



**LIEUTENANT GENERAL**

**D L KOBBEKADUWA**

**RWP RSP VSV USP rcds psc**

**ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES 2017**

**BY INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES SRI LANKA**





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**General G H De Silva (Rtd) RWP VSV USP**

Delivers Lecture

at

**Lt Gen D L Kobbekaduwa  
RWP RSP VSV USP rcds psc**

**Annual Memorial Lecture Series**

**2017**

# LECTURE DELIVERED BY

## General G H De Silva (Rtd) RWP VSV USP



Former Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, General G H De Silva (Rtd) RWP VSV USP delivered the inaugural lecture at the Lt Gen D L Kobbekaduwa Annual Memorial Lecture on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2017. The Lecture was titled “The Life and Times of Lt Gen D L Kobbekaduwa in the Contemporary Context”.

“Secretary Defence, Mrs Lalini Kobbekaduwa and members of the Denzil Kobbekaduwa Family, Commanders of the Army, Senior Officers of the Tri-Forces, Your Excellencies, fellow members of ARFRO, Officers of Tri-services, Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen. A very Good Afternoon to all of You!

Without apologizing for beginning with a rather clichéd phrase, because it is true, I would like to say that it is a pleasure and privilege to be addressing this august assembly on the “Life and Times of General Denzil Kobbekaduwa”, the greatest of all military strategists the Sri Lankan military has had the good fortune to possess. Unfortunately for us, his untimely and sad demise on the battle-field on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1992 robbed us of basking in the greater glory of his sound military professionalism.

A pleasure, as General Kobbekaduwa whose magnificent combat skills, leadership and friendship, I cherished. A privilege, as the motives impelling the aim of this exercise initiated by the Institute of National Security Studies of Sri Lanka through the aegis of the Ministry of Defence, invited me to do so at this inaugural presentation, in a series to follow, of the life and times of this great military icon- a most laudable and timely initiative, as too often our heroes tend to be men in white, whereas the men in fatigues are all but ignored. Sadly, the soldiers' exploits are expected to be confined to the battle-



field; similarly his Honours. Yet written history is, unfortunately rarely accurate and the contributions of such men towards nation building are often conveniently glossed over. Moreover, the soldier is confined to a stereotype whose human face is often to be seen only in mess-hall lore and almost never outside military circles.

I applaud the Chief Guest for his address to the audience at the Book Launch of “War Heroes-Killed-in-Action” in which Denzil Kobbekaduwa is featured, first. He commented that such publications should be included in the school curriculum, for our children to know of the glorious feats on the battle-field of our War Heroes, as to date we study or read-only of the military campaigns of our Ancient History. Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa also remarked that the West continues to project the valour and bravery of their War Heroes of the two World Wars, publishing books and making films on their glorious feats even today; so many years after the Wars have ended.

Mr Kalyananda Godage, a former diplomat and Foreign Secretary commenting on the book had this to say, “we have been introduced to the brave men who sacrificed their lives to save our country and enabled us, and generations to come, to lead normal lives, free from fear. Little did we know of the battles that had been fought and hardships that our Servicemen endured. Yes! We are guilty of a lack of awareness of what went on in the war. We are made aware of the action of our heroes, men that we should be more than proud of, men whose heroic acts inspire us”

At the outset let me inform you that I know very little of the Late General Denzil’s early childhood and adolescence. What little I know, I gathered from military records.

I met Denzil for the first time when we appeared at the final interview held at the then Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs for selection as Officer Cadets

to attend training with the 29<sup>th</sup> Intake of Officer Cadets at the prestigious Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, in England.

After selection, we had to attend a pre-course training capsule at the Officer Training Wing of the Army Training Centre in Diyatalawa for six weeks. But more of that later.

We were enlisted on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1960 and proceeded to England by ship, the 'Orcades' a P&O Liner. The cruise lasted three weeks and a close bond was established amongst the Ceylonese Cadets.

