

Medals and Ribbons

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A SALUTE TO OUR VALIANT WARRIORS

OPERATION PAWAN

Reverses to Recovery to Restoration of Writ

The Man at the Helm

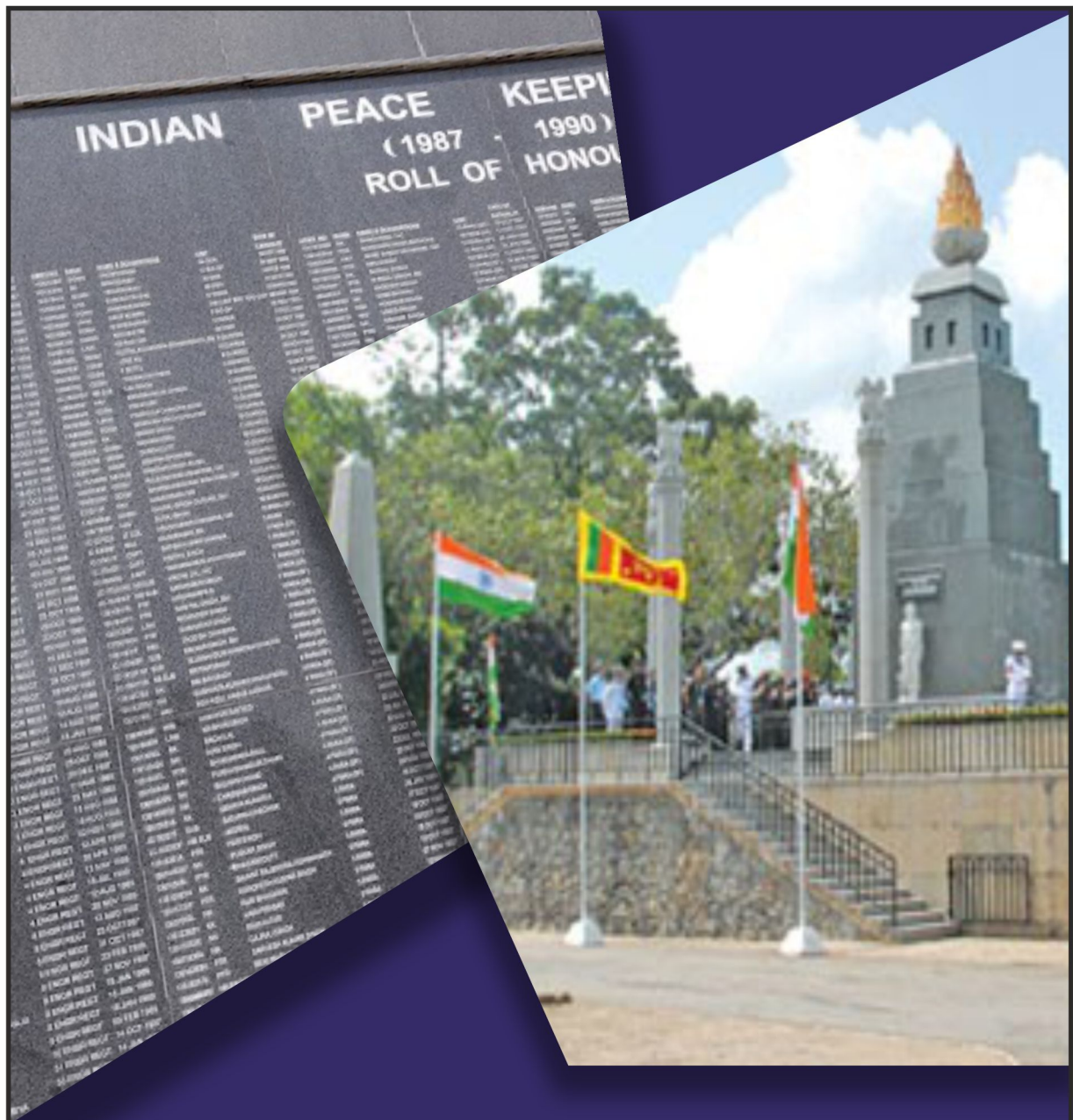
In Conversation with Lt Gen AS Kalkat,
Overall Force Commander

Jaffna University

Descent Into the
Maelstrom

Param Vir Major Parameswaran

A Tribute



THE **IPKF** MEMORIAL COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

A befitting recognition of the valour and sacrifice of over 1200 bravehearts of the Indian Armed Forces, who laid down their lives on Sri Lankan soil, during OPERATION PAWAN between 1987 and 1990.

