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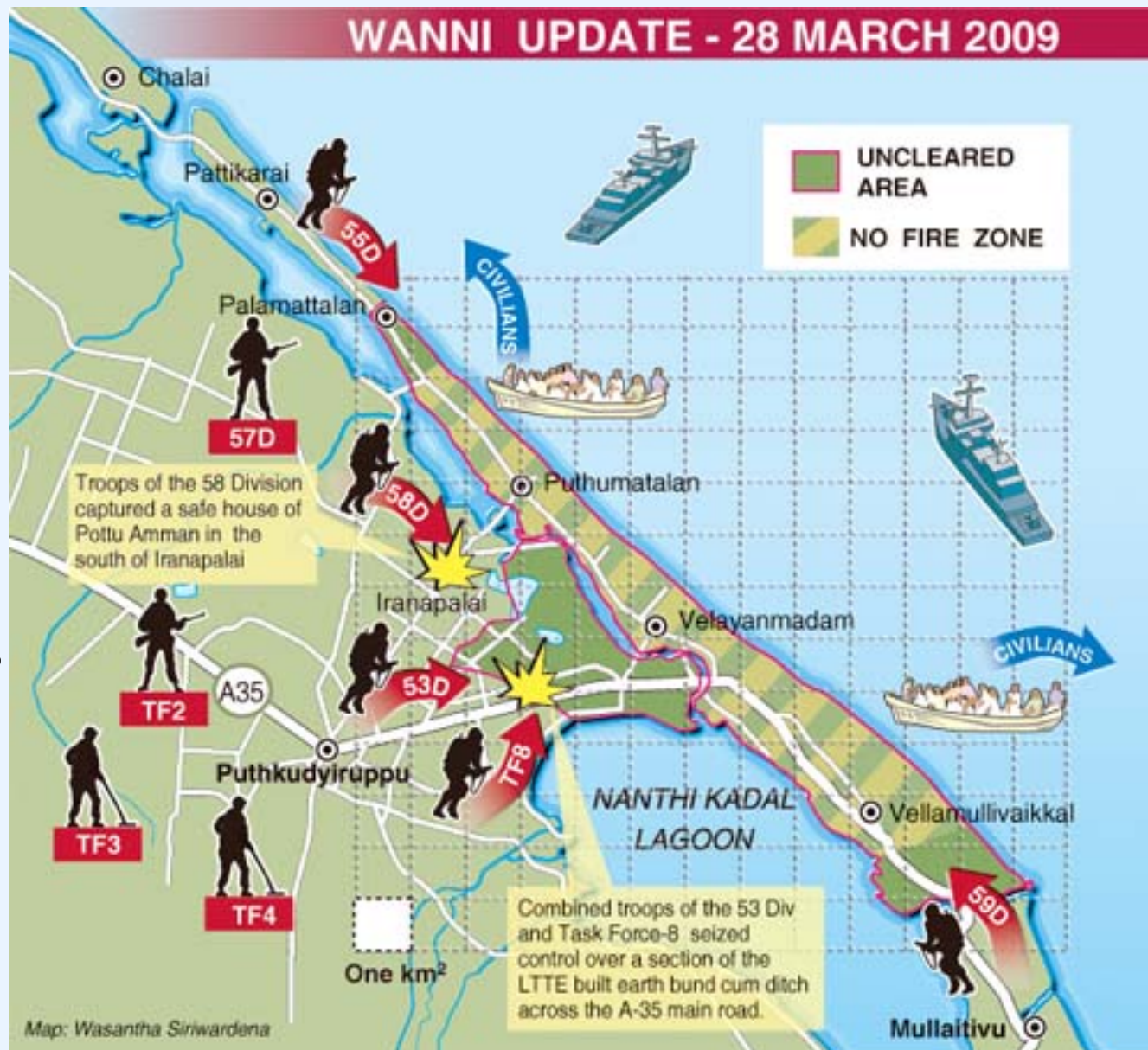


REBEL'S LAST DITCH STAND

Among the surrendeers was a 'Lt Col.' of the Tiger intelligence wing, who had worked under its Deputy Leader Kapil Amman. He surrendered with his family. In addition, a woman 'Major', who had been the head of a Tiger training school, OIC of its Wattakachchi police station Gunaratnam Kuneshwaran and 504 other senior Tiger cadres escaped with civilians during the past 10 days and surrendered to 58 Division. Among these, 63 Tiger cadres surrendered on March 16, 50 on March 24, and were correctly picked out from among the escaping civilians, by intelligence, and handed over to the Police for rehabilitation