We joined Intake 29 in Sandhurst on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1960 and passed out from the RMA two years later on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1962. The four Ceylonese of Intake 29 to grace the hallowed portals of that prestigious military academy, apart from Denzil and myself were A.R.P. Wijeratne [a.k.a. "Kalu Wijeratne"] from St. Thomas' College, Matale and Sarath Jayasinghe a colleague of Denzil from Trinity College in Kandy.

**INSSSL launches Annual Memorial Lecture Series in honour of Lt. Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa**

The Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL) launched an Annual Memorial Lecture Series in honour of Lieutenant General Denzil Lakshman Kobbekaduwa.

The inaugural lecture in the series was delivered by General G.D. Silva (Retd.), on the 11th and 12th of December 2017, at INSSSL premises - Subroopya Auditorium (19th Floor).

The event was grandly by the Secretary - State Defence Kapila Waidyaratne P.C., Secretary - State Ministry of Defence, Sarath Samararatne, Lalini Kobbekaduwa and family, Commander of the Army Lt. Gen. A.L.M.M. Senarathne, Retired Senior Military Officers, distinguished military officers, members of the diplomatic corps, civilian scholars and academics.

On behalf of INSSSL, Director General Anura Kumara Senarathne delivered the opening remarks. He stated the motivation behind launching this event in honour of Gen. Kobbekaduwa: "To evoke the memory of a great military strategist and discuss an important strategic topic for our nation". In this regard, he thanked President Maithripala Sirisena of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for establishing

INSSSL as the first civilian-military national security think tank. "It is fitting that we can bring together both the military and civilians to honour this valiant military strategist."

An 'In Memoriam' video of the life and times of Gen. Kobbekaduwa was shown to the audience in an attempt to delve into the past of this stoic military strategist. Thereafter, Lalini Kobbekaduwa gifted the portrait of her late husband Gen. Kobbekaduwa. The opening remarks were then delivered by the Secretary of Defence Kapila Waidyaratne P.C. As the Chairman of INSSSL, the Secretary stated that: "It was of utmost importance to

reflect upon the visionary legacy and strategic depth in forging a military strategy for our country during the war years". The Secretary addressed the defence establishment in the audience stating that: "The best blood of the land here should be encouraged to follow in the steps of their illustrious predecessors".

Thereafter, the speaker - General Gerry de Silva (Retd.) took the stage to deliver his lecture on his friend and comrade Gen. Kobbekaduwa. He was introduced by Brigadier Sri Mudanayake who is providing a volunteer service at INSSSL. The aim of the lecture was to do justice to the memory of a fallen war hero as well as commemorate his legacy and his strategic thinking on the battlefield. The lecture began with a foray into General Denzil Kobbekaduwa's early childhood and adolescence gathered from military records. General de Silva illustrated how Gen. Kobbekaduwa rose to prominence in the military - surpassing records in promotion that were unprecedented in the annals of recent Sri Lankan military history." General de Silva explained that in 1959 Gen. Kobbekaduwa received another rare honour in that he

attended the Royal College of Defence Studies in England and became the only Sri Lankan Army officer to be trained entirely in the UK commencing with his officer cadet training in Sandhurst, followed by the Technical Transport officers course, the Young Officers course of the Armoured Corps in Devonport and the Staff College course in Camberley.

According to General de Silva, this training and Gen. Kobbekaduwa's character building during the early war years, contributed to "the acquisition of a dominant Battle Space Knowledge," which was invaluable during the formidable challenge that lay ahead in terms of the height of the armed conflict. Gen. Kobbekaduwa's "far-sighted, approach, and 'out-of-the-box' thinking brought the desired results for success in all endeavours." This was no more apparent than in the major combat operations that Gen. Kobbekaduwa conducted against armed Tamil Militancy since July 23rd 1983 (Black Friday).

