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# END OF AN ERA OF TERROR

**By Tissa Ravindra Perera**

The Security forces gained a historic victory by virtually wiping out the LTTE, considered the world's most formidable terrorist outfit, killing its ruthless leader Prabhakaran, over 70 top military wing leaders, as well as several thousands of its hardcore cadres in the process.

Government troops under Army Chief General Sarath Fonseka will go into the annals of world military victories for also the unprecedented achievement of killing all top leaders of a terrorist organisation, including its supreme, in one strike, after cornering them into a small area. This also can be seen as a result of President Mahinda Rajapaksa as Commander-in-Chief and Gotabhaya Rajapaksa as Secretary of Defence, giving the Army Commander a free hand to carry out the fight against the terrorists to an end, without giving in to foreign pressures.

Thus finished off 'Eelam War IV' in less than three years, safeguarding the territorial integrity of the country. This victory is the outcome of a war fought with blood, sweat and immense sacrifice of life.

Security authorities believed that, the Tigers cornered in the last bit of land, would move towards Nandikadal lagoon, in a bid to escape death staring in their faces.

Brigade 68-1 under Lt. Col. Lalantha Gamage and 68-2 under Lt. Col. Subashana Welikala, stood guard over the Nandikadal lagoon, prepared for any kind of attack.

On May 17, the Tigers were preparing for the inevitable final battle.

On the night of May 15, 11 SLLI led by Lt. Col. Kithsiri Ekanayaka, under 58 Division commanded by Brig. Shavendra Silva, north of Vellamullavaikal, and 11 GW under Lt. Col. Thisantha Fernando under Brig. Prasanna de Silva, from the direction of Mulativu were advancing for the final assault. These two Brigades, after a fierce battle at the dawn of May 16, had gained a km of shoreline of Mulativu beach from the Tigers.

Thereafter, troops of the 59 Division and 53 Division under Maj. Gen. Kamal Guneratne on the edges of Nandikadal lagoon parallel to A 35 route, advanced in the hope of cornering the Tigers there. The two Brigades dug in only 400 metres from each other.

The only way for the Tigers to escape was to make a dash to the Mulativu jungles, after breaching the forward defence line (FDL) on the South. Troops of 19 SLLI of 59 Division and 5 VR of Brigade 68-2, anticipating this move, went into action, crushing the planned Tiger attack, codenamed 'Anchor One', killing several hundred Tigers. (Full report available separately)

The next move on the Tiger agenda was to advance from Karaimullavaikal, along the lagoon upwards, and penetrate the Army FDLs.

### Special Forces in final battle

By this time the Special Forces (SF) under Col. Athula Kodipilli, had been instructed by the Army Chief to join the final battle at Vellamullavaikal, the last Tiger fortress, for the purpose of destroying all Tiger leaders.

Both 1 SF under Maj. Mahinda Ranasinghe and 2 SF under Maj. Vipulatilaka Ihalage were called up for this battle. By Sunday (17), Golf Squad under Capt. Chaminda Gunasekera, Romeo Squad under Capt. Kavinda Abeywardene, all of 1SF, and Echo Squad under Maj. Kosala Wijekone, Delta Squad under Capt. Lasantha Ratnasekera and Hotel Squad under Maj. Nihal of 2 SF, were also deployed in battle.

These squadrons of the SF entered the last Tiger fortress by 3:30 am on Monday (18) and began the final assault. While, armoured vehicles commanded by Col. Kodipilli were advancing on the A35 for battle in the No Fire Zone (NFZ), a group of soldiers came running towards them. They were troops under fire from Tiger cadres who had breached the FDL of 17 GW Front. They had been wounded in the attack.

The Brigade Commander immediately ordered the Unicorn following behind, to take the wounded to a safe point to be treated. At this time, SF troops were engaged in fierce battle, where the Tiger supremo had earlier been holed up. SF troops using superior firepower on suicide bombers, managed to penetrate the Tigers' last fortress.