Col David Devasahayam



War causes tumultuous upheaval in society, as is being witnessed today in Ukraine, and many near and dear ones sacrifice their lives. For us military men the grief is more profound, because we often personally know many of the officers and men who are killed in action. In Operation PAWAN in Sri Lanka, the Indian Armed Forces lost over 1200 men – two of them were very close to my heart.



Capt YV Prasad

Captain YV Prasad, 1 Para Commando, was killed in action on 18th September 1988 in the jungles along the Mullaitivu Coast. As course-mates in Alpha Squadron, National Defence Academy, we shared many rigours together for three years; and often met up

later during military training courses while maintaining letter correspondence. YV (Thambi as we called him) was undoubtedly a gallant, dedicated daredevil – and all of us from the 56th course, Alpha Squadron miss him dearly.

Captain Sanjay Dogra, 1 Maratha Light Infantry (Jangi Paltan), was a brilliant cadet and was awarded the Sword of Honour at Indian Military Academy, Dehradun. I was his Weapons Instructor during the Young Officers' Course and was like a mentor to him. He went on to also be the Best Young Officer in that Young Officers Course. He was killed in an ambush near Jaffna on 13th January 1989 – a tragic 'Friday the 13th'.



Capt Sanjay Dogra

The merits and demerits of inducting the Indian Armed Forces into Sri Lanka in 1987 post signing of the Indo Sri Lanka Accord on 29th July 1987 has often been debated. I met up with Lt Gen A S Kalkat, my Regimental stalwart and the Overall Force Commander of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka. We discussed the strategic outcomes of Operation PAWAN, and we carry the interaction in this issue. Notwithstanding the political goals of the military intervention, it is a fact that Indian soldiers, sailors and airmen fought with valour and commitment for the honour of their units, their Armed Forces and their country – and restored governance and order in a civil war ridden turbulent area. We salute their bravery and fortitude, and hence decided to bring forth various action stories of all the three services from Operation PAWAN in Medals and Ribbons.

I am sure our readers will get a fair idea of the prevalent operational environment at that time and find our detailed compilation of personal accounts interesting.



CONTENTS

Vol.03 • Issue 01 • Oct '22 - Dec '22

A Walk Through Operation PAWAN 08

by Lt Gen J S Sandhu (Retd)

A chronology of major events which unfolded before and during the operations of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka.

A Political Imbroglio, A Military Intervention – The Big Picture 10

by Col R S Sidhu (Retd)

An evaluation of the Indo – Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987, which set in motion the operations of the Indian Armed Forces in Sri Lanka.



Across the Palk Straits – A Transport Jock Reminisces 15

by Wg Cdr SR Swarup (Retd)

A glimpse of the hectic schedules of transport pilots as they flew into Sri Lanka on a daily basis to sustain the troops.

The Man at the Helm of IPKF 18

by Col David Devasabayam (Retd)

An interaction with Lieutenant General AS Kalkat, SYSM, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd), the Overall Force Commander of IPKF.



Jangi Paltan's Valiant Operations in Jaffna 24

by Lt Gen Ashok Ambre (Retd)

A first person account of the actions of 1 MARATHA LI, the first unit to be inducted into Jaffna.

Jaffna University – Descent into the Maelstrom 34

by Col RS Bhadauria (Retd)

The first paratrooper to be helidropped describes the Jaffna University Heliborne Operation – the most significant firefight of Operation PAWAN.

Fierce Firefights of Fearless 13 SIKH LI 42

by Col RV Shrivalkar (Retd)

This narrative recalls the recovery of a unit after a tragic and failed mission.



