



COLONEL A F LAPHIR

PWV RWP RSP



ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES 2019

BY INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES SRI LANKA



INSSSL

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This publication includes speeches by Brigadier H P Ranasighe RWP RSP ndc and Major General G Hettiarachchi (Rtd) WWV RWP RSP VSV USP psc at the Annual Memorial Lecture Series 2019; COLONEL A F LAPHIR PWV RWP RSP, presented on 7th August 2019. The views expressed herein do not represent a consensus of views amongst the worldwide membership of the Institute as a whole.

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ABOUT US

The Institute of National Security Studies (INSSSL) is the national security think tank of Sri Lanka under the Ministry of Defence, established to understand the security environment and to work with the government to craft evidence-based policy options and strategies for debate and discussion to ensure national security. The institute will conduct a broad array of national security research for the Ministry of Defence.

OUR VISION

"To improve policy and decision making through high-quality research and analysis with excellence".

OUR MISSION

"From high-quality research to continuously support the ministry of defence in formulating and executing strategic plans and policies for a secure, safe and sovereign country with territorial integrity"

Biography of the Speakers

BRIGADIER HARENDRA PARAKRAMA RANASINGHE RWP RSP ndc

Brigadier Harendra Parakrama Ranasinghe was a proud product of Thurston College Colombo and excelled brilliantly in the field of both academic and sports during his college period.

He was enlisted to the Regular Force of Sri Lanka Army on 27th October 1986 as an Officer Cadet to the Regular Intake 26 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 23 July 1987 to the prestigious Infantry Regiments in Sri Lanka Army, the Gamunu Watch. Later, he voluntarily joined the Sri Lanka Army Special Forces Regiment on April 1990.

During his Special Forces career as a young energetic leader he was able to hold all most all appointments that a middle grade officer should hold. The Army recognized him as a Potential Military Officer and appointed him as the Commanding Officer to lead Special Forces battalions consequently on 01st Regiment and the 2nd Regiment. Subsequently, he held the appointment of Commandant Special Forces Training School, the Commandant at Army Training School and as the Center Commandant of Sri Lanka Army Special Forces Regiment.

During his illustrious military career, he served as the Principle Staff Officer for the General Officer Commanding of 58 Infantry Division. Thereafter, he has served as the Commander

of 571 Infantry Brigade, and as the Brigade Commander of Sri Lanka Army Special Forces Brigade. Further he served as the Defence Adviser during year 2013 and 2014 to the Curriculum Development Board of the newly establishing National Defence College of Sri Lanka in 2019.

He has followed many military career and civil academic courses locally and abroad. He is a graduate of Masters on Conflict and Peace Studies from University of Colombo, graduated the National Defence College India for the Strategic Studies on National Security and graduated the Masters of Philosophy on Defence and Strategic Studies from University of Madras India. He has been decorated with gallantry awards of Rana Wickrama Padakkama for three occasions and Rana Sura Padakkama for three times for the bravery shown in the battle field. Currently Brigadier Harendra Ranasinghe is the Principle Staff Officer serves as the Brigadier General Staff of Security Forces Headquarters Wann.

**Major General Gamini Hettiarachchi (Rtd) WWV RWP RSP VSV USP
psc**

Major General Gamini Hettiarachchi retired from the Army of the Democratic socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in 2006. He served from 1973-2006 and has been awarded the three highest gallantry awards for valour in combat. He has been awarded Weera Wickrama Vibhushanaya once, Rana Wickrama Padakkama and Rana Sura Padakkama three times each. During this period he has held many important command and training appointments in the Army.

He raised the Special Forces in the Sri Lanka Army and has extensive knowledge in training and employment of Special Forces and conduct of special operations. Major General Hettiarachchi (Rtd.) has over 23 years direct involvement in combating terrorism and guerrilla warfare and has acquired in depth knowledge in Counter Revolutionary Warfare (CRW).

In July 2005, H.E. the President of Sri Lanka appointed him as the Director General of the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) and to established the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) after the devastating Tsunami of 2004. He relinquished his appointment in May 2014, after having built the institution to a high level of competency to manage disaster risk in the country.

In December 2014, Major General Hettiarachchi (Rtd) was awarded the National Leadership Award for Disaster Resilience by the Ministry of Disaster Management in collaboration with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, Bangkok and the Disaster Resilience leadership Academy of the Tulane University, USA in recognition of his exemplary leadership and remarkable contribution towards Disaster Risk Reduction in Sri Lanka.

Major General Gamini Hettiarachchi (Rtd) is a Fellow of the Academic Commons of the Disaster Resilience leadership Academy of the Tulane University, USA.

He was the chairmen/CEO of Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka from 11th November 2015 to 30th May 2017. Presently Major General Hettiarachchi (Rtd) is holding the appointment of Director Security in the Sri Lanka Ports Authority from June 2017.



**Brigadier H P Ranasighe
RWP RSP ndc**

Delivered Lecture

at

COLONEL A F LAPHIR PWV RWP RSP

**Annual Memorial
Lecture Series**

2019



LECTURE
DELIVERED BY
Brigadier H P Ranasighe RWP RSP ndc



Brigadier H P Ranasighe RWP RSP ndc delivered the inaugural lecture at the Colonel A F Laphir PWV RWP RSP Annual Memorial Lecture on 7th

August 2019. The Lecture was titled “Epic of a war hero Colonel Aslam Fazly Laphir PWV RWP RSP”.

Today, I stand here with great pride to bring out an epic about one of the greatest patriotic military leader whom I eternally respect in my life as a true hero.

