

# **Counter Insurgency Operations - Wellawaya April 1971**

## **By Major Gen Allan Fernando**

“With affection and the determination to win”-

The last sentence in all Operational Orders of General Giap Commander of the North Vietnamese Army which defeated both the French and the USA.

B Company had just arrived in Diyatalawa (DLA) from Mannar after a turn of Tafii duties in March 1971. After a short spell of leave we were into tactical training after completing part of the AWTC. There was some problem with the ammo available so we couldn't fire the LMGs. An Emergency had been declared in the last week of March 1971 after an explosion had occurred in Nelundeniya attributed to the JVP. The JVP was then proscribed deservedly as they had vowed to take over state power by violence. Few gave serious thought to combating such violence other than cancelling all leave which was the unwritten and apparently the only SOP for all ailments in the Army at that time. For us in DLA this made little difference as we all lived in and around the garrison anyway.

A platoon of B company under 2/ Lt Gibbrey Muthalib (later Major General) was despatched to Moneragala shortly afterwards as some weapons and ammo had been found in a rocky jungle hide out. They returned after a few days as further searches with the police under ASP Percy Wijesuriya later to become DIG, were unsuccessful. I had been Gibbrey's instructor with Intake One at the Officer Cadet Wing of the ATC in 1968/9 from which 2/Lt Sunil Peiris who would later raise and command the Commando Regiment from scratch also joined us. 2/Lt Vipul Botejue from Intake2 (later Brigadier) who as Commanding Officer led the First Battalion in the first ever deliberate and victorious two Brigade attack on the LTTE in Vadamarachchi in 1987, had also served with B Company in Mannar. He was a national level swimmer and spent a lot of time doing boat patrols at sea. All of us had also played together in the ATC rugby team, winning the C division of the Clifford cup tournament in 1969 and the Regimental team.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1971 while I was coincidentally taking a class on PWs I was called by the Commanding Officer Lt Col SB Miyanadeniya (later Brigadier) to take a platoon and move to Wellawaya ASP as there had apparently been a few casualties after 'some firing' at the police station. Some one said a bomb had gone off too. The details were not too clear. At this time it took several hours to get any outstation phone call to find out the details. A little while later I was told that in Monaragala a policeman had been shot and that another platoon would also have to go. That platoon was Gibbrey's. As B Company commander I did not think to take offence that I had to take charge of a platoon although each platoon had its commander. This was the prevailing wisdom when ever circumstances became abnormal. Very soon I would be leading a section too. Weren't we always abnormal?

Based on this flimsy info I set off with 2 CASC trucks carrying the platoons. My platoon sergeant was Sgt Heenbanda DR who with Cpl Solomon had been in my company in the Sinha Regiment before we were transferred to GW in 1963. Most of the men had been with me as recruits at the ATC in 1963 and 1969 and since then on jungle training and , the long march to Ridiyagama (71 miles) The rest of the men had been with me in Mannar for 4 months. We knew each other well having patrolled the beaches 3 times a week at night scouring the seas for the elusive Illicit Immigrants and sharing roti and fresh fish in the CWPs in the mornings after the patrol.

The platoon HQ included Private Wickramage my runner who was to be a strength in the Army and Combined Services rugby 15 and Fernando PK.. Cpl Balapitiya a regimental player and Cpl Ariyadasa who had created problems with the fishermen in Mannar and had to be sent back to DLA were the other Section Comds. The CSM was attached to Gibbrey's platoon. I'm sorry that I cannot recall all the names 35 years on.

On the way we met an ambulance going to Badulla The driver told us there had been an attack by the JVP on the Wellawaya police station. The word 'Thrasthaya' came into vogue only the next morning over the radio. When we reached Wellawaya town which we used to pass often on our way to the Army jungle training camp at Ridiyagama and to Ampara, none of us could recognize it as literally there was not even a dog in sight. It was a ghost town. We had gone past the shop lines of the town and had to turn back to get to the police station. A helicopter had just touched down as we arrived and I saw Major Gratian Silva CA SO 2 (Ops) AHQ accompanying DIG Rudra Rajasingham into the police station. The platoons debussed and took positions around the police station. I asked Major Gratien what had happened and he seemed surprised that I did not know that there had been a bomb and shot gun attack on the police station that morning at about 5AM which had left one police man and 2 insurgents dead. Pellet marks were on the station walls. Another policeman Gunsekera who had been at home beyond the town, on hearing the firing had hurried to get to the police station when he met the retreating insurgents and was shot dead by their leader who had for some reason worn a coat.