General de Silva, having served alongside Gen. Kobbekaduwa, stated that he was of the personal opinion that Operation 'Balasagaya' was the crowning glory in the battlespan of Gen. Kobbekaduwa. He elaborated that during

this combat operation Gen. Kobbekaduwa coordinated a total of 5000 soldiers and "true to his military character projected his strategic and tactical acumen to be focus, which in the end brought victory". It is this strategic depth that led others to observe that "Kobbekaduwa was a person who could obtain maximum advantage from minimum resources and was therefore known as an excellent strategist".

Despite his untimely demise at Araly Point in the Kayts Island on August 6th 1992, Gen. Kobbekaduwa's legacy still lives on today. This legacy not only encompasses his strategic acumen, but rather General de Silva was able to enlighten the audience on "the Hearts and Minds" approach of Gen. Kobbekaduwa in battle, which showcased his leadership from the heart. This was witnessed by the fact that Gen. Kobbekaduwa "was trusted, admired and highly respected by tens of thousands of political figures for his sterling qualities of fortitude, honesty and integrity. It is what made the lecture an edifying. General de Silva was able to capture the essence of Gen. Kobbekaduwa's character and illustrate it in a contemporary context for the next generation or the armed forces to garner valuable knowledge from.



Training in Sandhurst was unforgettable. Ceylonese cadets adjusted to the new life quickly. Quicker in certain circumstances than even their British colleagues. The Cricket and Boxing teams of Sandhurst invariably included at least one Ceylonese. Ceylonese also shone in academics. At least four of them being awarded the “Cane” for the most outstanding Overseas Cadet. Many held ranks in the Cadet’s system of Governance. Three Ceylonese were bestowed with the rank of Junior Under Officer.

Sandhurst is a great leveller, especially in the first three months Junior Term where all juniors are cut down to size. All who graced the hallowed portals of this great military academy whose history dates back over 250 years and has maintained its noble traditions over the years; all, such as members of Royalty [in the Intakes at Sandhurst during the couple of years of our cadetship following the course of training as Cadets were the Sultan of Oman- then Plain Officer Cadet ‘Bin Said’, Prince Michael of Kent, a number of Earls, Lords and Knights of the British Realm and, Mengeisha - the grandson of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia].

These members of all strata of society, British and foreigners, are made to feel that they would be better off as some subterranean creature than undergo the trauma and rigours of what passed off under the guise of training. This is by design in the build-up of the cadet’s personality and character. From being a creature several feet below the surface of the earth, Sandhurst transform their charges to reach the highest levels of self-confidence and pride, to the extent that when the cadet passes out from Sandhurst he would have acquired the much bandied about swagger and poise that makes him move about in a manner becoming that of a General.

A trait that quickly brought the unsuspecting Young Officer coasting on ‘cloud nine’ back to earth when on joining his regiment he is informed by the





Adjutant that he is not much better off than a cadet in his junior term. The Adjutant of the Regiment I was posted to followed it up soon after with his visiting card that had on the reverse “Why be difficult when with a little more effort you can be bloody impossible”.

Field Marshal, Viscount William Slim of Burma, the Reviewing Officer at our Passing Out Parade held on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1962, who in the course of his address firmly reminded cadets being Commissioned. “There are three responses a Young Officer joining his Regiment dare utter when spoken to, and they are, Yes Sir, No Sir and Sorry Sir”.

Soon after selection as officer cadets, we took the Oath of Allegiance to our Country and the Army and were despatched to the Officer Training Wing of the Army Training Centre in Diyatalawa for a six weeks basic training capsule prior to joining Intake 29 in Sandhurst on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1960.

Training in Diyatalawa was tough! May be because we were being introduced to a new life-style ingrained into our psyche through adherence to a strict code of military discipline. Looking back we felt that the training stint in Diyatalawa was tougher than what we experienced in our junior term in Sandhurst or perhaps because we expected it to be tougher? Our instructors in Diyatalawa were the cream of the Ceylon Army. The Other Rank Instructors, Corporals Dayananda, and Peiris who put us through our paces in the drill, and weapons training respectively, had excelled as the best recruits in their training intakes. We admired their knowledge, smartness, military stature and gait, which made us try even harder to measure up to standards required of us.

