steps to rectify situation.

FDLs as per the threat.

Even though a threat from the rear was a probability, ironically very little has been done by way of planning to counter such a threat.

Troops, including those injured detached themselves from their platoons and fended for themselves in the absence of clear instructions as to what action should be taken. Maximum casualties have been inflicted during the retreat to Battalion HQ as the terrorists were waiting in ambush along the withdrawal routes.

Troops expended their ammunition within a very short period of time due to lack of fire discipline and fire control orders.

Troops located in the artillery positions abandoned their weapons and went to hiding when the terrorists attacked gun positions. In most cases special weapons were left behind by the troops in their haste to get away from enemy fire.

Even though the attack started at midnight on 10/11 November. The Tank Troop Commander appears to have been sleeping even at 1.30 a.m.

The airforce aircraft were not capable of engaging the terrorists effectively. Thermal guided weapons may be more effective.

It is clear that Commanding Officer Sri Lanka Light Infantry, Colonel TTR de Silva lacked alertness.

Troops had no hesitation in leaving their wounded under enemy fire. Grenades have been given to destroy themselves instead of falling into enemy hands.

One of the most prominent weaknesses of the Pooneryn defence was the large gaps between bunkers/ambush points and detachments. These gaps have not been covered with mines or fire. Brigadier Naumuni has not taken any decision to readjust FDLs and is a major lapse on his part.

several warnings of imminent threats on Pooneryn beginning January 1993. Brig. Balagalle has also indicated imminent threats on other camps which never materialized. This has created a general impression amongst troops that this is a ploy to keep them constantly on the alert, which in the long run becomes counter productive as a result of troops becoming immune to this type of misinformation.

The Court expressed its opinion as follows:

Pooneryn defences were overrun due to the negligence of troops at all levels in the chain of command.

The Pooneryn defences have not been planned in conformity with the basic principles of defence.

No action has been taken to readjust defences in keeping with troop availability.

No proper contingency plan was available to effectively counter a terrorist attack simultaneously launched from two or three directions.

No proper reinforcement plan coordinated with Navy and Airforce with details of timings worked out.

Our own troops could have given a better account of themselves if there was proper planning, close supervision, correct motivation, good leadership, proper exercise of Command and Control and adherence to orders, instructions and Special Operating Procedures issued from time to time from Army headquarters and the required standard of vigilance and alertness.

Under the caption "Degree of neglect and blame", the Court of Inquiry has made adverse comments on the following Officers:

Capt. D. T. P. D. K. Perera, Capt. I. M. K. Devage, Capt. T. R. Hewage, Capt. W. W. S. L. Fernando, Capt. G. P. J. Priyantha, Capt. W. J. P. S. Soysa, Capt. K. T. N. Perera, Capt. H. M. T. B. Hangilipola, Capt. W. M. J. K. K. Senaratne, Capt. N. U. Silva, Capt. H. R. N. Fernando, Lt.

# Pooneryn debacle...

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K. P. S. A. Fernando, 2/Lt. S. D. Jayakody, Capt. Sumith Premalal, Capt. Jayasinghe, Lt. Col. S. W. L. Daulagala, Col. T. T. R. de Silva, Brig. L. P. Balagalle, Brig. S. H. S. Kottegoda, Brig. G. P. Kulatunga, Brig. J. Naummuni, Maj. Gen. R. de S. Daluwatte.

Serious strictures have been made by the Court against all the above-named Officers. It would indeed be necessary for Army HQ to take disciplinary action against Officers from Capt. D. T. P. D. K. Perera to Capt. Jayatunge. As for the Senior Officers from Lt. Colonel S. W. L. Daulagala downwards upto Maj. Gen. R. de S. Daluwatte, and since similar strictures of a very serious nature have been made by this Court on them as well as a course of disciplinary action should be decided upon at the highest levels as they hold their appointments with the approval of the President.

The strictures made against these Senior Officers by the Court are extracted from the Court proceedings and recorded below for you to realise the gravity of the situation that was:

**Lt. Col. S. W. L. Daulagala**

Failed to effectively co-ordinate with the Navy. Battalion HQ not properly organized. He was living in Administration area away from his HQ indicating that his priority was personal comfort and not an efficient HQ.