Three decades of war concluded with emerging hundreds of military victors who contributed immensely sacrificing their young blood and lives. It is indeed that the sacrifices of leaders who were accorded recognition as heroes of the war will never be elapsed from the depth of the hearts of patriotic Sri Lankans who has a great sense of gratitude. When unfolding several episodes during the Elam War, which paved its way for final

success, there were both failures and victories as a core for several epics.

My intention is to spotlight a true hero of one of these episodes, a gentleman who laid down his life during an attempt made to save thousands of comrades in arms under circumstances of almost a great despair.

I, as one of the closest comrades among his fighters has been given the opportunity on this occasion to unfold his epic actions in the face of the enemy as a tribute for that great warrior, an infinite hero, Colonel Azlam Fazly Laphir.

Laphir was born in Kandy in 1958 as the eldest son of late Dr Mohammad Laphir and his beloved wife, Mrs Siththi Hanul. He was loved and cherished as the older brother amongst his seven siblings comprised with four sisters and three brothers.

Parents of little Laphir always had an intention to lay a solid foundation for his education since his early stages. As a result, little Laphir started his long journey of education in 1964 from one of the prestigious leading schools in Sri Lanka, St Anthony's College, Kandy. Little Laphir was an outstanding character since his childhood. He was always straightforward

than his classmates in both academic and extracurricular activities.

His skills and talents were initially identified by then Principal of St Anthony's College, Kandy Colonel Thomas and directed Laphir to Mr David Silva, a well experienced teacher of St Anthony's College, Kandy.

Laphir in his school time recorded high degree of talents in academic fields whilst performing brilliantly as an all-round Cricketer and as a Scout. Making the dreams of parents and teachers a reality, Laphir was able to get through his Advanced Level examination with flying colours under the stream of Maths. The expectation of his Father and Mother was to see their eldest son as an Engineer in future. So, young Laphir was able to secure a scholarship to proceed for his higher studies in Libya under the stream of Bachelor of Science in Engineering. However, his motivation was towards an entirely different direction which was to join the Sri Lanka Army.

Young Laphir was certainly inspired to wear a uniform to safeguard the motherland generated through his inborn Patriotism. Further, the incomparable qualities of leadership practised during his entire school life and fields of

extracurricular activities strengthened his thought of joining the Army. Keeping away the dream of his parents to see him as an Engineer, he chose to be a guardian of this Nation as a commissioned officer in Sri Lanka Army.

The garrison of Diyatalawa was quite busy on 11th August 1980 since an exclusive group of educated youngsters with physically fit and energetic was arriving to the prestigious Sri Lanka Military Academy bearing a dignified aim to be guardians of the nation. This young energetic team was enlisted under Officer Cadet Intake No 14. Captain Gamini Hettirachchi was the Course Officer to groom and mould them as future leaders of the Army.

Depicting the prime value of the motto of Sri Lanka Military Academy, “Serve to Lead”, Officer Cadet Fazly Laphir excelled brilliantly in undergoing the hard training in both military and academic related fields. His exceptional talents and skills led him to receive the Second in Order of merit in his Intake and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 27th February 1982. From the very outset, his career was featured by skills and exceptional overall competence. He was commissioned to 1st Rajarata Rifle initially.

According to his senior subaltern Col Jayavi Fernando, young Laphir has made a voluntary request to join Commando Regiment. During the period as a junior officer, young Laphir was identified as an officer having great loyalty to the establishment and for his brother officers. Also he was keen on learning carrying out extra tasks.

When the 1st Gajaba Regiment was formed under the leadership of late Major General Vijaya Wimalarathne who had contributed valiantly in the battle field, Lt Laphir transferred from Rajarat Rifle to 1st Gajaba Regiment. During this period, he was a matured young officer attached to 'A' Coy of 1st Gajaba Regiment served in many parts of the country including North and East to eradicate terrorism.

Having identified the talents of this Young Officer, the Commanding Officer of 1st Gajaba Regiment turned down his request to join the Commandos. Later due to his inborn capacities and language proficiency of Tamil he was inspired to attach to the Army Intelligence unit which was functioning at Security Force Headquarters Jaffna where the 1st Gajaba Regiment was also deployed in the same Headquarter. Later the Army Intelligence Unit was absorbed into the newly established

National Intelligence Bureau and one era of Lt Laphir ended up there.

Thereafter, he changed his existing career in to different modes by approaching for new concepts and strategies. He was the first young officer to be volunteered to establish the path of Special Forces in our Army because he was in much eager to do something different than others.

With the rapid increase of terrorist movements and activities against Government Forces, the Army was quite in puzzle to counter the emerging threats and fighting tactics in guerrilla type. These circumstances were keenly observed by Major General T I Weeratunge then Joint Operation Commander.

Thereafter, Major General Weeratunga suggested a concept of adopting small type groups to be utilised for fighting against guerrilla tactics. Accordingly, Major Gamini Hettiarachchi who was one of the great military leaders having a good vision, vivid command, courage and knowledge with maturity in all aspects was called upon by Major General Weeratunge to conceptualise and formulate this small group concept.

There, Major Gamini Hettiarachchi with the background knowledge of Ranger School in US formulated a special group

to counter the guerrilla fighting while neutralising the combat power of all existing terrorist groups after infiltrating into the deep enemy territory. The concept of fighting in Jungle areas operating as small groups were constantly facilitated and enriched with the knowledge and tactics of Late Maj Gen Vijaya Wimalarathne.

