

FLASH
PLAYER.



Single battle that decimated most Tigers

By Tissa Ravindra Perera

Last week saw the worst defeat of the LTTE, with the Security Forces (SF) killing the most number of its leaders in a single battle.

The meticulous planning of the SF, and the bravery of the soldiers, caused Velupillai Prabhakaran (VP) this single biggest loss.



Durga - In Charge Sodhiya Band

Gadafi - Senior Military Leader

Nagesh - Senior Military Leader

Theepan - Senior Military Commander

Vidusha - In Charge Malathi Band

Along with 10 of its senior leaders, 613 Tiger bodies were recovered by the SF, along with a large haul of weapons. This victory enabled the SF to push VP and the other remaining leaders into the 'No Fire' Zone (NFZ).

It was at this moment that, Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, was making plans for one of the biggest hostage rescues in the history of wars.

The next move of the SF would be to free civilians held captive by the Tigers in the 12 sq. km. NFZ.

Troops of 58 Division, under Brig. Shavendra Silva, are already advancing for this purpose. Using public address systems, the troops have been announcing repeatedly to the Tigers, to put down their weapons and surrender, while allowing the civilians to leave the NFZ. The hailers were also used by the SF to direct civilians escaping from the Tigers, into safe routes.

The 11 Sri Lanka Light Infantry (SLLI), under Lt. Col. Kithsiri Ekanayaka, launched this final drive into the NFZ on Thursday night, at the strip of land connecting the mainland and the NFZ, in front of the Nandikadal lagoon.

Knowing it would be disastrous to lose this land approach to the NFZ, the Tigers fought hard to prevent troops from advancing on this front.

As was done in Puthukudyirippu, the SF entered from the rear of the area and cut off the enemy in front, on Thursday around 8.30 p.m.

Even at 3.00 a.m. on Friday, the battle was still raging, the surviving Tigers, knowing the inevitable, blew themselves up. In the end, the forces recovered 61 assault rifles, 7 bodies, 3 walky-talkies and an RPG launcher.



Tigers attack with two battle tanks

The SF defence line advanced to within 100 metres of the NFZ, from its earlier 300 metres, during this heavy firefight, during which, the Tigers deployed two more battle tanks from the NFZ, into the fight.

With heavy rains experienced from early Friday morning and low lying areas close to the lagoon going under water, it was even thought of slowing down the operation

10 SLLI closes in on NFZ

The brave soldiers of 10 SLLI of 58 Division, advanced to within 100 metres of the NFZ to the surprise of the Tigers.

While its Commanding Officer (CO), Lt. Col. Samantha Wickramasena was on leave, its Second-in-Command (2IC), Maj. Shantha Bandara, pressed home with the attack, unexpectedly breaking their lines. When the troops had advanced to within 150 metres from enemy lines, they were able to recover 8 Tiger bodies and their weapons.

When the troops managed to capture the sandy strip of land linking Ampalwanpokkaney area in the NFZ, to Pachchapulmudai in the mainland, amidst heavy fighting, they also managed to build bunkers in neck-deep water, along the lagoon. From the NFZ, the Tigers were hammering the SF with tanks and heavy arms fire, but the SF hung in there.

In the meantime, 58 Division was awaiting orders from the Army Chief, to move its troops into the NFZ. By Friday noon, two civilians fleeing to safety from the NFZ, with 123 others, were shot and wounded by the Tigers. Troops who captured this strip, held on to their newly won positions, weathering heavy enemy fire and the heavy rains.

This stretch being vital, especially, for civilians escaping the NFZ and for troops to enter it, the SF were determined to hang on to it and the Tigers did their utmost to overthrow them.

The 53 Division under Maj. Gen. Kamal Guneratna and Task Force VIII under Col. G.V. Ravipriya were advancing along the North and South of A-35 route, and in parallel to the Nandikadal lagoon, moving towards Wellamulla Waikkal.

The 68-2 Brigade under Lt. Col. Subashana Welikala was rounding Nandikadal lagoon with a security ring, while advancing on that route.

Troops belonging to the Air Mobile Brigade under Col. Tilak Hangilipola, were North of A-35 route, advancing on Wellamulla Waikkal.

55 Division, under Brig. Prasanna de Silva, was advancing from North of Pudumattalan, closing in on the NFZ.

The decision to cut off the final Tiger supply route to Pachchapulmuddai, from the NFZ, at an unexpected moment, resulted in the Tigers suffering the crushing defeat there.

With their last land route cut off, the Tigers were left with a bay shaped area of 1.5 sq. km at Anandapuram, East of Puthukdyirippu, which could not be breached by the Tigers, to make a run to the NFZ.

Brig. Shavendra Silva and Maj. Gen. Kamal Guneratna being on leave, Brig. Chagee Gallage was in charge. And as planned the week before, two Brigades of 58 and 53 Divisions were sent to the Pachchapulmudai junction to corner the Tigers into the bay shaped area.

11 SLLI troops advanced from Alampockeney to Pachchapulmudai within 1.5 km of the Tiger lines.

Lt. Col. Kalpa Sanjeeva commanding 5 Vijayaba Regiment (VR), under 68-1 Brigade, belonging to Task Force VIII, advanced from South Pachchapulmudai to North of it, and joined up with 11 SLLI. On April 2, they advanced unexpectedly from a route unknown to the Tigers, to cut off all Tiger supply routes.

VP escapes to the NFZ

Meanwhile, unknown to the SF, the Tigers themselves were gathering troops in the area for some time, for a major assault. VP too, joined other Tiger leaders there. Fortunately, he had left the location for the NFZ, on March 30, after entrusting the massive attack to other leaders.