58 Piffer Gorkhas Take On the Tamil Tigers

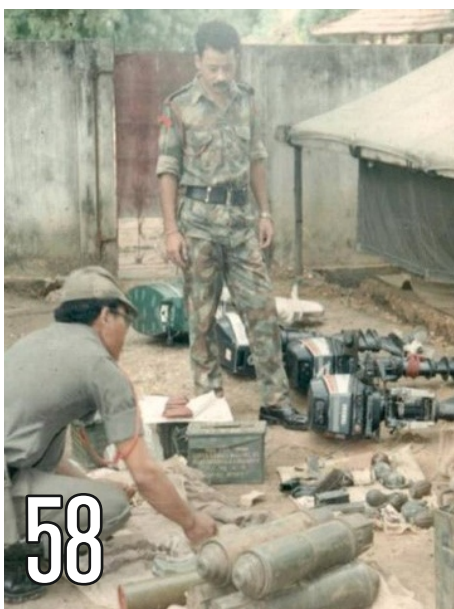
by Col Randhir Singh (Retd)

A look into the ups and downs of combat situations – and how units recover and strike back.

65 Param Vir Parameswaran

by Brig Satinder Singh (Retd)

A tribute to the valiant warrior - the only Param Vir Chakra awardee of Operation PAWAN.



48 Courage in Cockpits – Landings Amidst Whizzing Bullets

by Air Cmde Vishwanath Prakash (Retd)

The heliborne operation launched at Jaffna University on night 11/12 October 1987 and the reverses suffered had a telling impact. A helicopter pilot narrates.



68 Tough Going, A Tough Commander

by Maj Gen J Manavalan (Retd) and Brig BK Unnikrishnan (Retd)

Brigadier Manjit Singh, MVC surmounted the challenges and became a hero – the man who led his Brigade through LTTE resistance in Jaffna.

74 Umbrella of Fire on Moolai Beach

by Captain Deepak Agarwal (Retd)

This story describes an action on Moolai Beach, involving all the three Services, who worked in sync and supported each other through thick and thin.

76 Operation Foxhunt

by Col VK Rao (Retd)

Good luck and speedy resolve by the troops enabled success in this operation, leading to a sizeable recovery.

54 Naval Operations Off Sri Lanka

by Cmde Anil Joseph (Retd)

The Indian Navy played a crucial role during Operation PAWAN, and even thereafter as will be realized from this report.



82

Rugged and Reliable Mi-8s – The Workhorse of the IPKF

by Air Vice Marshal
N Samuel (Retd)

The aircrew rose to the occasion and took grave risks to support the Indian Army troops. A Mi-8 pilot takes us back in time.

87

A Surgeon's Marathon in Vavuniya

by Col (Dr) Ashok Tyagi (Retd)

A surgeon discusses the pressures of casualties faced on some occasions in Operation PAWAN.

92

Asset Allocation

by Mr Babu Krishnamoorthy

An introduction to the intrinsic factors in investing monies in different asset classes, and the guiding principles for such decisions.

96

Eat Pray Love

by Dr. Renuka David

Given the plethora of festivals in the next few months, a few tips on how to stay healthy amidst the revelry.



98

Units and Troops Readiness – The Mantra

by Maj Gen Binoy Poonnen (Retd)

Reflections on how Counter Insurgency Operations in Manipur enabled better readiness in troops inducted into Operation PAWAN.

Medals and Ribbons

A SALUTE TO OUR VALIANT WARRIORS (ENGLISH QUARTERLY)

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Lt Gen J S Sandhu, (Retd).

The 1962 India – China conflict, the 1965 and 1971 Indo - Pak wars, the 1999 Kargil conflict are very much alive in the national consciousness, but India's military intervention in Sri Lanka is not recalled by most people. There were political disagreements related to the intervention, and there were no celebrations when the troops returned in 1990 at the behest of the Sri Lankan Government. Is Operation PAWAN therefore a forgotten campaign?

By 1986, the Tamil Tigers had grown in strength with large areas of Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka under their control, and the Sri Lankan Army was confined to a few pockets. The civil war in Sri Lanka had intensified. After intensive talks between India and Sri Lanka, a strategic call was taken in Delhi – the Indian State would not bat for or support an independent Tamil Eelam in parts of Sri Lanka. The resultant Indo – Sri Lanka Accord was not accepted by the Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the Indian Armed Forces had to conduct intense operations against the LTTE. We lost over 1200 men in the 32 month Operation PAWAN, a rather heavy price to pay. There were innumerable actions during this period, Indian troops displayed many instances of valour, resilience and determination. It is apt for us to recall and learn from these sterling engagements – we have hence focused on the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operations in this issue.