During inception, there were two officers and thirty-eight men from different Regiments who volunteered to join this special group which was named as the Rapid Deployment Force – Special Forces. When formulating such a fully-fledged group, then Major Gamini Hettiarachchi was in thorough confidence to invite his outstanding past student, young Lieutenant Laphir to make the vision a reality in formulating a special combat team. Young Laphir was much delighted and he himself requested to start along with his mentor a novel way of planning tactics to counter the guerrilla fighting.

The far-sighted maturity of a Major was entangled tightly with the strength of determined, young Lieutenant to lay the solid foundation to formulate a Special Team with incomparable combat proficiency.

When formulating the Rapid Deployment Force – Special Forces in 1985, Laphir as a Lieutenant was one of the pioneer members and played a key role in developing it into a daunting Special Forces unit, which specialized in special operations on counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, dominating the battle space in the depth and unconventional warfare.

The training for Rapid Deployment Force – Special Forces was based on small group operational tactics and it was initially carried out at Commando Regiment. Having concluded the training in 1985, the newly passed out team was deployed in Welioya areas in order to operate offensively against all terrorist groups.

Under the guidance of Major Gamini Hettiarachchi, young Lieutenant Laphir was able to create new strategic plans to operate in deep enemy areas by infiltrating beyond from the own defence lines and conducting reconnaissance to grab accurate details about the enemy prior to the conduct of major attacks led by infantry.

Covert Operations conducted by RDF SF were launched successfully day by day and it led to make a great fear among top carders of all terrorist groups. During the period, Army

leadership proposed to enhance the infantry fighting capabilities in jungle terrain. There RDF – SF had to play the Combat Tracker role in those operations. However, after moving for the Wadamarachchi operation RDF – SF had to employ for Covert Operations as same. In same during this time RDF – SF had been developed as four squadrons Alpha, Bravo, Chali and Delta. The Bravo Squadron was one of the leading groups in RDF which was led by Lt Laphir.



After recognising the high performance of RDF, a Special Army order was issued on 10th December 1988 to

convert the existing Rapid Deployment Force in to 1st Regiment Special Forces.

Colonel Fazly Laphir was indeed a real military leader who inherited exemplary moral qualities. He had an incomparable memory, knowledge and intellect as a role model for his subordinates. He had a persistent belief that a soldier belonged

to Special Forces should be different from others and to be a real Special Forces member they should possess;

- Integrity and exemplary leadership qualities in all levels.
- Humble and silent professionals
- Never quit until the mission is accomplished

The main reason for the Special Forces to be considered as excellent is the belief in constructive competition through the performances. We, the Special Forces, never sought to fail. We have eradicated the factor called “fear” from our minds. We are feared only to fail in our missions. We have inherited these qualities from our forefathers.

The most inspired leader who could motivate the followers was none other than Colonel Laphir. He always believed the Special Forces to be the paternity of warriors who dare to fight for the cause of protection of motherland from evil forces.

During that era, he guided us as his young officers and group commanders, to be sharpened in analysing situations to take best decisions. He never allowed us to be panic in danger but

tolerated as much as to take the right decision which supported us to achieve the paramount results.

As group commanders, we observed his leadership qualities in different situations. Some of the proven Special Forces leadership qualities of our great leader Col. Laphir are;

- Integrity,
- Courageous
- Perseverance,
- Personal responsibility,
- Professionalism,
- Adaptability,
- Team spirit and Capability.
- Endurance
- Determination

This exemplary military figure depicted his true features of being humble when he was stepping up in the path of his career. His humbleness always led him to be more popular among the Special Forces as well as in the entire Army. He was truly a gentleman due to his human qualities.

He always understood the pulses of people moving with him and helped his fellow members when and where necessary. Due to

his genuine qualities, everybody believed him to be a precious leader. That was the secret behind all his successes as every single person with him carried out his instructions and orders to accomplish all the missions assigned to them successfully.

His language proficiency in all three languages was an added advantage to guide, instruct and command his troops in all instances. His knowledge on several languages became a great impact to enhance the language skills of English and Tamil among Special Force troops.

Colonel Laphir always proved that military discipline should not be curtailed by mere saluting and complements. He emphasised that the real discipline could be exhibited only through accomplishing the prime duty vested on a soldier.

Soon after the withdrawing of IPKF from Sri Lanka, the peace negotiations between LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka were collapsed on 13 June 1990. LTTE unilaterally declared cessation of hostility by attacking number of isolated military bases in the Eastern Province and later spread to the Northern Province. I joined Special Forces during this era. Special Forces were called to rescue camps located in East during this

confrontational circumstances. That was the period numbers of Police Officers were brutally assassinated by the LTTE.

Special Forces played a major role when conducting rescue operations in Eastern theatre along with 1st Sri Lanka Singhe Regiment. The bravo squadron led by Major Laphir played a significant role to secure and rescue isolated military bases while eliminating terror threats. In Many occasions, he was the master for conducting jungle operations by infiltrating as small groups in to the depth of the enemy territory.

The most dared instances that he himself engaged in such stunt missions which ended in achieving great success to the military forces.

Major Laphir had an incomparable strength to bear up any hardship whilst maintaining positive attitudes towards his duty. He actively engaged in deep enemy areas and became a role model for us in many successful missions. After the series of successful operations conducted against LTTE in Eastern theatre by the Armed Forces, the LTTE sprung to attack isolated military bases in Northern areas using their maximum strength. They made several unsuccessful attempts to capture the Jaffna Fort which had a fortified defence. Then LTTE cut off the Main

Supply Routes and troops were besieged inside the Fort for several months. Rescuing the besieged Jaffna Fort was one of the greatest challenges confronted by Sri Lankan Armoured Forces in 1990s.