Not reorganized his defenses to ensure that two large gaps were adequately covered.

Not planned for any contingency to meet threat from two or more directions. This was a serious lapse on the part of this Commanding Officer.

Col. T. T. R. de Silva

Although there were definite indications of an impending attack the Commanding Officer did not attempt to give instructions to those down the chain of command. He only arrived at the radio room after the attack started.

When company commanders asked for artillery support he had directed them to obtain such support from gun position officer thus passing down the responsibility to a very junior officer.

He failed to use full potential of tanks. No protection has been provided for the tanks and instructions from Army HQ not followed to prevent tanks falling to enemy hands.

He has not coordinated to use the available naval fire power. Here too he has passed down responsibility.

He has not given any thought to the identification of friend and foe.

He has not located battalion HQ judiciously. He had allowed the tank troop leader to go on leave two days prior to attack. The relief tank troop leader who came day before the attack was not familiar with the ground.

**Brig. L. P. Balagalle**

The Director Military Intelligence (DMI) had given several warnings of impending attacks which had not materialized and the troops had not taken this warning seriously. The DMI had failed to give specific and accurate information about the date or at least exact week of this major attack.

During 1993 the DMI had given warning of impending attacks on several other camps as well. This shows that DMI gives intelligence on assumptions and troops doubt the credibility and accuracy of the information.

In projecting the threat to Pooneryn the DMI has misinformed this Court regarding date of attack and other information. He should forthwith refrain from disseminating wrong information.

**Brig. S. H. S. Kottegoda**

He should have located brigade HQ in Pooneryn for better command and control.

He only requested additional troops, but has done nothing to re-adjust FDLs to manage with available manpower.

He has failed to nominate the Senior Officers in Pooneryn as the Sector Commander who should tie up and coordinate defence matters.

He has failed to take adequate precautions to protect Artillery Guns and Tanks.

**Brig. G. P. Kulatunga**

He was in Jaffna for eleven months and left only 2 months before the attack. During the last 8 months of his command, even though there were warnings of impending attacks he has not done any reorganization of Pooneryn defences.

He has failed to carry out an intelligence appreciation and develop a contingency plan against an enemy attack.

During his tenure of command there were no offensives carried out giving the enemy the opportunity of planning and preparing for major offensives. He has failed to carry out his operational

responsibility as given by Army orders and instructions from time to time.

He has visited Battalion HQ but not the FDLs. Even though he has been critical of the Southward extension of the Pooneryn FDL he has done nothing to contract them and readjust the FDLs releasing more troops for better defence.

**Brig. J. Naummuni**

He has stated that there was shortage of infantry ammunition. But Army HQ has confirmed availability of sufficient stocks. This shows that he has not checked availability of ammunition and issued to troops. Special Operational Companies sent to Pooneryn had only 120 rounds of 7.62 x 39 ammo per person but a stock of 218,909 rounds were available prior to attack. This was the same case with defence stores too.

He has not visited Pooneryn FDLs during his tenure as acting Commander of Security Force HQ.

He has complained of inadequacy of troops but has done nothing to readjust FDLs to manage with available troops. Therefore he has failed in his responsibilities as laid down by Army Orders.

He has failed to plan and execute any operations with available resources to pre-empt major enemy attack.

He has failed in proper intelligence appreciation and has not considered the defence of Pooneryn with due priority.

When terrorist build up was evident two hours prior to attack. He should have monitored the build up and directed air and artillery to pre-empt the attack and checked the preparedness of troops, but instead he left the Operations Room and went to the Chalet with instructions to the duty officer to contact him on further developments.

He informed Airforce to be ready with aircraft and helicopters only after the attack. The attack commenced at 1.30 am on November 11 and Palaly Airforce base was informed only at 1.45 am on Nov. 11th.

He has complained that he saw no reason why the Pooneryn FDL should extend 8 Km southwards, but did nothing to readjust this FDL to improve defence.

He has failed to take important precautions to protect Artillery guns and Tank. He has failed to give instructions for the removal of engine parts of tanks to prevent them falling into enemy hands, as per Army HQ instructions.

Co-ordinating Officer Intelligence Corps informed Brig. Naummuni at 4.30 pm on November 10 a terrorist attack on Pooneryn was imminent. He has taken this information lightly and no additional precautions have been taken. He did not keep the Divisional Commander informed of this vital information.