There was also present inside a truck on the road by the police station about 15 Gunners from Hambantota under Lt Bashoor Musafar who later captained the army rucker team before migrating to Australia. In the police station we met shocked and demoralised policemen under Inspector Donald Jayasekera whose tin house at the Western edge of the police compound had also been holed by the JVP in several places with shot gun pellets. Miraculously his wife and their Alsatian dog who were inside had survived. They had seen the entire action from the time the police patrol with the Inspector had returned to the station. The leader of the attackers wearing a black coat had approached the house from the rear of the station after the attack started and fired indiscriminately before taking post on the road opposite the Station.

Inspector Jayasekera had just returned from an armed patrol to the town in a commandeered Anti Malaria jeep and returned the weapons to the strong box in which they were stored. The policemen began to relax. The key to the strong box was given to PC? who asked permission from the Inspector to light a cigarette and went to the veranda of the station when suddenly a shot rang out and hit him in the neck just where his top tunic button would have been had he not taken it off. All hell broke loose. Fire bombs were hurled from the rear and shot guns were fired. The policemen in quarters which were on either side of the station jumped into the charge room to join the others. They had to break open the strong box as the key was with the PC who was killed and was lying exposed in the veranda. Having taken out the weapons they returned fire, rather blindly. The JVP having tossed fire bombs and fired shot guns had asked the police to surrender. According to the police there were about 500 attackers. One PC Banda turned tables on the insurgents by running out of the station to the Post office which was immediately East of the station. He had outflanked them and soon fired on them, killing one. Sgt Seneviratne had also shot dead another attacker and wounded another who had run away. The attackers then broke and fled. It was said that the driver of the Anti Malaria jeep had meanwhile run all the way into the town without knowing where he was running. Whenever Inspector Jayasekera recalled the past events, the hairs of his hands stood straight up, the first time I had seen what up to then was only an expression I had heard.

I suddenly realised with some excitement and trepidation that I was going to actually practice what I knew before only in theory. We were in a life and death situation for the first time and I was in command. I walked around the police station and at the rear(North) climbed over a wire fence which was behind their kitchen. I noticed that there were 2 young boys pressing themselves into the earth on the sides (niyara) of the paddy field just a few yards away. Thinking they were inquisitive villagers who had come there to observe the mayhem at first hand, I asked them to scram. They stayed transfixed to the earth despite another shout by me. It dawned on me that these 2 were acting strangely and suspiciously even though to me they didn't look like what I imagined insurgents would look like. I was looking for swarthy, hard core criminal types, black and ugly. I asked them again to get up and shouted a 3<sup>rd</sup> time. This time they got up just as a policeman named Amugoda who it later transpired was from Ambalangoda, my home town, jumped over the fence tearing a ligament in one leg in the process and holding on to it, began kicking the nearest boy with his other foot. Some gunners who had got out of their vehicle by this time started hitting the 2 boys with their rifle butts as well. I yelled to them to stop which they did. I asked the 2 boys what they were doing there. They appeared very frightened and couldn't speak at first but after some coaxing they admitted they had come in the morning with the insurgents but had not taken part in the attack. Having seen the killing of 2 of their 'kaliya' they had become jittery and remained hugging the ground as the police fired at the retreating attackers. They had remained so through out the morning, waiting until dark to make a run for it. They said that there were only 25 men in the attacking group divided into 5 sections

and that they had retreated East towards the town. I asked Sgt Heenbanda to give the 2 boys a bath from the nearby well, the standard PW treatment given in DLA to those especially officer cadets, captured on exercises. It didn't strike me that we were in the warm lowlands and the water would not be cold. Apparently they had asked for soap after soaking themselves! I said I would question them later. The police were baying for their blood but I did not allow them to touch them. The DIG and Major Gratien Silva then made their way to the helicopter. I told 2Lt Muthalib to proceed to Monaragala with his platoon. The gunners left for Hambantota. I took out a clearing patrol after having the rest take up defensive positions around the station. We searched the nearby houses and found no one there. They had fled the expected vengeance of the police or the unwelcome presence of the insurgents. As we entered the first house I was suddenly confronted with pitch blackness as the wooden windows had been shut. We had not carried any torches as it was still day. It was an unnerving experience. It soon became clear that no one far less the attackers were anywhere around so we returned to the station.