By Tissa Ravindra Perera

The LTTE, realising its fate, put up some of its fiercest resistance this week, not seen in the earlier battle for Kilinochchi, but the brave security forces (SF) steadily continued to grind forward



Dwindling Tiger habitat

By Friday (27), other than the 'No Fire' (NF) zone on the Mullaitivu coast, there was left only another four sq. km. area under the LTTE in Pudukudyirippu East. The task of liberating this last stretch has been undertaken by 58 Division under Brig. Shavendra Silva, 53 Division under Maj. Gen. Kamal Guneratne and Task Force VIII under Col. G.V. Ravipriya. In Iranapalai East, 58-1 Brigade under Lt. Col. Deshapriya Gunawardene and 58-2 Brigade under Lt. Col. Sanjaya Wanigasingha, were moving from North to South and West to East, respectively.

58 Division is now within 400 metres of the Pudumattalan NF zone, in a three km. wide frontage.

Meanwhile, 53 Division's 68-1 Brigade under Lt. Col. Lalantha Gamage and Task Force VIII's 68-1 Brigade under Lt. Col. Subashana Welikala, are advancing on Pudukudyirippu East.

55 Division under Brig. Prasanna de Silva, is advancing from North Pudumattalan to South Pudumattalan, aiming to capture a two km. stretch remaining on this front. In this task 55-3 Brigade under Col. Mahinda Weerasuriya, has been supplemented by the newly formed 55-4 Brigade under Col. D.K. Jayatilleke.

Troops from five Brigades, belonging to the four divisions, are now engaged in completing the capture of the entire Pudukudyirippu region. Once they complete this task, they would then be left with only the liberation of the trapped civilians in the 12 sq. km NF zone, from the clutches of terrorists.

Early this week, SF were able to get a clear view of a top Tiger leader being driven in a jeep, with armed guards escorting it on two motorcycles, but there was nothing the soldiers could do, since they were under orders not to fire into the NF zone.

'Cats' among the 'pigeons'

However, a large number of civilians, as well as some Tiger leaders, were able to escape from the NF zone this week, and surrendered to the forces.

Among the surrendeers was a 'Lt Col.' of the Tiger intelligence wing, who had worked under its Deputy Leader Kapil Amman. He surrendered with his family. In addition, a woman 'Major', who had been the head of a Tiger training school, OIC of its Wattakachchi police station Gunaratnam Kuneshwaran and 504 other senior Tiger cadres escaped with civilians during the past 10 days and surrendered to 58 Division. Among these, 63 Tiger cadres surrendered on March 16, 50 on March 24, and were correctly picked out from among the escaping civilians, by intelligence, and handed over to the Police for rehabilitation.

Many of those who surrendered belonged to top LTTE units such as Charles Anthony, Radha, Imran, Pandiyan, Sodiya, Malathi, Kutti, Sri Mortar and intelligence.

The failure of the Vavuniya Police to reveal proper details of these surrendees and the surrendees themselves pleadings about their personal problems, at the time of being produced in Court, has resulted in many of the detainees being sent to IDP camps. SF commanders have warned such careless handling of hardcore Tiger surrendees could lead to a grave situation, with the possibility of them reorganising terrorist activities from within these camps.

LTTE black market in NF zone

Meanwhile, in the last few days, among the civilians fleeing from LTTE clutches, has been the Asst. Govt. Agent Pooneryn, with his family, some Indian fishermen who had been in Tiger captivity and a Tamil family born in Malaysia. Fleeing civilians continue to report that all the food sent via the Red Cross, to civilians in the Pudumattalan NF zone, is taken charge by the Tigers.

Due to this, the Tigers distribute food according to work done for the outfit, with people willing to hand over their children to the Tigers and those digging trenches, getting preference.

Under the circumstances, the LTTE is also operating a brisk black market in the NF zone controlled by them. The civilians are sold a kilo of rice at Rs 200, dhal at Rs 150, Rs 350 for litre of kerosene, coconut oil at Rs 500, betel leaf at Rs 100, soap at Rs 50, a card of Panadol at Rs 160, set of torch batteries at Rs 850 and a kilo of brinjals at Rs 200.

Tiger 'IGP' taken away handcuffed

Fleeing civilians, who crossed over on March 26, have revealed that the Tiger political leader and Police Chief S. Nadesan had been caught trying to flee with his family, three days earlier, and led away in hand cuffs.

Recently, Nadesan, unable to face the Forces onslaught, was quoted as saying that, they were willing to enter into unconditional talks with the Government.

Digging in, digging deep

In recent weeks, Nadesan, along with Pottu Amman, addressed public meetings and gave assurances that they would regain areas lost in battle, and appealed for public help to capture those who deserted Tiger ranks. In a move to halt the exodus of civilians, the Sea Tigers have tightened its patrolling of the coastline of the NF zone

People coming in from the NF zone have also reported seeing a Tiger light aircraft in the Pudumattalan area.