The then incumbent Commander of the Army, Major General H W G Wijeyakoone OBE,ED visited us and enquired of our progress from the Commanding Officer of the Officer Training Wing, Colonel Clinton Labrooy.



General Wijekoone also visited us in Sandhurst in October 1960, the second interaction within three months of fledgeling Officer Cadets with the Commander of the Army- a rare experience indeed!

The feature of the training in Diyatalawa was negotiating the Obstacle Course in full battle-order. As we were young and physically fit the hazardous course did not prove too difficult until we reached the “Jacob’s Ladder”.

Kobbe proved to all of us, instructors included, that his ‘guts’ were in his spine. We had difficulty in reaching for the uppermost horizontal bar weighted down as we were in “battle-order”. Kobbe tried a couple of times and failed to negotiate to be much shorter in stature than all of us. Not one to be left behind as nothing was too much of a challenge to this dynamic figure of determination, courage and resolve, he let off his grip and leapt up reaching for the top most horizontal bar, caught it and raised himself over the top. One false move meant falling down 30 feet or more, certain of serious injury. We were all awestruck in amazement at this exhibition of courage, determination, and robustness. Our minds reverted to his legendary feats on the schools’ Rugby Football fields.

As a Cadet under training he was selected to represent the Army in the Defence Services Rugby Tournament - a rare honour indeed for a trainee! An amusing anecdote comes to mind as told to us by Captain Darnley de Sousa our Chief Instructor who was also a member in the Rugby squad and travelled with the Commandant and Kobbe. An exhausted Kobbe travelling back to Diyatalawa in the Commandant’s car from Colombo had fallen asleep on the lap of Colonel John Halangode, the Commandant.

Born on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1940 as the second son to Loku Bandara and Iona Ratwatte Kobbekaduwa, he grew up at the “Deldeniya Wallauwa” in Menikdiwela and subsequently in “Amunugama Walauwa” also in the Kandy district. His



ancestry was of the Kandyan Buddhist elite. Denzil had a colourful school career at Trinity College excelling in Academics and Sports. He was a Senior Prefect and a Trinity Lion in Rugby Football and Hockey, captaining the Teams in 1959. He gained entry to the University but opted for a career in the Army.

After receipt of a “Queen’s Commission” from Sandhurst and returning to Ceylon he represented the Army, Defence Services and the National Teams in Rugby Football. In his latter days, he graced the Rugby fields as one of the finest Referees the Country produced, being much sought after for his knowledge of the game and his impartiality.

Sunil Keppitipola, a fellow Trinitian of the Class of 1970 once wrote, “he was a role model to many others in school, to society and close family associates. As a person who had the privilege to associate with him since my childhood days, we, the close cousins of General Denzil Kobbekaduwa always looked upon him as our Hero and Role Model. He was our saviour at times when we were in trouble”.

Politics, unfortunately, determined the destiny of several great military personalities, who found themselves side-lined, suspended from service and even denied continuity in the military mainstream, suspected of being loyalists of the opposition political entity, with every change of the governing elite since the abortive Coup d’ Etat of 1962. Scores of military personnel were suspended from service. Some were reinstated with a regime change of the governing political authority. Others opted to resign and were beneficiaries of prestigious appointments in Public Service as Heads of Departments and Public Service Corporations. Some served terms in Remand Prison. A couple of them died before reinstatement and court proceedings could be terminated.