I had asked Sgt Heenbanda to give the 2 captives a piece of paper each to write down the names of all those with whom they had come. The names in the lists matched. I handed the two boys over to the Inspector with the 2 lists for him to study as they were probably well known to the police being from Wellawaya. I asked that the boys be kept in the cells and given food and water. Action would soon be taken to visit the houses of the persons whose names were on the list. Meanwhile a tracker was brought in by police sergeant Seneviratne who was thereafter always with us on every patrol. He was the best policeman there. He said that we may still be able to catch some of the retreating insurgents who apparently had taken to the jungle clad hills to the South. I therefore took a section and went after them with the tracker and Seneviratne towards Kuda Oya. I now had to take the role of point man as I felt there was certain unease in the men about going after the insurgents despite their familiarity with jungle training. The men were armed with the .303 Enfield rifle and I with a Sterling SMG and the standard issue for officers the Webley .38 pistol. We proceeded for some considerable distance before the tracker gave up. We went back to the station in the truck that had meanwhile been brought up.

I had sent Sgt Punchibanda to recon the rest house for our base. However the Inspector dissuaded me saying that the police were not strong enough to face another attack alone, so we stayed there that night and remained there uncomfortably for the rest of the month. We took up defensive positions around the station giving the police one side while we took over the other 3 sides. But we patrolled their side too as our safety could not be compromised by them. That night we went out with the police to some of the nearby addresses given by our captives. All the suspects, one of them being the manager of the local Cooperative, had fled. We also went to the house of a suspect close to the police station when I saw at first hand how the police drive the fear of hell into relatives of the suspects threatening blood curdling retribution. This suspect was the guy

the police wanted most as he had cultivated close relations with the police. One of his sisters had been very friendly with one of the policemen- who happened to be PC Banda the man who saved the station. Not much later he had become a suspect of the police himself. His action in running out of the station while it was under fire began to look very odd even though he had turned tables by shooting one of them. However Banda was a hero just then and I believe won a reward from the Police. The suspect, I think his name was Milton had even arranged a volley ball match with the police the previous evening which the police had lost. This perfidy was unforgivable according to the way the police saw it. When this man was captured later (in Negombo!) he turned out to be a tall, lean light skinned, handsome man who would have made a good soldier. In fact he confided with me that he had applied to join the police and had been rejected. He had then fallen captive to the JVP leader Wijeweera's indoctrination. Milton who went into business on his release from jail did not join the JVP in 1989. Another insurgent who surrendered in Diyatalawa had been shot in the mouth by Sgt Seneviratne and cured the wound by applying Boric powder supplied by an estate hospital.

The next morning using the list given by the 2 captives we went into several villages. In one we arrested one young man named Appuhamy. He was sent back to the station. It is with sorrow I have to say that while we continued the search of the other villages, the police tortured Appuhamy. When I came back I saw what had been done was irreversible. The boy died that night. A few days later the 'black coat' leader of the attackers was caught by some villagers and handed over to the police but sadly was shot while in their custody and brought dying to the station. On my return to the station I asked for volunteers to go with the wounded man to Badulla General Hospital but found no one. I questioned the man and found out that he too was from Ambalangoda. His father had been a fisherman who had died when he was a small boy. He asked me for water and one of our soldiers, driver Sumanapala, swore and spat in his face. I gave the wounded man my water bottle. He drank from it and said "Sir" (in English) and continued in Sinhala, "if you haven't anymore questions please take your gun and shoot me". I never felt more humbled and small than at this time in front of this fearless man. I tried to put myself in his place and imagine what I would have wanted to say to my captives after being shot. I realised that in our rural youth there lay tremendous untapped resources of guts and courage that were being wasted in this confrontation because they had been misled convincingly by Wijeweera. Sumanapala was soon faced with the reality of civil war when he received news that the police had opened fire on some youths in the main street of his home town Passara killing one of his best friends.

On other days we searched villages keeping the pressure up. Some times we mounted road ambushes and searched rubber estates and rocky hills in the jungle on wild tips received from the police. Another day we had excellent info that a suspect Dissanayake would be coming to get provisions from a chena near a prominent Nuga Gaha ara on the Kuda Oya road. I took a section with me and mounted an ambush. Cpl Solomon was beside me with the Bren gun and given