Our Founder, Colonel D Devasahayam (Retd) had a vibrant dialogue with Lieutenant General A S Kalkat (Retd), the Overall Force Commander of IPKF. We are glad to put across his insight of the strategic design and the way the operation progressed. Colonel R S Sidhu, an IPKF Veteran has added on by evaluating the Indo - Sri Lanka Accord. The Jaffna University heliborne operation was a major setback when hostilities commenced between the Indian Army and the LTTE, but shook the Army into action. We responded with might, recovered and put the LTTE on the back foot. We have compiled notable first person accounts of officers of 10 Para Commando, 13 SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY (LI), 1 MARATHA LI, 4/5 GR (FF), 13 MAHAR, 1 JAK LI and from pilots who flew missions into the jungles with soldiers onboard. The narratives by Navy Captains who supported the Army operations enable us to present a wholesome overview.

The issue would have been incomplete if

we did not pay tribute to Major R Parameswaran, PVC (posthumous) - the only Param Vir Chakra awardee of Operation PAWAN. His unit officer recounts the action at Kantharodai, where Major Parameswaran was killed in action. We also recall the phenomenal combat leadership of Brigadier Manjit Singh, MVC who linked up at Jaffna Fort after fighting through the tiered and dynamic resistance by LTTE militants. The reminiscences of a surgeon who became a 'Karmayogi' and saved many lives is also worth reading. Besides our regular columns on Wellness and Money Matters, we close with the Reflections of Major General Binoy Poonnen, who has highlighted the importance of basic battle skills and readiness of units and troops for operations.

All in all, I am sure the readers will find this issue as fascinating as our previous issues – we look forward to your tips and feedback. **In our next issue, the primary theme would be on Adventure activities by the Armed Forces.** We invite narratives, articles and experiences about mountaineering, aero sports, rally driving, river rafting, water sports, sailing across the world and such other activities; these may please be sent to chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com by 05 November 22. We would be paying a suitable remuneration.



A WALK THROUGH OPERATION PAWAN

A chronology of major events which unfolded during and before the operations of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka.

1987 - 1990

June 1987 Move of formations and units to mounting bases.

04 June 1987 - Humanitarian aid para-dropped into Jaffna by Indian Air Force.

29 July 1987 - Signing of the Indo Sri Lanka Accord.

30 July 1987 - 54 Infantry Division starts inducting into Sri Lanka as Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

August/September 1987 - Interregnum and riots in Trincomalee.

05 October 1987 - 12 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres held by Sri Lanka Army at Palaly Airbase, Jaffna consume cyanide capsules and commit suicide.

06 to 09 October 1987 - LTTE unleashes violence across Northern and Eastern Provinces and massacres large number of Sinhalese in retaliation. Five Para Commandos of 10 Para Commando Battalion also killed in Jaffna on 08 October 87.

11/12 October 1987 - Heliborne operation fails at Jaffna University. Indian Army suffers major casualties.

October 1987 : From Peacekeeping to Peace Enforcement – a violent month. Several violent skirmishes between IPKF and LTTE.

26 October 1987 - Indian Army wrests control of Jaffna from LTTE.

November 1987 - Consolidation operations in Jaffna and induction of forces into Vavuniya.

October 1987 to April 1988 : IPKF reinforced with 3 more Divisions as under:

October 1987 - 36 Infantry Division moves into Trincomalee.

February 1988 - 4 Infantry Division moves into Vavuniya.

February 1988 - 57 Mountain Division moves into Batticaloa.

April 1988 - Raising of Headquarters IPKF, thus formalizing Tri-Service jointness for operations.

November 1988 - Conduct of North - Eastern Provincial Council Elections, despite boycott call and threat of violence by LTTE and JVP (a Sinhala terrorist group). Administration transferred into civil government hands post the elections.

January 1989 - Shri Ranasinghe Premadasa becomes President of Sri Lanka, secretly rearms LTTE, and demands withdrawal of IPKF.

September 1989 - Ceasing of offensive operations against LTTE.

October 1989 - Deinduction of 24 Mountain Brigade from Kalmunai.

December 1989 - Shri VP Singh becomes Prime Minister of India and orders deinduction of IPKF from Sri Lanka. 59 Mountain Brigade deinducts from Batticaloa. 57 Mountain Division moves out from Batticaloa, takes over Trincomalee sector from 36 Infantry Division, who deinduct.

