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ABSTRACT

In July 2001, the impregnable Air Base of Sri Lanka (SLAF Katunayake) fell into the hands of the LTTE. The ultimate destruction of the majority of flying machines and the International Aircraft were so rapid that one might have doubts about the competency of the defenders that were entrusted with the mission to defend this Base. One possible explanation for this military setback could be due to the poor understanding of the value of defence operations. In this case the results of this disaster were incalculable. The myth of the training supremacy, the advantage of technology, the prestige and competence of Air Force military professionalism were shattered. Many an Aircraft was lost and many more suffered damages in twenty-three years of misery under the separatist war. From this historical recount, the lesson that needs to be learnt is the value and importance of defence in military operations at Air Bases.

The basis for this research is based on an in-depth study of the Air Base attacks that have taken place so far around the world and then through a critical evaluation of the findings of the previous attacks on the SLAF Air Bases and the training conducted with regard to the Air Base defences.

"The overall efficiency of an Air Force is more likely to be effected by the knowledge and skills of its personnel than by any other factors. Therefore the Air Force has to continuously strive to create and maintain competent officers and other ranks so as to maintain and enhance its combat effectiveness. Hence systematic efforts need to be made to plan, implement and monitor the training process, which will ensure the necessary transformation of individuals to what they should be from 'what they are'. The challengers posed to the Air Force and training systems adopted to meet this will dictate the planning and execution of proper training. The leaders in the chain of command are required to plan and conduct training as they want to achieve highest performance in their respective areas of responsibility".

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Training should improve the airman's knowledge and battle skills, attitudes and behaviour needed to perform tasks and self-confidence and physical/ mental fitness required for envisaged roles. "The development of initiative and leadership qualities must be given top priority together with discipline to honour the laws of the country, laws of armed conflict, human rights and to improve public perception of the Air Force. Training will always remain the military's top priority because it is the cornerstone of combat readiness".

As per the above statement the Air Force defence elements totally rely on training for the achievement of its objectives in the highest possible manner.

In conclusion, attacks by small forces with the limited objective of destroying aircraft succeeded in destroying or damaging over 2,000 aircraft between 1940 and 2002. Such attacks are powerful testimony to the effectiveness of small units against typical air base defences and offer a sobering precedent for those responsible for defending SLAF bases against them. The researcher repeatedly voiced similar sentiments during his involvement with the SLAF's one of the most vulnerable areas (VA), which gave protection to the most sophisticated acquisition of fighters the SLAF possessed.

Given the numerous occurrences, global distribution, and recentness of ground attacks on air bases, it is surprising that history- lapses of those defences have not been published. This paper is intended to begin filling that void by bringing together in one-document descriptions and analyses of air base attacks over the past 50 years in order to evaluate the applicability of training for the defences of Air Bases.

It is hoped that these historical insights will be helpful to SLAF officers responsible for planning and executing air base defence today and in the future.