With a regime change in 1965, several Officers and Senior Other Ranks



suspected of loyalties to the defeated parliamentary opposition were interdicted and sent on leave. Denzil too underwent a period of uncertainty, not because he dabbled in politics or had any political affiliations, but because of family connections he had no control over - a victim of circumstances perhaps? This “Tit-for-Tat” action compelled Denzil to spend a few years of his military career away from the military mainstream. During this time his love for Rugby Football led him to coach a prominent school in Kandy and turn out for the Kandy Sports Club in the premier Clifford Cup Rugby Football tournament with distinction. His love did not end on the sports fields as it was during this period in time that he met Lalini Ratwatte, the younger daughter of Kenneth and Merle Ratwatte. They were married on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1970.

They had two daughters and a son. Kobbe returned to the military mainstream in 1971 and rose to the top rungs in the Army ladder in his illustrious military career. To quote from an article written by Kusumanjalee Thilakaratne in the “Sunday Times” of 4<sup>th</sup> August 2013 titled “An Exceptional General”, she had this to state, “Kobbekaduwa was a person who could obtain the maximum advantage from minimum resources and was therefore known as an excellent strategist”.

The UNHCR too paid a glowing tribute to his humanitarian approach towards the “Harassed” Tamil population in the War Zones. He was trusted, admired and highly respected by Tamils of every political tincture for his sterling qualities of Fair play, honesty, and integrity. He ensured that his services reached the underprivileged, feeble, weak and sick at the edge of society’s attention.

I was witness to an incident in Mannar. We were awaiting the arrival of a helicopter to ferry us across to Vavuniya for a Security Forces Conference. He left us and approached a Tamil family who was awaiting transport to



Anuradhapura to see a seriously ill close relative in hospital. Sensing their anxiety because of the delay in the arrival of their transport, he spoke to them and assured them of his help.

He offered the three of them seats in his chopper to take them to Vavuniya and arranged for another chopper to take them to their destination. He never hesitated to reach out to people. His spontaneous action was an exhibition in communication, fellowship and generosity.

A unique tribute was paid to Denzil when the “Island” newspaper devoted an entire Editorial Column highlighting Denzil’s military career and his outstanding services to the Army and the Nation. No other military officer, before or since, has been honoured with such distinction whilst in service.

I would now like to quote from Professor Rajiva Wijesinha’s feature article in the “Daily News” of 8<sup>th</sup> August 2012, titled, “Denzil Kobbekaduwa and different perspectives in the Army”, published to commemorate 20 years since the death of Denzil Kobbekaduwa, extolling the virtues of an Outstanding Army General. I quote, “my first and lasting memory of General Kobbekaduwa is of the work he was doing in Trincomalee in the late ’80s to make life better for civilians and in visiting a small Tamil school I found soldiers digging latrines. The Head Master said that General Kobbekaduwa had visited, asked what needed and taken prompt action to fulfil it was. Similar sensitivity was apparent in Sinhala and Muslim schools as well.

And again from Professor Rajiva "I remember the Principal of a small Sinhala school in town telling me how he had not bothered about maintaining his school well until the General had dropped in, seen the shortcomings, and asked him where his children went to school. In Wellawatte he had replied, whereupon the General had gently suggested that, had his children been in the school in Trincomalee, he would have made sure it was all in good order.



The lesson had gone home, and the school when I visited it was incredibly neat and tidy, with teachers at work in all classes”.

To carry on with Professor Wijesinha’s observations on ‘The Hearts and Minds’ approach adopted by General Kobbekaduwa “the answer, however, is more sympathy and sensitivity, much more of the Kobbekaduwan approach to winning the hearts and minds, rather than the alternative of hanging and flogging them, as some senior ranking officers did.”

And Professor Wijesinha concludes his article commenting on the commitment to civilian security and welfare aspects that need to be strengthened in a peacetime Army “this is how we can best honour General Kobbekaduwa, the best Army Commander we never had, an inspiration to civilians as well as to his colleagues in the Army”.

