



Walked to the front yesterday but today carried on a stretcher

Desperate hours

SPECIAL Assignment

Sumithra Herath from Anuradhapura
Pix by Genunu Wellage and Sajeewa Chintaka

Living death for families of soldiers

By Christopher Kamalendran, Faraz Farook and Nilika de Silva

Desperate family members of service personnel dead, wounded or missing in this week's intense battles in Oddusuddan, Periyamadu and Nedunkerni were thronging to military information centres and hospitals to find out what has happened to their loved ones.

Special desks were set up at the Army Headquarters and camps at Panagoda, Anuradhapura and Trincomalee to provide information about the troops to the frantic family members.

In addition to these centres, army and navy camps at Irrapperyyakulam and Anuradhapura, Galigabura also saw hundreds of family members who were seeking some kind of information about their loved ones.

Judging by the sorrow

which had accommodated 130 service personnel until Friday morning has displayed the list of names of those admitted to the hospital at the entrance to the Accident Service.

Hospital Deputy Director Dr. Rani Fernando said the hospital was geared to attend to any emergency as it had handled crisis situations worse than this earlier.

To accommodate the new casualties from the battlefield, some 'relatively healthy' patients were asked to give their beds and were transferred to other wards.

Some were Colombo-bound. They were going to the National Hospital having been informed by the Anuradhapura hospital that the patient had been transferred to Colombo.

Outside the National Hospital in Colombo, anxious family members were waiting till the gates were open for visitors to know the fate of their brother, husband or son.

"He is my only brother," said a sobbing Sumithra Herath from

Anuradhapura, referring to her soldier brother. Standing at the entrance to the hospital, Sumithra said she did not know how serious her brother's condition was.

The news that her 20-year-old brother was one of those transferred from the Anuradhapura Hospital came as some relief to her.

She learnt on Thursday that her brother was wounded in the Periyamadu attack. "This is the fourth time my husband was injured on the battlefield," said 24-year-old Chandrakanthi.

On information received from the Anuradhapura Hospital, she had travelled from Gampola with her three-year-old son. Strokking her son's head fondly, Chandrakanthi said her husband was determined to serve the country, though she had told him to quit the forces and find an alternative employment.

Patriotism and determination seen in Chandrakanthi's husband

Tears will become a massive tide

The Association of Disabled Ex-Service Personnel has condemned what they called the sacrifice of young men in the battle front for what appears to be for narrow political reasons.

The text of the statement follows. "Thousands of our brave soldiers have died in the course of intensive fighting with the LTTE in the last few days. Many of them have also become permanently disabled."

"We wish to offer our condolences to the families who have lost their sons and loved ones in Oddusuddan and Nedunkerni."

"We wish a speedy recovery to those who have been injured. We note with distress that the political leaders of our country are failing to admit the truth of the disaster that has overtaken the Army in the north. Worse still, they are not even expressing their sorrow, perhaps for opportunistic reasons," the statement said.

"Thousands of parents and wives are in the terrible situation of not knowing what has happened to their loved ones. Successive governments have been guilty of this contemptible failing. As an organisation of disabled veterans of the war with branches in 20 districts, we have decided to issue this media statement to register our strong protest and concern regarding the prevailing situation, the statement added. "We condemn the sacrifice of our young men for what appears to be narrow political reasons."

All the political parties should come to a common platform on this matter.

"Instead of campaigning to win elections at the time of national tragedy, our political leaders should be getting together to find a consensus way to end this wasteful war."

If not, the tears of the families of those sacrificed in the war, will turn into a massive tide of anger against every politician," the statement said.



In pain and exhausted they came

They came with saline bottles in their hands

By Hiranthi Fernando

During the terrorist attack on the Forward Defence Lines at Oddusuddan and Nedunkerni, even the field hospital at Kanakarayakulam was shelled by artillery fire.

A large number of soldiers wounded in the battle were being treated at the field hospital when it came under attack in November 3.

The chopper which was ready to land at Kanakarayakulam. The wounded had to be transported by road in Vavuniya and arrived from there to Anuradhapura.

Wounded soldiers from Oddusuddan and Nedunkerni Forward Defence Lines were brought to the Victory Hospital in

Anuradhapura for treatment.

Before they were sent, they were given the necessary first aid or emergency treatment at the field hospital at Kanakarayakulam.

Blood needed for emergency cases was sent from Anuradhapura to the field hospital.

The Commanding Officer and staff at the Military Hospital were in constant touch with the field hospital monitoring the situation.

On arrival at the Military Hospital, a team of doctors, nurses and other staff rushed to their aid. A batch of soldiers with relatively minor injuries evacuated from Kanakarayakulam, came to the Military Hospital, carrying their saline bottles in their hands, diagonally cant attached to their wrists. Some were in much pain while others were exhausted from their ordeals.

The hospital staff examined the diagnosis cards and tagged each, classifying them according to the severity of their injuries.

A team of about 10 doctors, several nurses and other staff were ready with stretchers and wheelchairs to receive the wounded.

They were examined by the doctors and the necessary treatment ordered.

The soldiers were given clean sarongs and shirts and served a good meal.

The hospital staff worked with dedication to minister to their needs and make them comfortable.

Patients needing surgery were admitted to the surgical wards until they were taken into the theatre.

They are kept under observation after their wounds have been attended to.

"When they are stabilised, they are transferred to Colombo

His luck finally ran out

A twenty-five year old sergeant of the Sri Lanka Infantry, G.K. Gunaratne, was killed last week during Operation Watershed at Oddusuddan, his body pierced by a single bullet.

Young Gunaratne survived eight operations against the LTTE but the firm protest that destiny was not willing to get off his track.

Having participated at Operations Jayamaga, Sep Passage, Rana Gosa I, Rana Gosa II, Rana Gosa III, Rana Gosa IV, Rana Gosa V, Sathjaya, Greenbelt, Vidu Pahara, Jaya Shivan and Pivi Bala.

Gunaratne who held sacred the family bonds, built a home for his family and attended his brother's wedding just one week before he was killed in battle. His mother, K.L. Somawathie, tears pouring down her face said that her youngest son had looked after the whole family. He gave his sister in marriage, bought a motorbike for his brother, built the house for us to live in, and only last month he gave my other son in marriage, and now he's gone," she wept.

His last words to me were that he would furnish the new house, and he specially told me that he would bring me a cooker which does not work on kerosene, a gas cooker.

His elder brother Yaswantha who had himself been stationed at the Pabey police station in Jaffna had been transferred to Colombo only last month.

"It is of his bravery that they all speak," Gunaratne's younger sister Indrani said.

Although my brother said he would come home for our father's 80th birthday on the 29th, I knew that things were bad, because our



A grieving mother holding up her son's photo

neighbor who had some home on lease was called back. Since his lease was cancelled, I was doubtful if my brother would be allowed the leave he had applied for. And then we got the shocking news. Indrani said

Udath Priyankara, Gunaratne's eight-year-old nephew is still watching the road waiting for his uncle to come.

"My son Udath's life is the same length as my brother's service in the Army. My brother joined the forces in 1992," G.K. Upali said.