standard orders to fire when I tapped his shoulder. After some time I noticed that one of the men, Pte Silva was falling asleep and got him woken up. Towards dusk we saw our quarry appear from the jungle. My blood raced as I realised that I had staked out a man and was eagerly waiting to kill him. Dissanayake moved cautiously forward amongst the vegetation and we could see his head appear and disappear in the folds of the 'chena'. When he was only about 100 yards away and still not a proper target, Solomon without any order pulled the trigger of the Bren gun. It did not fire as the change lever had been on safety. I chided him. He changed it to 'A'. I whispered to him to put the change lever to 'R'. I saw he was agitated. Dissanayake stopped and seemed to sense something. Seconds later, again without a signal from me, Cpl Solomon fired but with the gun on automatic against my orders. He missed. Dissanayake began running into the jungle which was behind him and into a dip. I yelled "stop" to the men and thought I saw their trigger fingers taken off the weapons. I then gave chase. No one followed me. I never saw a man run so fast. I understood the phrase "running for his life" in a real life situation. It was electrifying. Dissanayake had disappeared before I reached the fringe of the jungle. I came back with my hands raised talking to the men to make sure that no one fired on me. This was not taught in text books but this is what happened. I was furious with Solomon. I believed he fired in fear in order not to allow the quarry to close up, not so much as to kill him. I gave Solomon a verbal lashing after we pulled back and debriefed the men. As much as I knew that the mission had failed I wasn't all that unhappy that we hadn't killed a man. I told the men that maybe God Kataragama had saved Dissanayake We were fated to meet again soon.

A few days later the police got a tip that Dissanayake was visiting his father in a chena off the stream near the same Nuga gaha . We entered downstream and walked on both sides upstream. Shortly afterwards the policeman signalled that there was someone ahead. We saw 2 men coming towards us, one of whom was old. As soon as they saw us they ran up the side of the stream nearest to the jungle and into the chena. I chased after them with one other soldier and tried to get a shot off but the old man was in front of me so I couldn't shoot without hitting him. It was Dissanayake again as his father the old man who blocked me admitted unsmilingly. We could only threaten the old man whom we caught for giving succour to a felon. He kept under arrest for a short duration and released. On the way in we had seen that their house had been burnt by their neighbours who were working off their personal grudges with a vengeance making maximum use of the situation, something that very sadly happened all over country. It appears to be an incurable disease of our countrymen. I met Dissanayake twice subsequently after he was released from prison He had been employed as a teacher but avoided questions about his politics. In 1989 he did not join the JVP

On New Years day we received info that some insurgents had holed up in rock temple overlooking the Ella –Wellawaya road bridge beyond Randeniya. The plan was to approach them not from the main road as they would be warned but from the hills above on the Haputale side. So we went by vehicle towards the

Diyaluma Falls and climbed by foot towards the Haputale hills before descending on to the temple below. We saw the temple and went in cautiously. It was an anti climax There was no one there except for a little man dressed as a priest who admitted that some insurgents had indeed stayed there for a day and had fled the day before. He had fed them. The villagers then came up and denounced the man as a pervert who had abused the trust and generosity of the villagers pretending to be a priest. He was pushed about by the soldiers thereafter and taken down to the bridge where we had planned to meet up with our vehicles. The villagers however would not let us go until we had part taken of New Year kavun, kokis, kolikuttu and kalu dodol. On reaching Wellawaya police station the man admitted to his lechery as a diary giving details was also found amongst his belongings. He was asked to disrobe voluntarily which he did and was told to get out of the district with a caution that if he was seen anywhere in the vicinity again he would be dealt with extreme severity. We were exulting on the rooting out of the wicked man in the temple the next day when we were informed of the wounding in the head of Lt Muthalib and the death of a policeman on an operation planned by him in the village of Gallebedde, North East of Monaragala.

We had earlier arrested a small orphan boy named Sirisena who was about 12 years old. He admitted he had come with the attacking insurgents and that he had attended the first of the famous 5 lectures. On 4<sup>th</sup> April a leader had met him and asked him to meet them near the Nuga gaha as the area leader wanted to speak to all of them that evening. So on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> April Sirisena became a part of history by reporting at the appointed place where he was told that they would attack the police station that night. Thoroughly frightened he had asked to go back to his guardian grandmother at Athiliwewa and tell her that he would not be coming home that night. A gun was put to his head by the leader and he was told he couldn't move. At about mid night they were given bread and potato curry. At about 3 AM they had started the move out. He said his task was to carry the box of matches for the petrol bombs which he did. As soon as the 2 attackers were killed he ran off with the rest and got back to his village. He was kept in the police station and looked after by us. We handed him over to the police when we left at the end of April. He was later released. I met Sirisena during the 1988/9 second JVP uprising. He was working at the Pelwatte Sugar Company as a labourer/cane cutter. When I reminded him of 1971 he appeared to be frightened and I never saw him again.