With the rapid increase of attacks conducted by LTTE to capture Jaffna Fort, the Army launched a major operation to rescue the besieged troops in Jaffna Fort under the leadership of Maj Gen Denzil Kobbekaduwa. The Special Forces were tasked to support for the Infantry Battalions on reinforcement mission to rescue the troops inside the fort.

The supporting Special Forces were led by then Commanding Officer of 1st Regiment Lt Col Gamini Hettiarachchi along with his Second in Command Major Jayavi Fernando. Alfa Squadron was under Major Prasanna Silva, the Bravo squadron was under Major Laphir while Charley squadron was led by present Army Commander, then Major Mahesh Senanayake and Delta squadron was under then Major Raj Wijesiri.

The main effort with the infantry battalions was led by 1st Sri Lanka Sinha Regiment and 1st Gajaba Regiment.

Initially, troops of the main effort with the support of Alfa and three groups of Delta Squadrons of Special Forces along with

the command element were on the first wave from Mandathivu Island advancing through the lagoon. They came under heavy resistance and had to fall back to the fort. Due to the resistance of the enemy, Bravo along with Charley and a group of Delta Squadrons could not advance to the fort and had to stay at Mandathivu Island.

The major responsibility was lying on Major Lafir to find a life line to supply and to salvage the casualties besieged in the fort. Then the operation commander requested him to plan and engage with this dared mission. I as the group commander still remember the briefing he gave us emphasising that it would be entirely a suicidal mission.

Crossing the deep canal of the water line in the lagoon, we had to walk through the shallow water and to make a depth to the teams supplying food and ammo and to evacuate the casualties along with the states banks deposits which was stored in the fort safely. This mission was called as “Suicide Express”.

As the Officer Commanding of Bravo Squadron, Major Laphir was constantly inspiring his troops to conduct the mission stealthily. His strategies were able to get the overall mission successful and to rescue the besieged troops in Jaffna Fort.

The steady morale and persistence excelled by Major Laphir as the Bravo Squadron Commander he proved him as a real military leader. His inspiration was the morale for all others to be successful in the operations.

In recognition of the bravery in the face of enemy at high intensive battle areas, Colonel Fazly Laphir was awarded the “Rana Wickrama Padakkama” and “Rana Shura Padakkama” several times by then Chief of Armed Forces, His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka.

Though this real war hero had a great opportunity to migrate to Libya to be an Engineer as his sisters and brothers did, he voluntarily chose to safeguard the sovereignty and the integrity of the Nation proving him as a genuine son of the motherland.

During his career in Special Forces, Colonel Fazly Laphir held different positions such as Group commander, Squadron Commander, Battalion Second In Command, Chief Instructor of Special Force Training School and the Commanding Officer of the 1st Regiment Special Forces.

He has contributed immensely for the success of military operations conducted by the Special Forces which had led the

entire Army towards a victorious path. Some of his contributions towards exceptional offensive operations are;

- Operation Wadamarachchi,
- Hasaka Sena,
- Operation Thrivida Balaya,
- Operation Sea Breeze
- Operation Riviresa
- Operations conducted in Unnachchi and Kalawanchikudi
- Operation Sumana in Eastern Province

Proven leadership and dedication of Col Laphir in special operations along with his counterparts in the aforesaid battles rose the 1st Regiment Special Forces to shine as a gallant Regiment.

Col. Aslam Fazly Laphir deserves to get much glory earned by Special Forces for the prestigious service in the operations launched in order to free the motherland from brutal terrorist menace.

Though he was a strong and hard character to the battle, there were lot of sensitive and loving senses inside his deep of heart. Handsome Major Fasly Laphir was lured by many young ladies.

But, only one lady was the luckiest amongst all to win his heart. She was none other than Anoma Wickramasooriya whom also had a military background as her brother is also a war veteran, Col. Prasanna Wickramasooriya of Gajaba Regiment. Fazly took Anoma's hand on 16th July 1992 and entered in to a new life in their own house. He was a loving and caring husband to her. She too was an amiable wife to him.

After the marriage, he was posted to the Special Forces Training School as the Chief Instructor on 10th February 1993 tasking high responsibilities to develop training concepts and tactics to enhance the fighting power of Special Forces. Special Forces Training School is the Institution where determined and dared elite soldiers are produced. Heroes produced by this institution terrified the terrorists of LTTE organization due to small group operations in the depth of the enemy terrain.

Being the Chief Instructor of the Special Forces Training School, Maj Laphir rendered a tremendous service in developing new training concepts, tactics and theories for the soldiers of Special Forces just to enter into the battle front in order to produce new ways of fighting. During this period Army tasked him to train the Infantry Battalions to fight efficiently in the battle front, mainly to fight in the built up areas before the

RIVIRESA operation was launched in order to free the Jaffna Peninsula.

Later, he was appointed as the Commanding Officer in the 1st Regiment Special Forces on 08th February 1996. While performing duties as the Commanding Officer of the 1st Regiment, he brought glory to the Special Forces.

The night hour on 17th July 1996 was the day which brought a dark stain to the entire military history of Sri Lanka.

Mulaithivu, one of the fortified isolated bases in the northern theatre, was attacked by LTTE terrorists concentrating all their strength and captivating fate of more than 1200 lives of soldiers into their hand.