**Maj. Gen. R. De S. Daluwatte**

The Court appreciates that 5 Battalions were withdrawn to East in view of elections there. Yet he had had 31,370 troops under his command and he should have endeavoured to earmark at least one battalion as a dedicated reserve in view of the threats posed by the LTTE. The induction of five Companies as a reinforcement force by air and sea has not been planned and rehearsed and was a matter of trial and error.

He says that the Service Commanders took over the planning of rescue operations. However, between 1.30 am and 6.30 am Security Forces Commander Jaffna was in charge and from 6.30 am to 11.00 on November when the Service Commanders arrived he (Maj. Gen. R. de S. Daluwatte) was in charge — yet during this period no meaningful action has been taken to induct the five companies earmarked as reserves.

His lapse of not appointing Officer Commanding troops for Pooneryn whereby he would be supervising three down the chain of command as per Army HQ instructions, resulted in the Senior Officer in Pooneryn showing a certain recalcitrance to coordinate the defences in the proper manner. The omission thus created (by not supervising three down in the chain of command) caused a great deal of confusion during the attack on Pooneryn. As a result of this lack of supervision three down the chain of command by Maj. Gen. Daluwatte, neglecting a very specific Army HQ instruction, was a very serious lapse on his part.

The foregoing observations of the Court of Inquiry are a very serious criticism of gross negligence, poor leadership and the pathetic supervision that has been exercised down the chain of command from Divisional Commander, Maj. Gen. Daluwatte under whose area of responsibility

Pooneryn was. Maj. Gen. Daluwatte is the Divisional Commander in charge of the North. It is now quite evident from the findings of this Court that it is his negligence, poor leadership and lack of supervision that resulted in a debacle when Pooneryn was attacked as these damaging traits seeped down the chain of command. In fact the Court has gone so far as to say that 'our troops would have certainly performed a great deal better account of themselves had there been good leadership and adherence to operational procedures given regularly by Army.

**HQ.** Having seen poor leadership, verbal instructions not carried out and poor implementation of directives, I issued special written operational instructions from time to time, 17 or more in all. Had these instructions been followed diligently from the highest level of command, the attack on Pooneryn would certainly not have been a debacle.

I am sure you would agree with me, that as Army Commander this is the furthest that I could have done to prop up the poor leadership and ineptitude of the Northern Divisional Commander, Maj. Gen. Daluwatte.

From the above it is clearly evident to any reader that this serious Pooneryn debacle could definitely have been avoided and also prevented any embarrassment it has caused the Government. This report clearly brings out the fact that Brig. Balagalle had been in command from the 31,370 troops (as stated in Court proceedings) under his command in the North and exercised the supervision that is required of a Divisional Commander and motivated the Officers under him. The attack on Pooneryn had not been planned into a major victory for us. The Court has emphatically stated that the most basic principles of battle have been violated: defences of Pooneryn not planned. FDLs not adjusted to varying threat situations, no contingency plan, no reinforcement plan, no back-up communication. Poor co-ordination with Airforce and Navy and lastly negligence of unbelievable magnitude.

The Court has also come down hard on Brig. Balagalle in that the troops doubt the credibility and the accuracy of the intelligence provided by him. In fact the Court has concluded that the intelligence provided by Brig. Balagalle is considered by the troops not as intelligence, but a play on them to keep them alert. The Court has also made the very serious comment that in the evidence Brig. Balagalle has misinformed the Court — a polite way of saying that he has lied to this Court. Of what use is a Director of Military Intelligence whose very credibility has been questioned by this Court of Inquiry.

One 2nd Lieutenant, one Lieutenant, 13 Captains, one Lt. Colonel, one Colonel, 4 Brigadiers and Maj. General has been specifically named by this Court of Inquiry and it must be mentioned that I have already suggested earlier in this letter that all these Officers should be disciplinarily dealt with and action upto the rank of Captain could be done by Army HQ and those of rank of Lt. Colonel upwards, whose appointment has been approved to be dealt with at the highest level. The Court of Inquiry on Janakapura made severe strictures against two Senior Officers, namely Maj. Gen. Daluwatte and Brig. Liyanage. In my report on the Janakapura debacle dated December 29 1993 my submissions on the subject of disciplinarily Senior Officer were:

"There has been no precedence in the Army where an Army Commander has taken disciplinary action against a Brigadier or a Maj. General for failure of his command and such must mention that I was reluctant to take disciplinary action against these two Senior Officers."