In Monaragala, which I visited from time to time, info was coming in of insurgent sightings in villages around Obbegoda. 2/Lt Muthalib was eager for action and followed up on each bit of info. I asked him to let me know if he got something hot so as to join him. When he decided to attack Obbegoda he did not let me know as he felt time was of essence and communications were not secure. He took about 15 men in a bus including ASP Wijesuriya and some policemen hoping to make a concealed approach in it and take the insurgents unawares. Unfortunately as the bus approached the insurgents a policeman had exposed himself. There had been a cry "Kalu thoppi karayo" as a helmet had been seen.

The insurgents opened fire first and a hefty policeman was hit and fell out of the bus. 2/Lt Muthalib who was in the front of the bus standing up by this time shouted at the nearest men to pull the wounded man back. No one moved. 2/Lt Muthalib then jumped out of the bus, held the policeman and tried to drag him back when he too was shot apparently from the side of the bus. Our men led by 'Bren gun' Mendis GD fired back and drove them off before turning back and returning to the station with the wounded. The wounded policeman died. 2/Lt Muthalib was rushed off by ambulance to the Monaragala hospital. The next day he was taken by helicopter to Colombo. Despite having a pellet lodged in his head (It is still lodged there) his life was saved due to the skill of Dr Anthonisz the well known surgeon. Capt Gerry de Silva from C Company (later General and Army commander) took over Monaragala with an additional platoon under Capt Daya Wijesekera who was also from B Company.

I had before the above incident visited the police stations around us to bolster the morale of the policemen as well as to get a feel of the situation. I went to Bibile first. On the way the driver of a health Dept ambulance on his way to Badulla requested to come behind us for protection. At the turn off to the Bibile police station we signalled we were turning right while he turned left, when from the opposite direction came a police jeep which observed the manoeuvre It sped off in great haste to the station. We followed. We saw the jeep skid to a halt and the policemen running into the station. Then there followed a wild yell of "Halt. Hands up". We stopped. LCpl MS (Bada) Mendis my radio operator, (he had been in the Signals platoon with me in 1964/5 and played Battalion rugby and hockey too, said "be careful sir". I got out with my hands up but told Mendis if the police fired he was to fire back. The challenge came "What's your name? Where have you come from? What are you doing here"? I told them. The response was "Are you the Lalin Fernando who plays cricket for the army at Badulla"? Thus did cricket save the day at Bibile in April 1971 and prevented a deadly clash. My interrogator was Inspector Punya de Silva who later became DIG CID. He was the only policeman who faced the insurgency in the Monaragala district with confidence. He had his policemen outside around the station, not in it, at night. This would entice any attackers who were unaware of the situation to go into the station where they could be picked off in the manner they had expected to get the policemen. He asked me just before I left for the LMG that Mendis MS carried. Mendis growled. We left for Lunugala police station which was on a hill. On arrival, after introductions, I observed that one armed PC was circling me as I spoke to the OiC of our moves. The PC had seen that though I claimed to be a captain there were no rank badges to prove it. Before sudden death could descend I told the police that in combat situations we preferred not to wear rank. Before they could begin to think otherwise we moved out. Our next call was at the Ella police station where I saw CSM Gunsekera in charge. I can't remember in which company he was at the time but he was Colour Sergeant when I was OC A Company I was a bit worried about the location of the station as it was at the bottom of a very tall hill. Shortly afterwards CSM Gunsekera quietly took me to a side and told me the most horrifying news to date. Capt Noel Weerakoon

CA, my senior at Sandhurst and vacation buddy in Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia and with whom I played cricket at Sandhurst and for the Army and whose brother was in charge of the Signals Detachment in DLA, had been killed on his way from Vavuniya to Anuradhapura in an ambush. It took some time to digest that the insurgents had become bold enough to target not only the police but the army as well. Having spoken to the troops I left for Wellawaya immediately as dusk was falling. We drove without lights on the vehicle. It was a moon light night thankfully. All the men were worried as we got back and broke the news. I spoke to them to allay any fears they had. I said the insurgents were no match for us in anything from weapons, tactics, numbers, and organization and, resources to popular support and were not a challenge to us. The next morning I got one of the men to fire short bursts with one Bren gun at a target into an empty space to the West of the station. I think it had the desired effect on both our troops and our friends and any lurking JVP sympathisers.