Rescuing the soldiers and regaining the base from the hands of terrorists was a great challenge for the Army as this base was very important in the northern theatre. A strong base in Mulaithivu, going into the hands of terrorists was shocking. This affected badly over the National Security and hindered the morale of the military and the mentality of the individuals. Higher authorities in the defence sector paid their special attention to this incident since a large stock of ammunitions and

armament needed for the operations ahead had been stored there.

Having learnt a lesson from a previous rescue operation carried out in 1990 by Special Forces, terrorists had blocked all the passages from land and sea which could be utilized for reinforcement to reach Mulaithivu Base.

All the administrative supply of Mullaithivu base was carried out mainly through the sea route. The closest camp to Mulaithivu base was the Welioya, Janakapura camp which was located 27 kilometres away from it. The protection given by the 122mm artillery guns which had been fixed inside Mulaithivu base too had fallen into the hands of terrorists. Therefore, security needed for the Mulaithivu base was provided by 130mm artillery guns placed in Welioya, Janakapura camp. They too had been placed in the maximum range. As the entire communication with Mulaithivu Base had distorted, there was no way of getting the information about the things happening inside the base.

Therefore, the higher military authorities realized that most appropriate unit to utilize in this mission at that juncture was Special Forces who had gained previous experiences in the same

place. Special attention was drawn towards one gallant hero who had confronted bravely with LTTE giving a severe damage to them. He was none other than Lt. Col. Fasly Laphir. He accepted the challenge without any hesitation to carry out this rescue mission.

After analysing the situation he was made aware that the mission of rescuing the soldiers with one Battalion without auxiliary fire support and radio communication was risky as LTTE had attacked a brigade with more than 1200 soldiers blocking all the passages on land and in sea.

Therefore, Lt Col Laphir requested for additional troops from then Commander of the Army and he tasked 7th Battalion of the Gamunu Watch which was deployed in Jaffna to land after Special Forces.

275 dedicated, gallant soldiers of Special Forces were prepared for this unique mission under the leadership of Lt. Col. Laphir. The Operation was named as “Thrivida Pahara.”

“We all are in the face of the decisive moment in our life since more than 1200 lives of our soldiers in Mulaithivu Base are in danger.

A moment of our delay might be a serious loss and devastation.

We should never let our arch-enemies to touch even a single drop of blood of our brother soldiers.

Why we joined the Special Forces willingly?

Because! We are unique and special, both physically and mentally.

We are the most dared group in this Army.

We have done same in 1990

And we will rescue them again”.

This was the statement made by Lt. Col. Laphir, addressing the members of Special Forces before setting off for the mission. The determination shown in the statement made by him went deep into the hearts of soldiers and they determined to be committed for the mission to rescue our colleagues.

It was 18 July 1996. Aircrafts MI 17 of Sri Lanka Air Force took them into air to start an adventurous mission with the support of MI 24s and Kaffirs. Lt. Col. Laphir, through his 14-years’ experience in the battle field, had realized that Mulaithivu Base and surrounded area had been used as a fortress by terrorists at that time.

Terrorists tried to hold the base with them with all their might. They were ready to face any operation launched against them by the Sri Lanka Military Forces through land, sea or air.

Sea tigers along with suicide cadres had gained the power in the sea by blocking the sea route. They have positioned anti air craft guns to paralyze the Air Support.

Terrorists were surprised to see the helicopters invading in the horizon of Mulaithivu. They started attacking the helicopters using heavy guns. Landing the helicopters in Mulaithivu was difficult for the fliers. Amidst all severe attacks made by the LTTE using anti- aircraft guns, Lt. Col. Laphir instructed the fliers to land the helicopters on heavy anti air craft gun position upon dreadful situation. However, the fliers were brave enough to land over the guns retaliating in dared manner under heavy firing towards MI 17 helicopters. Apparently, the landing was a success whilst capturing anti air craft gun position bravely.

Due to weak communication, timely air attacks to the expected locations were a challenge. Although our own artillery guns had been positioned in the maximum fire range, the support gained from them was ineffective.

Having understood this, LTTE launched attacks towards the group continuously using heavy artillery. During this encounter few members of the Special Forces had to sacrifice their lives for the motherland. A considerable number of soldiers were wounded at the outset. Without any disappointment, Lt. Col. Laphir encouraged his team and continued the attacks towards the enemy and was able to gain the command in a certain part of the land.

Few hours of terrific confrontations felt as a long day. During night, terrorists utilized their full strength to destroy the SF positions. The dedicated, courageous soldiers fought continuously. The night was echoing with the sound of thousands gun shots.

Soldiers who were wounded severely has been taken extra care by Lt. Col. Laphir as their guardian and waited anxiously for aircrafts to send them for treatments. Overseeing the caring of their leader, soldiers were determined to fight under his command.

There were continuous waves of attacks towards the SF positions.

The Commanding Officer launched his next step. His mission was to rescue the soldiers trapped inside the base.

Observing the fire power and fighting ability, LTTE realized that they were from Special Forces and certain that they would enter the base of Mulaithivu at any moment. However, during the confrontation a considerable number of LTTE terrorists died causing severe damage on Special Forces as well.

Subsequently, as scheduled, 7 Gemunu Watch sailed from KKS to land in Mulaithivu but failed due to suicide attack made by LTTE over a Dvora. They had to turn back and headed towards Trincomalee. As a result, Special Forces fought the battle alone by themselves.

It was the fatal night. According to then “Golf” Squadron Commander, Major Jayantha Rathnayake, Lt. Col. Laphir had said that it would be the best night in the battle field that he had spent.