February 1990 - Deinduction of 4 Infantry Division via Trincomalee and evacuation of Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) political leadership to safety.

March 1990 - Deinduction of 54 Infantry Division from Jaffna and 57 Mountain Division from Trincomalee.

TAMIL REBEL GROUPS

| | |
|--------------|---|
| LTTE | (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) |
| TELO | (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization) |
| PLOTE | (People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam) |
| EROS | (Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students) |
| EPRLF | (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front) |
| TELA | (Tamil Eelam Liberation Army) |

THE POLITICAL DECISION MAKERS



Mr Junius Jayewardene,
President Sri Lanka
04 February 1978 to 02 January 1989



Mr Rajiv Gandhi,
Prime Minister of India
31 October 1984 to 02 December 1989



Mr R Premadasa,
President Sri Lanka
02 January 1989 to 01 May 1993



Mr V P Singh,
Prime Minister of India
02 December 1989 to 10 November 1990



Mr V Prabhakaran,
LTTE Supremo

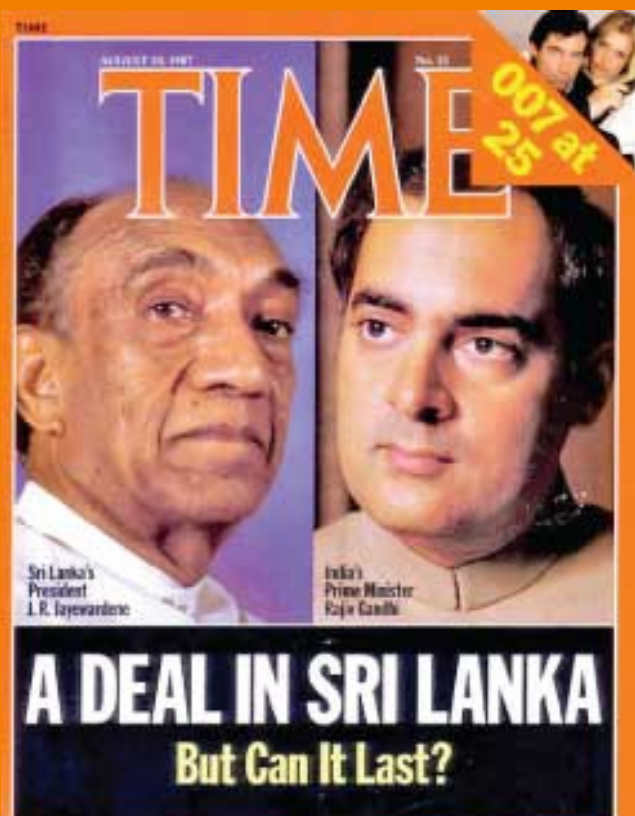
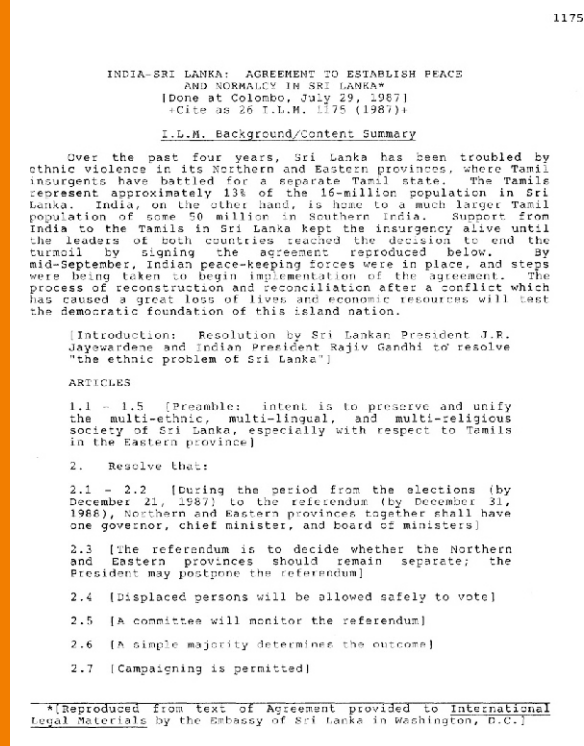
A POLITICAL IMBROGLIO

A MILITARY INTERVENTION - THE BIG PICTURE

An evaluation of the Indo Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987, which set in motion the operations of the Indian Armed Forces in Sri Lanka.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 29 July 1987 was primarily a political agreement between the two countries. There are two interesting facets to this agreement which eventually led to its unravelment. Whereas, it was an agreement between two sovereign states, the interests of a third party, the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka, were critical components of the Accord. The Tamil minority were void of a truly representative body, were citizens of a sovereign Sri Lanka, but their interests were being pursued by India. The second interesting feature was the provisioning of a framework for deploying Indian military within Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka, a sovereign state, having an established governance organisation, an effective security infrastructure and yet rife with ethnic, linguistic and communal fervour.