The next night we heard 2 shots being fired from the 3rd section Bren gun post. I rushed to the spot. We had killed a man who had approached the post and not heeded the challenge to halt. The next morning inquiries revealed that the man was of unstable mind and deaf. There was much contrition amongst the men.

As soon as Captain Gerald de Silva had familiarised himself we planned an operation to get the people who ambushed Lt Muthalib. We were told that they were holed out at a school at Liyangolla near Dambagalla. The next day a helicopter carrying Major Mano Madawela (later Maj Gen) who had been B Company Commander before arrived from AHQ with some stores. He was smartly dressed in Bush jacket with silver buttons and was in a hurry to go back. We asked him how he could help us to take on the insurgents at Liyangolla. He said he would go ahead and throw some grenades at the place. We had practised our drills but found that the men would not be more than a foot from each other when forming up to charge. We told them what would happen if a grenade came at us and told them we had to keep 5 yards between each other as we did on exercise. We moved in 2 trucks to Liyangolla. On the way we saw the damage done by Maj Madawella's grenades. They had fallen on a vehicle repair shop about a mile from the target school. When we attacked the school there was no sign of anyone there. We moved into the village and soon realised there was some tension building up. People came out and told us that some insurgents had lived there with their families and showed us where rice stolen from the Coop was hidden in a house belonging to the leader Bandara. We surrounded Bandara's house. Some people ran out into the wooded area near by. I yelled to them to stop running as I feared our men would shoot anything that moved. An old lady signalled someone to run. I shook her hard and asked whether she wanted one of the men to shoot and called out and said that no one would get hurt if they came back. Out came a girl of about 12 years and an even younger boy. . As the stolen rice was found in her house the old lady was arrested by the police for aiding and abetting an insurgent. She pointed out towards the 2 children and asked whether they could come with her too as she

feared the villagers might harm them. When they got ready to move the girl informed us that her watch was missing. Within minutes of my announcing the consequences of stealing, the watch appeared.. On the way back to Monaragala 2 shots were heard. We stopped and I got down and asked as to who had fired. No one answered Sgt Maj Gunsekera (who was earlier at Ella) tried to tell me something but I wouldn't listen as I was angry at what I believed to be very shocking fire discipline. Later at the debrief it appeared that we had actually been fired upon by the insurgents who must have run off when they realised that we were getting out of the vehicles, thinking we would pursue them.

A few days later we planned another move. Capt Gerry de Silva would approach Obbegoda from Ampara with a platoon while I would go with another platoon commanded by Capt Daya Wijesekera from Monaragala, debus on the move and take up ambush position near Obbegoda. The vehicle would carry on to join the oncoming Capt de Silva's platoon and come towards the ambush position Once they passed the spot where our ambush was we expected the insurgents who would be aware of our movements as there were no other vehicle movements as the 24 curfew was still on would come out on to the road thinking there was no one was there. Some time after the ambush was set slightly above the road we heard Capt de Silva's 2 vehicles coming up. We were very tense as we did not want a crossfire incident. Instead there was an anti climax. Capt Daya Wijesekera's spectacles had fallen down onto the road and in trying to retrieve them he slipped on to the road just as the vehicle with Capt de Silva came up. We saw the lead vehicle scout swing his weapon on to Capt Wijesekera. I yelled 'stop' and stood up and the soldier held his fire. The vehicles moved on towards Monaragala as planned and waited for our call. Some moments later as we had predicted some unarmed villagers came up a side road. Cpl Vernon who was covering that road, thinking to win a medal, fired at them with the Bren gun without orders and missed. He did not get the kick he deserved. We saw villagers bolting in all directions except towards us, perhaps fortunately. Our intention had been to catch some of them to get info but not to shoot unless they were armed. A chagrined lot went back to base.

In early May B Company was relieved by C Company under Capt Pakshaweera whose 7 platoon commander was 2/Lt (Bushido) Karunaratne (ex PMA) who I first met in 1964 in Pakistan when I attended the RSO's course in Rawalpindi He was in the first intake of PMA Officer Cadets. Bushido was an excellent wrestler and ensured we won the Army championship. He later moved on to Malaysia and for some time was in the personal staff of the reigning King which post is rotated amongst the various state Sultans.

**Post script** In 1989 GW troops under Maj Hiran Halangoda whose father had been founding CO served in the Moneragala district. He was under pressure to wantonly kill civilian suspects which he did not do much to the anger of the powers that were. GW was and would always remain a proud, brave and honourable regiment loved not feared by the people.