By mid-night, LTTE leaders instructed their cadres to launch heavy attacks towards Special Forces from all the directions. So that Special Forces soldiers were attacked from land and sea using heavy guns. Although some of the soldiers were wounded,

LTTE's attempt to eliminate the Special Forces soldiers from the battle field was not a success.

While the LTTE understood that they were losing the ground control in the confrontation with this small group, they moved suicide cadres into the battle field. As the Commanding Officer had anticipated the situation, numbers of suicide attacks attempted by terrorists were repulsed. Having known the centre of gravity of the fighting power, they targeted the Command element.

Despite being the target, he continued radio contacts with outside and move about in the battle field giving the necessary instructions in order to avoid the destruction.

At this moment, the motto of Special Forces was haunting in the ears of all SF soldiers.

“I dare to destroy the enemy in the battle field with all my might.

I will never surrender and will never let any soldier to get into the hands of the enemy.

I will never bring ill-fame to Special Forces through misconduct.

I will always display my ability of fighting alone as a Special Forces member until the mission is accomplished.”

This courageous warrior was able to destroy a considerable number of terrorists under his leadership. Terrorists made every effort to destroy the leadership and to resist the attempt of regaining the Mulaithivu Base.

His mind and physique were active all the time. He realized that the terrorists would not be able to harm them any more as they had fought giving severe damage to LTTE without having auxiliary fire support depending only on the armament and ammunitions they had brought.

Lt. Col. Laphir became a target of the LTTE while he was communicating through radio sets. He and his Headquarter element which were not in solid protection detected by the LTTE due to the communication antennas. An indirect fire was directed towards him that finally resulted in a piece of shell piercing through his body. It was a misfortune. It was a fatal wound and he shed his last breath.

Lt. Col. Laphir, the Commanding Officer of 1st Regiment of Special Force who gave leadership to members of Special Forces proved that he was the leader indeed through his deeds.

On 19th July 1996 was the saddest day of the history of Special Forces, the day Lt. Col. Laphir left us. This shocking news was spread over the channels of Special Forces which brought concerns and sadness of all members serving in Special Forces.

According to his batch mate Col. Raj Wijesiri, Col. Laphir had never complained about difficulties or challenges. He had taken all difficulties in good spirit. He was always honest and straight forward in his dealing with others. He was also a strict disciplinarian to his troops and ensured that his men acted with honour and discipline during difficult situation in combat.

Col Jayavi Fernando, one of his initial senior subaltern and was very close companion, one of the grate master worriers in Sri Lanka Army in keeping a memorable note on his junior mate, mentioned that Laphir was a quite sensitive officer having loyalty and enthusiasm towards his prime duty. He was always result oriented one with having good skills of man management. Further he noted that once Laphir was saying “He could die, if Maj Gen Gamini Hettiarachchi asked him to do so”.

Quoting a memorable note on Colonel Laphir made by one his close associates Major General Prasanna Silva, operations conducted by Col Laphir always ended up with a great success

since his skills of pre planning, self-orienting and the thorough vigilance on his opposes were admirable.

As a view of one of his close comrades, then Second In Command of “Bravo Squadron” present Maj. Gen. Nirmal Dharmarathne, Col Laphir amply demonstrated the great quality of Calmness in Crisis, particularly in battle. In all such catastrophic situations he faced as a field Commander he never got panic and lost his cool. Further, he applied all his time to duty where welfare of his subordinate troops was always at his heart. He maintained a thin line between him and other Rank, being very close to them, yet commanded respect of them to the fullest.

If he would have been alive, he would have been a decorated general in the Sri Lanka Army with true leadership qualities and great personality. He was constantly inspired by great military leaders such as Late Lt. Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa, Late Maj. Gen. Vijaya Wimalarathne, Late Maj. Gen. Janaka Perera, Maj. Gen. Gamini Hettiarachi and many others.

The name of Col. Aslam Fasly Laphir is written in the history of Sri Lanka as one of the salient, gallant, war hero who fought and sacrificed his life for eradicating terrorism from our motherland

and for protecting the sovereignty of the country as the Ten Giant Heroes of King Dutugemunu who fought to bring the country under one flag.

This brave, wise, intelligent officer in the Army who had kept the motto of Special Forces in his mind all the time volunteered to fight LTTE.

Having understood the risk of fatal attacks launched by LTTE in Mulaithivu, he got into the battle field by air with his colleagues and engaged in the war giving correct guidance and instructions to them giving a surprise to the enemy.

Heroism shown by Col Laphir in the annals of Elam Wars, and especially his commitment in the battle of Mulaithivu was unique.

We still mourn the fact that he is not with us to witness the everlasting peace dawned to our motherland through the glorious victory achieved by military forces. The prime thing we must continue is to accord him an everlasting place in our collective memory.

In recognition of his gallant heroic actions in the battle field to save over thousands of lives in laying down his own life, this

noble war hero was awarded the Supreme medal “Parama Weera Vibhushana Padakkama” that a real war hero can ultimately earn.

“The greatest thing we as soldiers can achieve is none other than anything, safe guard the integrity and sovereignty of our motherland as the greatest Laphir did”.

Thank You.

End.....



**Major General G Hettiarachchi
(Rtd) WWV RWP RSP VSV USP
psc**

Delivered Lecture

at

COLONEL A F LAPHIR PWV RWP RSP

**Annual Memorial
Lecture Series**

2019



LECTURE

DELIVERED BY

Major General G Hettiarachchi (Rtd) WWV RWP RSP VSV USP psc



Major General Gamini Hettiarachchi WWV RWP RSP VSV USP psc delivered the inaugural lecture at the Colonel A F Laphir PWV RWP RSP

Annual Memorial Lecture on 7th August 2019.