By April 1, although the area had been the scene of fighting, the Tigers, with their heavy artillery, were well entrenched in the bay shaped area. It was the intention of the Tigers to try and make the SF retreat about 5 km, by hitting them hard with horizontally targeted artillery. The task of making the forces retreat towards Vishwamadu was undertaken by Theepan and Bhanu.

On April 2, while observing the encircled area of the Tigers from the air, it was observed that, one of their heavy artillery pieces was positioned as close as 300 metres from SF's positions.

By then, 58 Division CO was there with the senior coordinating officer of the Air Force, Grp. Capt. Sumangala Dias

and Brig. Priyantha Napagoda, CO of the Artillery Regiment.

Meanwhile, the Army Chief, after viewing aerial photographs, immediately ordered Brig. Napagoda to take out the Tiger artillery gun with artillery fire.

Tiger artillery attacked

Attack on the Tiger artillery began immediately, and the tractor moving the big gun was hit and demobilised. From the air too, the heavy gun was attacked by jets.

By April 4, the Tigers, using two more artillery pieces, began firing from the encircled area. "One 130 mm gun fired 43 shells at the Gajaba Regiment (GR) troops alone. Although the troops came under fierce pounding, the enemy was unable to break the defence lines, as the soldiers somehow held on.

With fighting continuing for three days, Pottu Amman tried to rescue trapped Tiger cadres without success. All what he had planned was in vain.

The 15 Battalion of the Artillery Regiment under Lt. Col. Ajith Colombathanthri and Fifth Armour under Lt. Col. Sarada Samarakoon attacked the enemy relentlessly, in support of ground troops, to decimate the trapped Tigers.

The crucial, round-the-clock air surveillance by the UAVs and Beachcraft were immensely helpful to the ground troops to target enemy positions within the encircled area.

On the orders of the Army Chief, Special Forces CO, Col. Athula Kodippilli too, deployed his units in support of the troops already there.

The Special Forces also laid a second defensive ring around the encircled Tigers at Anandapuram, where the Tigers were holed.

The First, Second, Third and Fourth Battalions of the Special Forces, deployed their famed eight-man teams to cover the entire region, so that, there was no chance of either the Tigers breaking out or into the encircled region.

47 Tigers killed and arms recovered

The 20 GR troops, who were guarding the security ring, were attacked on April 5, around 1.30 a.m., by 200-300 Tiger cadres backed by maximum firepower, trying to break through the security ring. The enemy had called out "We are SF", to fool the troops into allowing them to break through the ring. The troops, undeterred, had beaten back the massive assault on their position. But, just prior to it, the First Battalion of the Special Forces, under Maj. Mahinda Ranasingha, was successful in gunning down 47 Tigers.

The Tigers' second assault was on positions held by troops of 6 GR and 5 VR. The Second Special Forces under Maj. Vipula Ihalage, was on the second security ring in the area. The enemy attack launched around 1.30 a.m. was successfully repulsed by the Special Forces. After a fierce encounter, the Special Forces recovered 44 enemy bodies from the area.

90 Tiger bodies recovered

Due to the Special Forces using the security ring to stop Tiger efforts to break out from or penetrate into the encircled area, they were able to recover 90 enemy bodies and many weapons after the battle. Four brave Special Forces personnel sacrificed their lives in this massive task, and 12, including Sgt Thushara, who fought fearlessly, were wounded.

20 GR under Maj. Kumara Pieris, from the North of the encircled area, 12 GR under Maj. Saliya Amunugama, from the South and 9 Gemunu Watch (GW) under Lt. Col. Lal Chandrasiri from the West, were set to penetrate enemy lines. By April 5, the Tigers, trapped in this two sq. km. area, were completely overrun by the SF. The fighting lasted three days, and by 4.30 a.m., April 5, it was all over. The scene of the final battle also had their radar station. Until April 4, their fight had been directed by Bhanu, Vidusha and Dhurga.

Tigers taken alive from their camps

Amidst heavy fighting, GR troops, that got inside Tiger positions, took many enemy prisoners. Delta Company of 12 GR, under Lt. Weerasinghe, and Bravo Company, under Capt. Kumarasinghe, broke into one position and captured the Tiger cadres with their weapons. A team led by Cpl. Gunawardana was the first to penetrate this enemy position amidst heavy fighting.

They recovered a large haul of weapons, including 85mm and 130 mm mortar and artillery guns.

It was revealed that, the Tiger cadres who surrendered, have had no proper food, and had been eating fried gram and murukku.

20 GR had met the brunt of the Tiger attack.

The 6 GR troops of 53 Division and 5 VR and 7 GW of Task Force VIII, were deployed South of the area, where the

Tigers were trapped.

Troops of 5 VR came under heavy fire on the night of April 4, as Tiger intelligence chief Pottu Amman attacked from the NFZ, while Bhanu led a simultaneous assault from inside.

Though the firing continued from the previous day, on April 4, seven desperate attacks were launched by the enemy. The 5 VR's Alpha Company under Maj. Roshan Silva, faced this onslaught.

The fighting continued from Friday to Saturday evening, after which, 39 Tiger bodies were recovered. Another 20 more were found in front of their positions. Prized enemy weapons recovered here included, a 30mm foot operated cannon, 3 anti aircraft guns, 7 Multi-purpose Machine Guns, 3 LMGs, 43 T-56s, 6 T-81s, 4 M-16s, 2 x 40mm grenades launchers, 3 RPG launchers and 28 walky-talkies.

After the previous day's fighting, 62 Tiger bodies, 26 T-56s, 10 walky-talkies and other weapons were found.

Sharpshooters kill 23 Tigers

This week also witnessed the killing of 23 Tigers in a single day, by sharpshooters brought in from the Diyatalawa Training School and placed with 6 GR. Those killed by sniper fire were mainly those who came to rescue trapped Tigers.



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