Civilians also informed that the Walayarmadam school has been converted into a fully functional hospital for treating wounded cadres, and its with facilities include an operating theatre.

A high security zone too, has been set up by the Tigers at Wattuvakal in the Vellamullivaikkal area, in the NF zone, for families of the Tigers. Even senior Tigers have been sighted in this zone. The area has been declared out of bounds for other civilians. Tigers have even placed their heavy guns in this zone.

Ditch by ditch

Task Force VIII captured about a 1.5 km area on the Paranthan- Mulaitivu road from West to East on March 21. With this, heavy fighting erupted, as they continued to advance from there.

The 6-81 Brigade, which began the operation early morning last Saturday, completed the task around 11.00 am. Thereby, taking away another area from the enemy.

With this, the Tigers lost the main supply road to Pudukdyirippu from the NF zone.

The seven and five Gemunu Watch took part in this operation to complete the capture of this route.

The 68-2 Brigade this week advanced about 800 metres parallel to Nandikadal lagoon.

55 Division, by this time, was on a narrow stretch of land moving from north to south in the Pudumattlan region. They are two kilometres from the NF zone.

This Division which started out from Muhumalai has advanced 65 km so far. The 55-3 Brigade under Col. Mahinda Weerasuriya and 55-2 under Col. Kapila Udalupola, are the main infantry Brigades under 55 Division.

In the line of fire

Dismantling the enemy's next earth barrier, fell on Lt. Col. Deepal Pusella of 55-3 Brigade, with 7 Vijayaba Regiment (VR) commanded by him.

This earth wall was built to cover the 500 metre-broad strip and it was as high as 10 feet.

The forces, in small groups, carried out reconnaissance on the wall this week too. The forward observation officer for artillery Lt. Chandrajith, with four others, moved up stealthily in search of possible targets in the Tiger defense. Crawling in open areas for about 250 metres, they were spotted by Tiger snipers and fired upon, along with the sniper fire, the LTTE also directed mortar fire at them. Lt. Chandrajith and a soldier died in the enemy fire. The other two in the team were injured. The task of recovering the bodies of the dead and rescuing the injured, without allowing them to fall into enemy hands, fell upon the commanding officer (CO) of Bravo Company of 7 VR, Lt. Tharanga Thusara. The time was around 2.30 pm.

Lt. Tharanga, with four others, left on their mission, but, since it was open terrain, and all Tiger guns were turned in that direction, they too, were fired upon before long.

Capt. Indika Prasanna, seeing what was happening, provided covering fire. In the meantime, Lt. Tharanga succeeded in moving the injured and the dead into a ditch created by an air strike. To extricate themselves from this safe ditch became even more difficult, as the Tigers directed heavy fire at them, during which,

Lt. Tharanga's radio man was killed and Lt. Tharanga himself became dehydrated.

Trapped in the ditch with the dead and the wounded and his surviving two soldiers, he was on the radio asking for help.

The CO organised to send in Capt. Prassanna's platoon. While this was taking place, Capt. Asanga Abrew from Delta Company, who was in charge of defending one side of the FDL, volunteered to lead the recovery mission.

Since these officers and men had been together from Muhumalai, they had become a well knit Unit, looking out for each other. They all wanted to be on this rescue mission. The CO while planning to send Capt. Prasanna's platoon, Capt. Abrew, with two others, jumped into action from another side.

The time was around 4.30pm. Under enemy fire, Capt. Abrew and others managed to get to their colleagues and, while trying to rescue them, Capt. Abrew and a soldier were killed. While they were hit by enemy snipers, more colleagues wanted to rush in due to their brotherly feeling for each other.

At this moment, the Tigers were targeting the Army personnel holed up in the ditch with machine gun fire and also foot operated 38 mm cannons. The Army snipers too, by this time, had bagged 11 Tigers. The Army too had suffered seven dead and 12 wounded.

Meanwhile, 55 Division Commander and others senior officers took charge of the situation and organised adequate counter measures and saved those trapped in the line of enemy fire.

Brig. de Silva recommended Capt. Asanga Abrew be bestowed with the Veera Vickrama Vibushana Award, for volunteering to go and rescue his comrades and dying in battle. In that battle, the Tigers too, suffered heavy losses, and in 12 days lost 65 men.

In this battle, soldiers of 7 VR, R.P. Premasiri, S.R. Pathirana, B.G.A. Lakshitha and M. Kulasinghe made the supreme sacrifice.