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mrs. Anoma Laphir, Chief Staff of the Army Major General Shavendra Silva, Chief Staff of the Air Force Air Vice Marshal Sudarshana Pathirana, Former Commander Gen. Sirilal Weerasooriya, Senior Generals, Senior officers of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Prof. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, Officers of the Police, Commandant of STF, members of the STF, Cadets from KDU, invitees, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Firstly I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera Director General; Institute of National

Security Studies Sri Lanka for giving me this opportunity to speak on Col. Fazly Laphir.

I am pleased and honored to speak on Col. Fazly Laphir whom I met when he joined the army as an Officer Cadet way back in August 1980.

Col. Fazly Laphir having joined the Army in 1980 was trained at the Sri Lanka Military Academy in Diyathalawa. He was from intake 14, where I was the Course Commander. Col. Fazly Laphir was an outstanding cadet from St. Anthony's College, Kandy. He did extremely well on the Cadet Course and came 2nd in the order of merit. He was posted to the Rajarata Rifles and later joined the Gajaba Regiment as a young officer in an Infantry unit and served in operational areas from 1983 to 1985. He also had a stint with the Military Intelligence during the above period.

In June 1985, I was attached to the Joint Operational Headquarters (JOH) to form a group to conduct Unconventional Operations against the separatist terrorists in the North and East, on the instructions of the Joint Operations Commander (JOC) Gen T.I. Weeratunga. Lt Fazly Laphir was one of the first officers who volunteered to join this group, initially known as

the Rapid Deployment Force (Special Troops) RDF (ST), when I called for volunteers from Army units. I was very happy and delighted to have him in my group, as he was my student and I knew his capabilities. Fazly and 38 Other Ranks underwent training at the Commando Regiment and later at the Army Training Center at Maduru Oya. The training was conducted by the Keenie Meenie services. (Ex- SAS personnel)

Fazly was an outstanding officer, who was very capable, highly committed, courageous, daring and determined. He was a very persevering Officer who never gave up. This factor was clearly visible in all the military operations he undertook. He was always in the front leading his teams. Fazly having a high IQ, had an analytical mind, and mastered all skills and drills required to fight an insurgency. He was well versed in fighting in the jungles and build up areas, in tactics and concepts of operations against the terrorists. As a result, he was renowned as a very knowledgeable and professional leader.

He was very fluent in Tamil. His experience in handling and questioning captured terrorists and suspects, when he was working in the army intelligence before he joined the RDF (ST) was a tremendous advantage to him. He would question them

for hours and days and had the ability to turn them around and get them to help him in operations with vital information.

Fazly had a very close relationship with his troops he commanded. He looked into their problems, gave them solutions and was always very fair in dealing with them. He was a sympathetic and understanding leader who always looked after the welfare of his troops. Sometime, he even gave them money to go home when they did not have cash. He felt the pulse of the fighting soldiers. He also used to discuss plans with his senior NCOs regularly and through training, proper guidance and motivation gradually turned them into a fighting machine. Fazly's troops loved him because he was always with them and did everything better than everybody else whether it is physical training, firing, battle runs or tactical training. In operations against terrorists, he was always in front leading his troops. Fazly was a very balanced officer, silent in nature but very sensitive. He was always very cool under fire, in difficult situations he never panicked.

Further, Fazly was very good in motivating troops. He used to speak to them regularly, even joined in singing with them and

enjoyed their company. His character was extremely good and his integrity was unquestionable.

He was always result oriented. In fact he laid down a policy for his troops in 1986 that his troops could proceed on leave, only after they had got a minimum of five terrorists on Operations. He conducted numerous operations with his 08 man teams. He was brave and never hesitated to take on dangerous and difficult operational tasks. A good example was the Jaffna Fort operation where he led the initial landing crossing the lagoon at night. He would plan his operations in great detail and carry them out meticulously. He would always carry his pack and weapon as an example, Because of his outstanding leadership qualities, dedication and commitment, his troops followed him at all times. He also had the luck to succeed. He was one of the very few officers who were always successful in military operations. He has walked the length and breadth of the Wannu, the Eastern province and the Jaffna peninsula during his career to carry out operations against the separatist terrorists in Sri Lanka.

He was always loved by senior officers like Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa, Gen. Vijaya Wimalaratne, Gen. Janaka Perera and numerous other officers. These officers liked him not only

because he produced results, but since he was highly disciplined and very respectful to senior officers. Above all he was a very humble officer, and was able to interact with all Officers and men. As a result, he was able to get their cooperation whenever he needed their assistance.

Col. Fazly Laphir was a warrior, a fighter, a professional soldier who came to form the Special Forces of Sri Lanka, in order to safeguard and preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Mother Lanka.

Operations, since 1985

During the formative years of the RDF (ST) in 1985, Lt Fazly Laphir and his teams were deployed in Trincomalee, Weli-Oya and Vavuniya to carry out small group operations against separatist terrorists. Lt Fazly Laphir and his 8 man teams along with the balance of RDF (ST) troops executed ambushes, stay behind parties, attacks on small enemy hideouts, covert operations and were able to produce remarkable results in the above areas. In one such operation, he was able to kill the PLOTE leader in Vavuniya. This was a significant achievement at that time as PLOTE was dominating the Vavuniya district.