The Accord entailed Sri Lanka to undertake specified political measures to end discrimination against its Tamil



Time Magazine cover on the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord

minority, while ceasing military operations in its Northern and Eastern provinces. The Tamil rebels, though not a signatory to the Accord, were to forego violence and surrender their weapons to their Government. India, on its part, would guarantee adherence to the agreement by the Sri Lanka government and the Tamil groups.

To a discerning eye the fabric of the Accord is woven by three distinct strands. Firstly, all parties accepting that the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka shall remain inviolate. Secondly, the Accord legitimized the Tamil minority grievances of discrimination by the Sri Lanka state and committed the latter to resolve these grievances by *'giving equal status and opportunity to its ethnic and linguistic identities and promote their distinctive cultures'*. The third strand gave India the role of the guarantor for actions of both the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil rebel organisations.

Unity, Sovereignty, and Territorial Integrity of Sri Lanka

The first and foremost guiding factor of the Accord was reiterating the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Clearly reflecting the convergence of interest between India and Sri Lanka on maintaining the territorial integrity of the latter, it placed beyond reasonable doubt the position of the Indian state that it does not favour an independent Tamil state being carved out within Sri Lanka. It accentuated India's wariness to undertake any geopolitical course resulting in the probability of fuelling centrifugal forces within its peninsular region.

This overriding factor hamstrung India in employing the option of resolving the dispute by force, despite recalcitration by Sri Lanka, and to that extent weakened its bargaining position in the discussions

leading to the Accord. Understanding this limitation enabled Sri Lanka to procrastinate in finalising the agreement. To further understand this fundamental aspect it is pertinent to peruse **Para 2.15 of the Accord**, *"The proposals negotiated between India and Sri Lanka from 4.5.1986 to 19.12.1986 are deemed to be part of the Accord. Residual matters not finalised during the above negotiations shall be resolved between India and Sri Lanka within a period of six weeks of signing this agreement. These proposals are also conditional to the Government of India co-operating directly with the Government of Sri Lanka in their implementation."*

This is an interesting provision of the Accord, generally not seen in geopolitical agreements. It acknowledges written exchanges of previous diplomatic attempts between the two countries to resolve the issues at hand, hints at failure to come to a common understanding on some of the more contentious issues, and underlines the probability of a break in further

negotiations between the two countries. This may have led India to harden its stand and consider a more forceful approach to resolve the issue.

In a similar vein, the Accord had several provisions to secure other key interests of Sri Lanka. The decision to hold or postpone the referendum on merger/demerger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces rested with the President of Sri Lanka. The monitoring committee to oversee conduct of the referendum was to be headed by the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka, and the two nominated members were to be formally appointed by the President of Sri Lanka.

All arms held by militant groups were to be surrendered in accordance with an agreed procedure to authorities to be designated by the Government of Sri Lanka. The confinement of the Sri Lankan Army and other security personnel to barracks was contingent to surrender of arms by militant groups. Responsibility for law enforcement and



A Sri Lankan Naval Rating's Assault on Rajiv Gandhi During Guard of Honour, 30 July 1987



*Sri Rajiv Gandhi with Mr R Premadasa, Sri Lanka Prime Minister in 1988.
(Photo Credit www.4to40.com)*

maintenance of security in the Northern and Eastern Provinces was to rest with the Sri Lanka government.

Even Indian military deployment was subject to a request from Sri Lanka. India was enjoined to cooperate and provide military assistance on request to Sri Lanka for action against militant groups refusing to accept the terms of the Accord. Indian cooperation was obtained to ensure that its territory is not used by militants opposing the Accord. India also guaranteed security and safety of all communities in Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Thus we see that the Accord secured the interests of Sri Lanka to the extent that all actions pursuant to the Accord were placed in its sovereign jurisprudence, while India was enjoined to cooperate in its implementation.