Very early in his military career, he proved to be a pragmatic, efficient and competent staff officer and administrator. He distinguished himself as an Instructor in the Military Academy in Diyatalawa. Denzil was a thorough professional who epitomized the classic image of an officer and gentleman. In senior professional appointments, he displayed the rare combination of a fighting and thinking leader. In combat operations, he almost always displayed his brilliance as a strategist and clever tactician. His courage on the battle-field was matched by his sense of fair play, upright behaviour, morality and the courage to stand by his actions and those of his subordinates. With his exemplary and appropriate conduct, he showed that his works were done in meekness and wisdom.



Kobbe was completely immersed in tasks delegated to him and the responsibilities he undertook on his initiative. He was committed to exploring all dimensions available to obtain the best possible outcome in any given situation. His foresight, approach, and ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking brought the desired results for success in all endeavours. The features of the tactics and strategies he indulged in to combat real life situations where his innovative skills, reacting to his ‘gut’ feelings and his considerable experience, which translated into success and high morale of troops under command.

The essence of leadership is the pursuit of collective interests, and identification- motivates such pursuits. Leaders must lead from what they believe. They should be models of the behaviour they expect of others. It is the behaviour of leaders that wins respect. Military leaders have to open their hearts and let people know what they think and believe. Leaders must be able to stand up to their beliefs; this aspect was more than evident in Denzil during OP “Balavegaya”. Leaders’ deeds are far more important than their words when determining how serious they are about what they say. Words and deeds



must be consistent to the extent that subordinates will readily follow orders of the leader without question or doubt. Leaders go first setting the example. Leaders renew their faith in human impulse to seek and create a world of justice, compassion, love, and joy. Thus, leadership has to be from the heart. And Kobbe had a large heart!

Admiral Hyman. G. Rickover in an address on components of Leadership, to Columbia University in 1981 said, “what it takes to do a job will not be learned in management courses. It is primarily a matter of experience, the proper attitude, and common sense - none of which can be taught in a classroom”.

To make possible to see and understand everything on the battle-field, “The acquisition of dominant ‘Battle Space Knowledge’; most importantly,

- To permit commanders to make the right decisions.
- To get the enemy with the correct resources
- And anticipate enemy reactions will be paramount.

Denzil aimed to get the best out of any situation however challenging, and the maximum effort from the men he led harnessing their latent talents, whilst maintaining total commitment for their safety and well-being. This does not mean to say that he did not take calculated risks, which in the end sum paid off immensely. These admirable qualities of exemplary leadership and concern for the high morale and welfare of his subordinates naturally endeared them to him, to the extent that they would willingly sacrifice their lives for the “Little Master”. He was streets ahead of any General engaged in active service nurtured by the Sri Lanka Army. He won recognition as our own “Napoleon” not just in Sri Lanka, as his awesome reputation spread internationally as well. I recollect High Commissioner Jha of India commenting on his “awesome reputation”. The IPKF had been briefed from a dossier maintained by the





Indian Army Intelligence Corps on intimate details of our military leaders before they embarked on their Peace Keeping Mission in Sri Lanka.

Denzil naturally, was a recipient of accelerated promotion to the higher ranks in recognition of his exceptional qualities of leadership and man-management. A case in point was when he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier ahead of eight other Colonels - all Alumni of Sandhurst- some three to four years senior to him in rank, after only a brief period of five months in the rank of Colonel, in 1986. This action was unprecedented in the annals of recent Sri Lankan military history.

In 1989 he attended the Royal College of Defence Studies in England. This was another rare honour, as he became the only Sri Lankan Army officer to be trained entirely in the UK, commencing with his officer cadet training in Sandhurst, followed by the Technical Transport Officers Course, the Young Officers Course of the Armoured Corps in Bovington and the Staff College Course in Camberley.