After the initial deployment in Trincomalee and Welioya districts the RDF (ST) was deployed under the Security Force HQ (Wanni) in 1986. When General Denzil Kobbekaduwa took over as the Security Force Commander, he utilized the RDF(ST) to conduct military operations in the Wanni, namely in Mannar, Mullathivue, Oddusudan, Veddithalathivu, Madhu, Pandivirichchan, Puwarasukulam, Pompemadu, Omanthai, Puliyanukulam, Mankulam, Killinochchi and in Vadamarachchi in the Jaffna peninsula in 1987. Under General Kobbekaduwa's leadership the RDF (ST) carried out some spectacular operations against the Tamil militant organizations, namely the PLOTE, TELO, LTTE, EPRLF and EROS from 1986 to 1988.

Lt. Fazly was initially a troop leader of Bravo Group which later on expanded to a squadron. He also took part in Operation Liberation where three Brigades were launched to capture Vadamarachchi in the Jaffna Peninsula in 1987.

Lt/Capt. Fazly Laphir, was undoubtedly the live wire behind the success of the RDF (ST) in Wanni. His actions consolidated and brought recognition to the RDF (ST).

In fact the success of RDF (ST) operations in the Wanni, Trincomalee district and Jaffna Peninsula paved the way for the

RDF (ST) to evolve into an Elite Special Forces Regiment by December 1988. Captain Fazly Laphir and his troops contributed immensely to the creation of the 1st Special Force Regiment.

I quote what his batch mate and colleague Col. Raj Vijayasiri who also served in the RDF (ST) had to say about Col. Fazly Laphir. “Fazly had joined RDF (ST) as a pioneer member in 1985. What was remarkable about Fazly was his utter dedication to the war and the men he commanded. He would not spare any means to get at the enemy. He had a good knack to gather intelligence as well.

When the RDF (ST) expanded, I commanded the Delta squadron and Fazly commanded Bravo squadron. We both were very competitive and wanted to lead any mission that came our way. So much so that we would go to Major Gamini Hettiarachchi, and argue whose squadron should lead a particular operation. Fazly with his exemplary leadership qualities, charisma and personality was a natural leader who could highly motivate a team. As a result, he and his team managed to produce extraordinary combat results in the operations that they took part in”.

Subsequently, in 1989-1990 the SF Regiment was deployed on counter Subversive Operations in the south of the country including Colombo.

During the southern insurgency Major Fazly Laphir played a prominent role. The success of SF operations could be attributed to his leadership, dedication, commitment, concepts and tactics adopted. Within three months after the deployment of Special Forces in August 1989, the southern subversion came to end.

In 1990, the SF Regiment was deployed in the Eastern Province during Eelam War II. From 1990 to 1993 Maj. Fazly Laphir commanded 'B' Squadron and took part in military operations in Jaffna, Mulathivue, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara districts. Many a time, he and his troops have spent days and nights in the jungles of Thoppigala, Punani, Vakarai, Thrikonamadu, Kallar, Angodavillu, Gomarankadawala, Kuchchaveli and Welioya searching for terrorists and their hideouts.

He was also very good trainer and was very knowledgeable in counter insurgency operations, jungle warfare, basic skills, handling weapons and tactics. He was also in charge of the Maduru Oya Special Forces Training School from 1993 to 1995.

During his period he improved the professional standards, basic skills and knowledge of Special Forces officers and soldiers that was essential for jungle and urban operations. Furthermore he also trained hundreds of infantry battalion officers and instructors in order to strengthen and improve the fighting capabilities of the infantry battalions.

Lt. Col. Fazly Laphir was appointed as the Commanding Officer of the 1st Special Forces Regiment on 08th February 1996.

He commanded 1st Special Forces Regiment Operation Rivirasa phase II and III and played a decisive role during the operations to capture Vadamarachchi and Thenmarachchi.

In 1996, Col. Fazly Laphir and his Regiment were sent as reinforcements to rescue military personnel after the LTTE launched a massive attack on the Mullativue army camp. In this operation he was injured while leading his troops and subsequently succumbed to his injuries.

Col. Laphir was one of the pioneers in forming the 1st Special Forces Regiment which had contributed immensely towards the defeat of the LTTE. As a raw 2nd Lieutenant he served with the Special Forces Regiment and continued to serve until he

commanded the 1st Battalion SF Regiment, when he met with his untimely death.

For his heroic action to rescue the troops under siege in the Mulativue Army Camp, Col Fazly Laphir was awarded the highest gallantry award in the Sri Lanka Army the “Parama Weera Vibhushanaya”.

In summary, Col. Fazly Laphir was undoubtedly one of the best officers ever produced by the Special Forces and the Sri Lankan Army. He was a very daring, courageous and a dedicated officer, who was highly professional and result oriented. He was a highly disciplined and balanced officer with excellent moral standards, integrity and an unblemished character.

Col. Fazly rendered a yeomen service to the Special Forces, to the military and to the people of Sri Lanka. His unfortunate demise was a great loss to the Special Forces, the military and to the country.

Col. Fazly Laphir brought fame and recognition to the Sri Lankan Special Forces and to the Military. He was a born warrior and a fearless fighter. An epitome of an Officer and gentleman. “May he rest in eternal peace”.



The monument at Mullaitivu in memory of late Col A F Lahir PWV RWP RSP, where he made the supreme sacrifice for the motherland.

ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

2019

The Institute of National Security Studies (INSSSL) is the premiere national security think tank of Sri Lanka under the Ministry of Defence, established to understand the security environment and to work with government to craft evidence based policy options and strategies for debate and discussion to ensure national security. The institute will conduct a broad array of national security research for the Ministry of Defence.

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