Giving their leader a new lease of life, the Tiger cadres were engaged in fierce battle using suicide bombers, with the idea of gaining time for their leader to escape towards the lagoon. 140 Tiger cadres, including Nadesan, Pullidevan, Tiger 'IGP' Illango and armour chief Ramesh were engaged in this battle. Although troops faced 30 suicide attacks from the Tigers, yet they managed to strategically neutralise their capacity to attack, and enter the fortress. The Tigers, with no cover or quarter to escape, soon fell victim to the superior firepower of the troops.



By this time, the SF had suffered three dead and 12 wounded. They were unable to get the wounded to Pudukudyirruppu by the A35, since the Tigers had gained their old FDL and bunker line by forcing 17 GW to retreat from their point of engagement.

Echo Squad was successful in gaining hold of the route once more.

The SF, which attacked and entered the last fortress, by then, had killed 106 members of Prabhakaran's armoured unit. The next day (19), the SF managed to kill another 32 Tiger cadres. Those killed on May 18 included Tiger leaders Nadesan, Pullidevan, Illango and Ramesh.

### **The Commando Battalion engaged**

The Commando's under Col. Ralph Nugera, a force called up for emergencies, was inducted into battle immediately. 1 Commando under Maj. Krishantha Gnanaratne, 2 Commando under Maj. Shyamal Silva and 5 Commando under Lt. Col. Anil Samarasiri, were called up immediately.

Echo Company (Cy) under Maj. Aruna Wijekone and Bravo Cy. under Maj. Nishantha Edinadura of 5 Commando that was in Kevil area, were called up to the battlefield.

Hotel Cy. under Maj. Jaliya Dehideniya, Bravo Cy. under Maj. Ravi Ratnayaka and Golf Cy. under Lt. Korala of 2 Commando, Bravo Cy under Maj. Suranga Manatunga, Echo Cy. under Maj. Rajitha Bandara of 1 Commando joined the battle. They were flown in by MI 17 chopper from Kumalamunai and Chundikulam, where they were stationed. These Commandos had been trained in hostage release, and were brought in case such a situation should arise within the Tiger fortress.

The Tiger leader began his trek to freedom along the lagoon, from Vellamullavaikal to Karaimullavaikal, on the night of May 17.

The Tiger leaders were moving along the shores of the lagoon, in the direction of the checkpoint where civilians, with their families, were being brought. Their intention was to escape in the guise of civilians, after overrunning the checkpoint.

17 GW under Lt. Col. Keerthi Kottewatta were deployed at the checkpoint, because of probable terror attacks, and now it was further secured.

68-1 Brigade under STF commanded by Col. G.V. Ravipriya under the direction of Maj. Gen. Kamal Guneratna Commander of 53 Division, was securing the defence line.

The movement of more than a hundred people, along the lagoon shoreline, four feet deep, was being observed by Capt. Abeyratna at 11:00 pm on May 17. Capt. Abeyratne, addressing those approaching, informed them that it was not possible to let them in at night, and to wait in the islet nearby and approach by dawn.

Capt. Abeyratne seeing them come back at 2:45 am, called up his Commander and informed him of the situation "These people are back, what do I do"? The Capt. was advised to keep them waiting till early morning.

"We have wounded among us, take us inside" responded the Tigers, disguised as civilians, sternly.

The Tigers were armed, ready to attack in the dark.

The Capt., unaware of the Tiger ploy, called his Commander once more. "These fellows are too close, what should I do" Lt. Col. Kottewatta's responded: "Fire two shots in the air to scare them". The time was around 3:20 am.

Suddenly the line of bunkers came under fire and Capt. Abeyratna ran inside for cover.

The troops used full fire power on the Tigers disguised as civilians. Under fire, the Tiger leaders breached two bunkers and tried to creep in. By then, there were eight wounded troops in two forward bunkers.

From the place that had been breached, 15 Tigers, including Charles Anthony (the Tiger leader's son) Ratnam master (Prabhakaran's security chief of Rada brigade) and Gautam (intelligence chief) managed to infiltrate.