Meeting Aspirations of Sri Lanka Tamils

The second strand in the fabric of the Accord concerned the meeting of

legitimate grievances of discrimination by the Sri Lanka state. Facing long and pronounced discrimination, and prevarication by Sri Lanka state to ameliorate its legitimate grievances, the Tamil minority was apprehensive about the sincerity of approach of the Sri Lankan government. On the other hand, Tamil aspirations of securing sovereignty were a non-option for the interlocutors of the agreement. Within the confines of these two parameters, the Accord contained several provisions to meet genuine Tamil interests, including a speedy implementation of the agreement.

Hostilities would cease within 48 hours of signing. Surrender of arms by militants and confining of the security personnel to barracks would be

completed within 72 hours of the cessation of hostilities. Emergency provisions would be lifted in the Eastern and Northern Provinces by 15 August 1987.

There would be upfront provisional merger of the Tamil predominant Northern and Eastern Provinces into one unitary administrative unit. Elections to the merged Provincial Council would be held within three months from signing of the Accord and in any event before 31st December 1987. Referendum on merger/demerger of North-Eastern Provincial Council would be held before 31 December 1988.

Such tight and definite timelines pointed to a measure of distrust between the warring parties, left little leeway for Sri Lanka to delay the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and devolution of administrative powers, thereby assuaging the concerns of the Tamil minority.

India's Role as Guarantor of the Accord

The Accord acknowledged and legitimised India's role as the guarantor of the Accord and ensuring adherence to it by all diverse parties. India's cooperation was requested in the rehabilitation process of the militant youth, repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees in India and Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, assuring safety and security of all communities in Northern and Eastern Provinces, ensuring conditions amenable to conduct of free and fair elections by Sri Lanka to the North-Eastern Provincial Council and providing Indian observers for these elections, and in overall implementation of the Accord.

Militarily India was obligated to provide military assistance on request of Sri Lanka for action against militant groups refusing to accept the terms of the Accord, and ensure non-use of its territory by Tamil rebel groups. This provision inter alia also acknowledged use of Indian territory by militant groups operating against the Sri Lanka state. India also undertook to prevent reprisals against non-Tamil communities in Northern and Eastern Provinces post transfer of governance to the Provincial administration.

Curiously India accepted two provisions that gave the Sri Lankan Government a greater say in the Accord Implementation: -

Para 2.16.c of the Accord. *"In the event that the Government of Sri Lanka requests the Government of India to afford military assistance to implement these proposals the Government of India will cooperate by giving to the Government of Sri Lanka such military assistance as and when requested."*

Para 6 of Appendix of the Accord. *"The President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India also agree that in the terms of paragraph 2.14 and paragraph 2.16(c) of the agreement, an Indian peace keeping contingent may be invited by the President of Sri Lanka to guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities, if so required."*

From the standpoint of safeguarding India's interests, these provisions enabled Colombo to insist on withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from Sri Lanka in the changed political environment in Colombo in 1989.

On the other hand India was able to secure recognition of some of its security concerns by Sri Lanka. These interests lay in the two countries **not allowing their territories to be used for activities prejudicial** to the other's unity, territorial integrity, and security; that an early understanding would be reached between

them on **employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel** to ensure that their presence would not prejudice Indo-Sri Lanka relations; Trincomalee or other **Sri Lankan ports would not be made available for military use** to other countries in a manner prejudicial to India's interests; the two countries would undertake the work of restoring and operating the **Trincomalee Oil Tank farm**; and Sri Lanka's **agreements with foreign broadcasting organizations** would be reviewed to ensure that they would not be used for military or intelligence purposes.

Evaluation

Both Sri Lanka and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil rebel group which mattered, were reluctant to sign the Accord. India's pushing through the Accord against resistance from the two most affected parties, resulted in the edifice of the Accord being erected on weak foundations.

Even at home, India was unable to develop a political consensus on military deployment in Sri Lanka. This political division became even more pronounced once Indian military began operations to disarm the LTTE, the dominant Tamil rebel group in Sri Lanka. IPKF troops could sense the sullen hostility amongst the local population at the mounting base of Chennai, and it had an adverse psychological impact.

