

10 Appreciations

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S. H. C. De Silva

S. H. C. De Silva joined the Irrigation Department in 1957 as an Irrigation Engineer and rose to the position of Additional Director of Irrigation in 1985 and retired from the government service in 1988.

He became the President of the Institute of Engineers, Sri Lanka in 1996. He was a member of the Water Resources Board and the Secretary to the National committee on Large Dams, since 1984. In addition to his professional achievements, he held several key positions in the friendship associations of France, the Netherlands and was also the Chairman of the Rain-water Harvesting Forum of Sri Lanka.

He was a member of the Otters swimming club for a long time and used to go for a regular swim every day early in the morning before he attended office. During the recent past he went to the swimming club only on Sundays.

His untimely sudden death occurred on 9th April 2006 in the Otters swimming pool at the age of 79 years. This sudden death prompted me to pen few words about S. H. C. De Silva in order to appreciate his services. S. H. C. De Silva was born in 1928, Magalle, Galle. His father, Senbukuttige Coranelis Silva was a businessman in Kinston, Jamaica, came back to Galle and got married to Margret Ediriweera from Devinuwara (Don-dra). When the eldest son was born, he was named Henry Coranelis to remember Margret Ediriweera's brother Henry and father's first name Coranelis. S. H. C. De Silva's Magalle home was known as Magalle Walawwa.

Young S. H. C. De Silva first studied at St. Aloysius College, Galle and later in Mahinda College, Galle. Then he went to Ananda College, Colombo. From Ananda he went to Jaffna College and then he was selected to enter the University of Colombo to read for a degree in Science. As his interest was to do engineering after entering the faculty of science, he went to UK to do Engineering.

After completion of the BSc.

degree in Civil Engineering in 1956, he came back to Sri Lanka in 1956. He worked as an Engineer for Socoman, French firm for a brief period and then joined the prestigious Irrigation Department in 1957.

S. H. C. De Silva fondly remembered his first appointment in the Irrigation Department and I would like to express his feelings using his own words.

"I was appointed as an Engineer in the Irrigation Department in 1957 and was posted to the Pavatkulam Reservoir Project in the Vavuniya District in the North.

I took a mosquito net and a water filter with me to Pavatkulam as advised by my elders. To reach the Pavatkulam Scheme, one has to travel 3 miles from Vavuniya along the Vavuniya-Mannar road, then turn left at the junction there and to travel 8 miles along the cart track to reach the scheme.

A. Maheswaran was the Irrigation Engineer in charge of the project at that time. N. Periyathamby was the Divisional Irrigation Engineer at Vavuniya and A. E. C. de Silva Gunasekara was the Director of Irrigation. N. Gurusamy, Irrigation Engineer was in charge of the construction work of the spill. A. J. P. Ponrajah, was in the D.I.E.'s office at Vavuniya and he was also involved in the sluice design.

In late 1957 the work in the reservoir bund was completed. One or two days before the Christmas, there were heavy downpours throughout the island, which later led to floods and damage many reservoirs in the country. Pavatkulam area too experienced heavy rainfall. During this flood S. H. C. De Silva had been instructed by Maheswaran to fill up a sink hole in the Pavatkulam bund in the night with torch light and he narrated this incident with humour.

"At bout 4.00 a.m. there was a heavy knock on my door. Maheswaran had come to my quarters in his jeep.

He was dressed in shorts and hat. He said that the water level was rising quickly and asked me to attend to a sink hole which had developed near the spill at

the Right Bank end of the bund. We started filling the sink hole with 20 labourers, but it was a never-ending task. It was raining heavily and the labour force was gradually depleting without my knowledge when I was busy with the job. After a few hours, I noticed that there were only thirteen of them working and the rest had vanished. In the meantime a driver named Seeman came shouting "Sir, your car is about to be taken away by the floods, please come and rescue it." I asked him to do whatever he could do, as I was busy and couldn't leave the place. At about 10.00 a.m. I was left with only six labourers."

After the unsuccessful attempt to repair the sink hole, he went back to his mud walled quarters. From the following it appears that S. H. C. De Silva had been a heavy smoker at that time.

One evening about 50-60 labourers gathered in front of my quarters and started demanding the lorry keys to go to Vavuniya to take part in the campaign. I told them that this was a political problem and tried to pacify them, but they became abusive.

The following morning, I was told that labourers from Padaviya came to Vavuniya in lorries and on their return the Army had confronted them and 10-12 people were shot by the army when they became unruly."

After the widespread communal incidents in all over the country, S. H. C. De Silva was posted to Tangalle Divisional Irrigation Engineers (D.I.E.'s) office. There after he worked at Embilipitiya and then transferred to Ratnapura, Padaviya and Colombo as Divisional Irrigation Engineer in charge of divisions.

The longest period he served in Irrigation Department was in the Drainage and Reclamation Division with A. T. G. Wickramasuriya and K. D. P. Perera. He was the Divisional Irrigation Engineer, Drainage and Reclamation from 1968 to 1976.

Another remarkable contribution made by S. H. C. De Silva was the extension of Kaltota scheme in 1961 when he was IE Ratnapura. The scope of the scheme was expanded from orig-

inal 700 acs to 2268 acs. This work dragged on beyond the agreed date of water issue in 1960 and colonists became restless and sent telegrams to the Minister of Lands. Mudiyanse Tennakoon (Podi Puta) was the acting Minister and after his personal inspection of Kaltota scheme, IE Ratnapura had been asked to come to the ministry to meet him in Colombo with the Director of Irrigation on 23rd of August. Silva Gunasekara was out of the country and therefore the Acting DI, S. Arumugam accompanied S. H. C. De Silva to the Minister.

According S. H. C. De Silva, the acting minister did not allow the DI to explain the position and it was one way of harangue for a full hour of allegations of mishandling, delay and corruption. Finally the ID was given the opportunity to talk posing the question, "can you give water for Maha before September 25th? Admist all the brickbats and wild allegations, Mr. Arumugam used only one sentence in replying "We will issue water". The gravity of this statement shook the IE Ratnapura as the balance work to issue water was unbelievable. However to the surprise of the Irrigation staff, Arumugam arrived at Kaltota on 25th early morning with his wife to issue water knowing the capability and dedication of Irrigation Engineer who was in charge of Kaltota scheme at that time.

S. H. C. De Silva, led a full life and his sudden death created a vacuum among the engineers who deals with water resources engineering.

He was one of the most innocent, but know legible engineer with highest level of dedication and devotion to work. I join with my colleagues of the Irrigation Department who shaped up their life with good traditions to offer his wife and son our deepest sympathies. May S. H. C. De Silva attain Nibbana.

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