

To Gerry Vaidyasekara of Potuhera

I read your letter "to Kepler Wessels", published in the "Island newspaper" on Saturday 28th August 1993. You have said that it was a great achievement for your grand-children to have had the signatures of Kepler Wessels and his teammates on their autograph albums. The South Africans, you have added, have also posed for a photograph with the children on your request and you continue in the same line to mention that those "Tiny tots" of yours would fondly remember his to their dying day. Obviously Kepler Wessels has become the hero of your grandchildren and of course yours. Isn't that correct?

You know Gerry, this is my 97th day inside a bunker at the FDL of the Karraitive Island in Jaffna. We normally eat sprats/dhal and rice every day. Occasionally we get fresh vegetables. Terrorist attacks are imminent 24 hours a day. The only consolation we have is the newspapers (delivered 2-3 days late) and letters from our beloved ones, in my case from my wife and from my tiny little tot. Whenever I read those letters my heart sinks but I keep on reading them until I get the next one.

My son, 6 years, is waiting for me to take him to "Sathutu Uyana." He hasn't gone out of home other than to school since I left home 3 months and 10 days and after my last leave.

Gerry, I am sure you must be aware that there is a war up here in the North. This war, is fought by the three servicemen and the police. But as a matured person you will understand that this is not their private war. The outcome of this war effects the whole country and hence this "National issue" should be everybody's war.

But, unfortunately it appears that this war has become only the poor soldier's war, who fights under extreme hardships and sometimes with very limited resources and the majority of the nation is completely ignorant and doesn't care too hoots about it.

In my opinion Gerry, for us to win this war everybody has to be totally committed. Not that everybody has to come here and fight, but, at least they must boost up the soldier's morale by their feelings and emotions. The whole nation must respect the servicemen and should be behind them cheering them up until we finish this war. But is it happening now? Leave aside being behind or cheering them up the majority of the nation adopts a very indifferent attitude towards the servicemen. A soldier here is frustrated as his young wife back home is being harassed by thugs in the area.

A soldier amputee with a stick is very rarely (if at all) offered a seat in a private bus. One of the five daughters of a sailor serving here was kidnapped by some youth in area the other day. Whilst the funeral of a Petty Officer who was killed in action was taking place (at Aluthgama) his house was robbed by some thieves in area. How's that, Gerry?

I can write another 100 of such instances but this is how our nation pay tribute to us. In addition there are test matches, Tamashas, musical shows and also in the newspapers letters to Kepler Wessels, thanking him for signing the autographs. What do you think our morale would be Gerry?

You must be in my father's age Gerry. I am sure you don't have any of your children or loved ones who have joined the services and fighting

here in North and East. If that's the case you would not have thought it a big achievement to have posed for a photograph with the South Africans, for then you will be always thinking of your loved one's life.

Gerry, please tell your grandchildren that the real hero of today is not Kepler Wessels or any other cricketer who faced the ball with the bat, helmet, gloves, pads and the ball guard and earns Rs 100/- for every run he scores, but the poor soldier who sometimes faces the enemy without the body armour and shoots the enemy risking his own life and gets absolutely nothing other than his monthly salary.

If we are to win this war, the whole nation has to back us, Gerry. The entire nation must be committed to this. Like the British did in World War II under Winston Churchill. Every citizen must feel that those are their own sons who are fighting here. If we can achieve that, then there won't be any deserters and I am sure we can even form "Kamikazi" groups. As a senior citizen in the country I think you are obliged to assist in achieving that.

Gerry, those tiny tots of yours should be educated in such a manner so that they gradually develop their "national feeling", the "love for motherland". As a grandfather if you can make them national minded from their tender age and if all the children are brought up that way, at least the future of our country will be in safe hands. But it is frustrating to note that you are on the wrong track.

When the soldiers are engaged in a fierce battle in the North to safeguard the sovereignty of your motherland, if you, as a senior citizen contemplates that posing for a photograph with Kepler Wessels from South Africa was a great achievement, what do we think of you, Gerry?

**A totally
disillusioned sailor,
Navy Base
Karainagar.**