Denzil was intimately involved in almost all the major combat operations conducted against armed Tamil militancy since 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1983 “Black Friday”. He planned and executed most, being upfront with combat elements bearing the brunt. Some of the more significant combat operations Denzil featured in are; “Op Liberation Phase 1” (known as the ‘Vadamarachchi Operation of 1987), Op “Thrivida Balaya” of July 1990 ( a Tri-forces operation to relieve the siege on the Jaffna Fort), Op “Sea-Breeze” of August 1990 (to relieve the siege on the Army camp in Mullaitivu) and Op “Balavegaya” of July 1991, the first-ever Amphibious Operation conducted (to relieve the siege on the Elephant Pass complex).

My personal opinion is that Op “ Balavegaya” was his crowning glory and true to his military character projected his strategic and tactical acumen to its



finest, which in the end brought victory. Op “Balavegaya” was planned and executed by Denzil who had Brigadier Vijaya Wimalaratne as his Deputy Commander of Combat Operations. Denzil and Vijaya had the habit of leading from the front always, thereby being in a position to influence the battle and take immediate action to counter terrorist manoeuvres.

Up to a total of 6000 soldiers participated. They initially secured a beach-head in Vettalaikerni, the eastern limits of the EPS Complex on the coastline overlooking the Bay of Bengal, after being ferried by naval landing craft and helicopters from Trincomalee. There was tremendous and fierce opposition from the LTTE, and the first attempt at gaining a foot-hold was defeated. Subsequently with the entry of naval gunboats to fire the infantry on to the beaches together with sustained covering fire from artillery, heavy mortars and machine guns; around dusk that same day, the planned beach-head was secured.

Pirabaharan resorted to classic conventional warfare for the first time with the largest force ever assembled by him, and a confident supremo, confident of victory, called it, the “mother of all battles”. Intense resistance and sustained fire-power of the enemy made our forces to fight every inch of the way. It was time-consuming and tenacious to the extent that battle-field commanders suggested aborting the operation temporarily to regroup. However, Denzil never relented and persevered with his planned tactics and strategies. It is said that “perseverance commands success”. The enemy’s will-to-win was overpowered and LTTE cadres were driven back in hasty retreat. As undoubtedly characteristic of all great leaders in all professions - “the possession of faith in one’s abilities is vital”.

It would be to quote from Sun Tzu highlighting other facets of accepted military norms, unrelenting devotion to the standards of duty and courage,



absolute loyalty to others and not letting the task go until it is done” Denzil projected it all.

Denzil Kobbekaduwa was riding the crest of a wave in his military career when tragedy struck at Araly Point in the Kayts Island on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1992. The country and the military lost their most accomplished, brilliant, and most loved General, together with their most experienced and battle-hardened Brigadier, Vijaya Wimalaratne. Included in the casualty list were eight others together with the Navy’s, Northern Commander, Commodore Mohan Jayamaha. They were on a reconnaissance mission to determine approaches for the invasion of Jaffna codenamed Operation “Final Countdown” when the unfortunate incident occurred. (For those interested, the “Araly Incident” is described in detail in the book I have authored titled “War Heroes- Killed-in-Action” and includes brief biographies of our Heroes and the heroic acts of those who won the highest Gallantry Award for bravery in fierce battle in the face of the enemy- ‘The Parama Weera Vibhushana’).

Denzil Kobbekaduwa and Vijaya Wimalaratne are acknowledged as the architects who built the foundation for a formidable fighting force with their total commitment, dedication, example, innovative skills and sound leadership that translated into ultimate and glorious victory over Tamil militancy.

## **CONCLUSION**

I would like to conclude my address by leaving you with some points to ponder on;

Words fail in the attempt to highlight the character, personality, the esteemed value and, strategic depth of the great General Denzil Kobbekaduwa. One who set the example, one who set the pace. The generations of soldiers who follow in the ‘Most Noble of Professions’ will not find it difficult to manoeuvre along the path to success as Denzil has enlightened that path and has shown



soldiers the way to live the life one speaks of.