The rearguard provided by 12 SR and 5G W attacked this group.

Charles Anthony was felled by a shot from L/Cpl Kurundugahapitiya.

Thereafter, the 17 GW regrouped and attacked, killing 25 Tiger leaders including 18 Tiger 'Lt. Cols'.

In the ensuing clearing operation, a satellite phone and several other military items were found on Charles Anthony. A briefcase containing Charles Anthony's personal letters and documents, showing Tiger arms deals, were found near Ratnam master. Sgt. Udayapala, Cpl. Jayasekera and Cpl. Mahesh of Bravo Cy. of 17 GW led by Lt. Udayapala, were involved in the killing of Ratnam master.

17 GW had completed their battle by the dawn of May 19. This battalion found a gun of type 57 JVB, with a carving T.V. K002, suspected of belonging to second-in-command of the Tigers. Ownership of this weapon could not be ascertained.

1, 2 and 5 Commandos were deployed to cover the entire area, until 1:00 am on May 18. Fighting went on through the night.

The ambulance used for transporting wounded soldiers of Brigade 68-2 was taken over by the Tigers after a fight. Its driver Sld. Sandaruwan and other soldiers, though wounded, escaped back to camp.

Had the Tiger leaders driven away in this ambulance, they might have been able to go up to Kilinochchi, as wounded soldiers being transported. But the Commandos seized it back from them. At this point, there was suspicion that, one of the burnt bodies was that of the Tiger supremo.

The confusion was due to the Tigers announcing over hand sets, that the leader died while escaping in the ambulance. After the battle on May 18, 68-2 Brigade found the body of Madavan master, who had a close resemblance to Prabhakaran, that's what made them think it was that of the leader.

1 Commando had found about 70 Tiger bodies. In the entire area, there were 150 bodies scattered.

During the ensuing fierce fight, Prabhakaran, with 24 of his security men, entered one of the six islets located in the Nandikadal lagoon. Capt. Sanjeeva Goonetilake and his troops were taking pot shots at various targets with 120mm medium arms. Maj. Bandula Weragama took targets using the guns of his tank.

Prabhakaran, who was without food since the night of May 18, was hiding in the mangroves in the islet, knee deep in water. The Commandos attacked this group in the night.

On May 19, it was confirmed that Prabhakaran was lying injured, after the attacks during the night. A grenade attack on them had injured Prabhakaran in the chest area.

Troops of 4 VR were deployed to survey the area. The unit led by Sgt. Muthubanda advanced firing their weapons. Two of Prabhakaran's security men had tried to approach troops to surrender, and were shot dead by other security men of his group. By then, Prabhakaran's security men were low on ammunition.

While the Commandos attacked them from the flanks, 4 VR came in from the middle and advanced towards the target. In the end, the next morning (19), around 10:00 am, 4 VR discovered Prabhakaran's body lying in the mangroves with

gunshot wounds to the head. Bodies of his security men were lying in the four corners. His medicinal drugs too, were strewn there. Prabhakaran's pistol, belt and satellite phone were found by 1 Commando battalion.

The Commandos found the body of Sea Tiger chief Soosai, 500 metres away. 53 Division was responsible for the deaths of Bhanu, Jeyam, Soosai, Pottu Amman and his son Maj. Parthipan in these mangroves. The Commandos discovered 52 bodies, following the battle. Former Tiger leader Karuna Amman and Prabhakaran's media chief Daya master, were sent by the Government to identify the body of Prabhakaran. Karuna Aman recognised and identified his former commander dressed in a loin cloth for the identity parade, from the wart on his right leg, a birthmark known to him.

The Army Chief travelled to Kilinochchi on Friday (22), to congratulate, in person, the brave soldiers who participated in this epic victory.

He thanked all those who participated in this war, which they managed to finish in a short period of two years and 10 months, killing 22,000 of the enemy, including Prabhakaran, who, for the past 33 years, spread terror in this country.

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