Thus the disciplinary action on these two Senior Officers, Maj. Gen. Daluwatte and Brig. Liyanage is still pending.

The report by the Court of Inquiry on Pooneryn also has now made similar severe strictures on a number of Senior Officers as against two officers in the Janakapura report. If no serious disciplinary action is taken against such Senior Officers, even to the extent, if warranted, to dismiss them from service, it is with a profound sense of regret that I have to state that we will continue to sacrifice the lives of our beloved soldiers in vain due to the negligence and ineptitude of the Senior Officer leadership. Not only would there be unnecessary loss of invaluable life but also that of arms and equipment, from our limited armoury, which in addition will also be a gain of critical importance to the enemy, which we can ill afford.

It is essential that you take serious stock of this disastrous and deteriorating situation and arrest this trend of debacles. I am trying hard to convince you that such serious situations warrants very serious disciplinary action even to the extent of dismissal from service. Our Officers are not very complacent with the firm conviction that no amount of indiscipline or ineptitude will bring on them disciplinary action. This concept is extremely dangerous. The Army cannot afford to carry passengers, especially in the senior leadership. You must have victory in this war, for without victory there is no survival of our nation. I must prevail upon you in all earnestness for such immediate, urgent action.

It is with regret that I have to inform you that Maj. General Daluwatte has made highly irresponsible and malicious statements to the Court of Inquiry wherein he has stated to the Court that: The Army Commander has deliberately crippled him by pulling out five battalions from the North and sending to the East to boost the image of the Eastern Commander.

He was denied the opportunity on two occasions having prepared for major offensives to link up Mannar with Vanniya as per the concepts of operation of GOC/JOC. General Wanasinghe just one or two days before the operation was to have been launched.

The Army Commander has never extended a hand in filling shortfall of personnel and resources. He be relieved of his Northern Command if the Army Commander has no confidence in him.

May I submit that he has with malicious intentions diabolically lied to Court in all these four counts:

Reference 13a  
Five battalions were removed to the East as per Government policy on the directions of the GOC — JOC, General Wanasinghe, to prepare for the planned elections in the East. Maj. Gen. Daluwatte is well aware of this and hence this statement of his to a legally constituted Court is unbefitting of an Officer of his rank and indeed highly malicious.

Reference 13b  
It is not possible for the Army Commander to contravene an operational directive by GOC — JOC, General Wanasinghe. If I had aborted such a

directive, as claimed by Maj. Gen. Daluwatte, I would have been held responsible for the extent of personnel and resources. From limited resources available, that I made available to the North. Obviously he is seeking cover for such excuses to conceal and mask his inapt very clearly highlighted by the Court.

Reference 13c  
This is yet another diabolical lie you seek to inquire from the Operations Directorate extent of personnel and resources. How limited resources available, that I made available to the North. Obviously he is seeking cover for such excuses to conceal and mask his inapt very clearly highlighted by the Court.

Reference 13d  
This is a total misrepresentation of fact more than one occasion I had to reprimand many shortcomings and in one short instance did mention about being relieved of his Command. The Court of Inquiry has made several important recommendations to improve upon the performance and battle preparedness of the Army. I am sure you ensure that all these recommendations made after very careful investigation implemented speedily and effectively. How unless the poor leadership is disciplined, punished and removed if necessary, no amount of recommendation implemented will have the desired effect.

It is without any doubt quite clear that the Court of Inquiry has specifically found Maj. Daluwatte guilty of negligence of duty, unable lack of supervision of those under his command and given pathetic leadership as a Divisional Commander. In such circumstances the blame this debacle and the embarrassment it caused the Government and the Army squarely on his shoulders. It is my consistent opinion that Maj. Gen. Daluwatte be immediately relieved of his command in the North and disciplinary action be taken against Maj. Daluwatte as well as the other officers who have been convicted by this Court so that they would have a clean and responsible leadership necessary for the successful conclusion of war. This, in my parting advice as Commander of the Army.