

Gerry: man with a mission in life. (1993, December 19). *The Sunday Times*.

Gerry: man with a mission in life

Maj. General G.H. (Gerry) de Silva was on Friday appointed as the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army by President D.B. Wijetunga. Here one of his long-time colleagues Colonel Sunil Pieris, pioneer and then chief of the Army Commando unit, explains the characteristics and personal qualities that have taken Gerry de Silva to the top.

It dates back to 1967 when I was participating as a school cadet in the regimental sports meet - a dashing young Captain of Gemunu Watch standing six feet in his boots called me after my event and 'marketed' an army career. I was quite impressed with what it had to offer and more impressed with the officer, who was the Adjutant of one of the cadet battalions, who I later found out was Capt. G H de Silva. Almost two years after that impressive sales talk, I met this gentleman, this time when I was being initiated into the highland regiment of Gemunu Watch.

The insurgency of 1971 brought me to serve with Capt. Gerry in Moneragala. I saw in him the determination and dedication he applied to the task at hand. He was baptised into the army, being the son of an Army Officer and he spoke their language and understood the soldier faster than anyone else did. Besides the popularity he had gained through his achievements in sports, his men in the field were ready 'to go to hell and

back' with him. No doubt, there is no comparison to the battle that holds out in the North or East today, but, leadership two decades ago was no easier or different to what it is now. The fog of war blinds many an officer, but to remain calm in a crisis and to be determined when desperate, brought out the leader in the man. The limited operations in the form of patrols and ambushes were the order of the day. To get the army to accept this new form of life needed direction, leadership, example and dedication. He did this with tremendous success. Even today to face a battle of a different magnitude and complexity one would have to rely on these same principles and there is no doubt he would use them to good measure.

Deprived of the opportunity to be the Adjutant of his regiment and later overlooked to command his own regiment, this man still went on to stand alone like a colossus not depending on godfathers. With the most coveted appointments of an officer's career denied him, not because of unsuitability or incompetence, the gentleman in the man was seen when he did not resort to the backroom tactics to secure those appointments. Today he comes out on top once again as the most popular choice of the rank and file as a leader on whom the nation will place their faith, not to lead divisions or brigades or battalion into battle, but, to lead an army.

He has stood out as a man of impeccable character of

Man of
dedication
and
integrity



Maj. Gen. Gerry Silva

moral integrity and unquestionable honesty.

It is refreshing to see the government standing by its own convictions of the man most suitable, despite the pressures that have been brought by other aspirants to the post and members of the public whose national interests have been blinded by that of petty personal gains.

In recent years, Gen. Gerry has seen the war develop with a total participation. But yet as it has been the recent culture of this 'war machine', suitability and capability were often overlooked - no godfather - no place. Today to have silently emerged from the sideline to be the major playmaker would have

quite a few people smarting under their shirts. Yet as a man with tremendous knowledge of the ground and our own army's limitations and the capabilities of the vastly experienced opponent, can anyone doubt the ability of the man destined to lead the senior service. Vadamarachchi is synonymous with the late Generals Denzil and Wijaya but alas no one sang of the brigade which was employed on a diversionary role into Kadduwan. Military pundits would know the importance of a diversion and the Generals of Vadamarachchi will testify to the importance of that operation - but there lies the tale of the dark horse that ran the race relying on his own steam.

Perhaps this man for all seasons cannot turn the legacy he has inherited into the most nippy outfit during his tenure of command. The need of the hour is leadership with honesty, integrity and dedication and this not from the physical front of the FDL's or the Start Line but, from the front of commitment, accountability and spirit. The nation is looking on to salvage the army from the depths of a directionless sojourn - the material is excellent the equipment passable, but, it is the fighting spirit that needs to be galvanized to deliver the goods to the Government, for it to proceed with a solution!

The nation looks to you Sir, in this hour of need - Maniwaththa Abikkami - Tarry not, go forward.

Sunday Times 19.12.93