The fact that so many, from diverse professions and occupations speak so highly of his enlightened leadership, his magnificent military lifestyle, his humane approach of reaching out to people, signifies the immortal like qualities he possessed and exhibited.

He acquired virtues proper to his state of life. He was mighty in his strength and understanding. He was excellent in power, judgment and abundant justice. He did not oppress. He was open in his opinions and true. He always thought of others. He straddled the military sphere like a colossus, with honour and majesty. He was always diligent in his work, upright, honest and faithful to his profession. His behaviour was modest, conversation kind and actions edifying. He was humble in success. He was deified!

Hardly anyone could fault him on professional competency, capability, personal integrity, diligence or courage that was enhanced with the required attributes in both moral and physical courage. Prompted by a deep sense of national pride, his life and times will not be easily forgotten. We may never see the likes of another Denzil Kobbekaduwa ever again.

*“Honour and Shame from no Conditions rise, act well your part, there all the Honour lies”*

He inculcated in the Officer Corps down the chain of the military command, the spirit to uphold the standards and ideals expected of them with his Advice, Instruction, Precept, and Example. He inculcated in the psyche of his subordinates the grace to walk with love in goodness, righteousness, and truth; above all that we ask or think according to the power that ignites in us.

Bear with me for a final quote, given by none other than our present Commander of the Sri Lanka Army Lieutenant General Mahesh Senanayake, who, as the Commander of the Security Forces in Jaffna made a poignant



statement in the course of an interview with Ms Radhika Phillips, Editor of the Life & Times journal of September 2016, which had reference to the Mind-set of Denzil Kobbekaduwa that influenced his thinking and motivation, I quote, “General Denzil Kobbekaduwa, a great Army Officer, said to us, ‘you ensure that this war is not handed down to the Next Generation’”

Ample evidence of Denzil Kobbekaduwa’s power of motivation, foresight, and unflagging confidence in his subordinates epitomizing the military legacy he left behind. For today, the Sri Lanka Army celebrates with pride recognition as the “World’s best professional anti-terrorist fighting force”.

The value of his life-style goes beyond its words of power, challenge and wisdom, for his teachings, examples, and guidance, his work has provided. The overriding feature manifests his love for the military, nation and all in his command, planning the future as worthy soldiers, their needs and comforts, and guiding their professional skills and standards. He has helped us to see, understand and apply those guiding principles for Military Excellence.

He may have echoed the words of Jesus Christ’s Apostle Phillip, “these things that you learned and received, heard and saw in me, these do”.

He upheld the essence of training Sandhurst training, “Serve to Lead” - Do before ordering others to do. To live the life of which we speak, walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise. Denzil upheld these principles to the core, a thorough Professional – What a Man?

I attended the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Commissioning of Intake 29 of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2012. At the thanksgiving service held in the Memorial, Chappel reference was made to General Denzil Kobbekaduwa together with batchmates killed-in-action during their military careers including those who were involved in the Falklands War. It made me very proud to be a Sri Lankan and a batchmate of a distinguished



military icon. Coincidentally, it was exactly twenty years since the demise of Denzil Kobbekaduwa.

When a dependent disappears; someone or something close to our hearts - the loss makes us off balance, unstable. That was the impact at the loss of the “Greatest of military combat strategists the Sri Lanka Army ever produced”. The Army was in shock! the Nation was in shock! - victory over armed Tamil Militancy never seemed further away.

Denzil was the epitome of “a Living Hope” uncorrupted and undefiled. We can now harbour the confident expectation that grows and gains strength from his exemplary military lifestyle.

What an Amazing Man? What an Amazing Life? He was one we could follow, the one we could call King! May he attain Nibbana!

- May I leave you with some norms I wish You would abide by,
- Do not fail to Honour our Soldiers who gave us the freedom we have today
- Respect those who came back. Honour those who Didn't Finally
- Never blame a Soldier for doing his Duty, no matter what Country.

I thank you all for your kind attention. Have a good evening!"

**END**

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