

Tigers turn captive guns on rescue troops. (1993, November 13) *The Daily news.*

POONERYN: commanders face logistics problem

Tigers turn captive guns on rescue troops

DN
13-11-93

By Daryll de Silva

The Operational Headquarters of the Defence Ministry said at noon yesterday that the battle at Pooneryn was 'ongoing', and security forces were in the process of reorganising and consolidating their positions which came under heavy LTTE attack on Thursday morning.

"Action is being taken now to induct additional troops as reinforcements to assist the troops still in the area" a special communique said, adding that "until reinforcements are in position and the situation brought fully under control, the casualty figures of the security forces cannot still be declared with certainty.

"However, it is likely that casualties are heavy. Technical sources (ie LTTE radio intercepts) have confirmed that the LTTE too has suffered heavy casualties...The service commanders are personally directing operations from the main security bases in the north," the communique said.

The commanders were in Palaly, the *Daily News*

learnt, unable to go to the Pooneryn sector until reinforcements were in position there. The communique quoted above and the security forces' inability to ferry fresh troops in at this juncture hints that it might take some time for the service commanders to get to Pooneryn, officials in Colombo conceded yesterday.

Reliable sources confirmed that four water-jet propelled inshore patrol craft, used for surveillance of the no-go zone of the Jaffna lagoon, and two battle tanks, have fallen into LTTE hands. One tank was completely destroyed in the attack. Six artillery field guns are also in LTTE hands and are now trained on likely naval beachheads.

"We have three major problems on our hands," one senior strategist in Colombo said. "First, we have to safeguard the area and make a secure helipad ready to send in the reinforcements. This can also be done by sea, but with the navy being held off in the area, we can't say how long that will take.

"Second, we have to get in sufficient reinforcements. And thirdly, to make optimum use of whatever craft takes them in, we have to gather our casualties together at one safe disembarkation/embarcation point and ferry them out on the return trip. The one big question is that right now we really don't know how many there are. Ferrying out the dead can wait till later."

He said the security forces' own estimate of its dead was around 250, "but that is only an estimate. It could be much higher," he cautioned.

As at noon yesterday, no helicopter was able to land in Pooneryn sector for fear of being shot down by the LTTE, whose estimated presence in the area is around 1500, almost matching the strength of the two battalions (ie 2000 men) the security forces had scattered in the area at the time the early Thursday attack began.

Sporadic firing was still going on, it was reported, confirming the LTTE's continuing activity. "We just don't know how many men and how much material we have lost yet," one source said.

Let alone the loss of life, the weaponry that would have fallen to the Tigers boggles the imagination," another well informed military official said.

Other well informed and usually communicative military men were tight-lipped yesterday, saying they had received instructions not to talk to the media. "Wait for the official communique," they all said.

Meanwhile, 41 navy and army personnel were reported to have reached the Elephant Pass army camp safely, some by swimming the lagoon. Some of them were wounded, official sources said.