Within the constraints of its overall interests, India did negotiate the best possible deal for Sri Lanka Tamils within the framework of the Constitution of Sri Lanka. However it failed to secure its own interests by letting the Indian military intervention be incumbent on the request of the Government of Sri Lanka, thereby dealing the key ace to the latter.

India blundered in its strategic reading of the probable stance of LTTE towards the Accord. The agreement promised greater autonomy and merger of Tamil majority North



The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord being signed in Colombo on July 29, 1987, between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene



President Jayewardene waves to the public, with Sri Rajiv Gandhi by his side (Photo credit knappily.com)

and East Provinces, within a broad democratic framework under the Sri Lanka constitution. Yet it fell far short of LTTE's political aspirations of an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. Significantly, sharing of political space in a democratic system of governance was an anathema to the political ideology of LTTE. It looked at itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Sri Lanka Tamils and brooked no rivals. This dogma propelled them to launch violent fratricidal wars to the finish against other Tamil rebel organisations, and validates this reflection.

India lacked an institutional setup to formulate 'Out of Area' military operations. This fault-line was further exacerbated by the undue haste in executing the Accord, giving no time to the Indian military to plan a considered response on the ground.

Faced with mounting political opposition at home and increasingly loud pronouncements from Sri Lanka for

being incorrectly laid at the door of IPKF. The bureaucracy and politicians came out looking clean!

A straightforward implementation of a political agreement, with a dormant military component between two sovereign states, resulted in the military component assuming the predominant role and is the biggest indictment of the Accord. This is the clearest possible indicator of misinterpretation of relevant geopolitical factors.



Colonel RS Sidhu was deployed with his unit 15 MECH INF, through the entire duration of Operation PAWAN, and was awarded Sena Medal for gallantry. Apart from his hands-on combat experience in active anti-terrorist operations in Sri Lanka, he is also the author of two books, 'Success from Being Mad' on entrepreneurship ventures by veterans, and 'Elephant on the High Himalayas' on India China discourse. His write-ups on strategic affairs have been published in magazines and journals of repute, and can also be accessed at his blogspot www.valleysandvalour.blogspot.com.



Col RS Sidhu



An IL-76 lands at Palahy on 11 October 1987



Palahy Airfield. Photo credit Wing Commander Sunil Cabral

ACROSS THE PALK STRAITS

A TRANSPORT JOCK REMINISCES

Akin to the Himalayan Hump Across the Himalayas and Tibet into China during the Second World War, the Indian Air Force (IAF) transport fleet sustained the four Divisions plus of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka for nearly three years across the Palk Straits.

One of my regrets has been my disinterest in writing a diary. Blame it on laziness or my lack of foresight. The casualty has been a failure to document many momentous events; Operation PAWAN being one of them. Not much has been written and documented on the role played by the transport fleet of the IAF during the IPKF operations. Their contribution was immense but the recognition was little.

India entered the scene initially as a friend of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), trying to persuade the Sri Lankans into taking a conciliatory position. Operation Poomalai, on 4th Jun 1987, sent a strong signal in this direction. The result was the Indo Sri Lankan Accord signed on 29 July 1987.

The LTTE was unhappy with the Accord and its terms. The Tamils were suspicious and reluctant to lay down their arms. The Sri Lankan Armed Forces were not happy yielding ground to the Indian Armed Forces. And the IPKF was not clear whether they were peacekeepers or peace enforcers. Right through the campaign they were looked upon with suspicion by both the parties we were trying to help.

After Operation Poomalai, we were generally rejoicing and in a triumphant mood. Life had returned to its normal **eventful** self. It was all about flying, and spending the little free time we got with our families. I had taken time off to pick up my wife and new born son (about five months old). By the time I got back, the security environment had gone up a couple of notches, and 'General Recalls' had become regular. On



An AN-32 gets ready for mission

sounding of General Recall (a hooter sounded in a pre-briefed manner), we would haul our bags on our scooters and quickly report to the flight office, ready to go into operations if the “Go” was given. We normally returned home after a few cups of tea, a round of ‘gup shup’, and the fog of war engulfing us further.

The ‘GO’ finally came on 29th July 1987. AN-32s from Agra took to the air, with Paratrooper Training School (PTS) aircraft leading and the neighbouring 12 Squadron joining in. Though I do not recall the exact numbers, at least 11 to 12 aircraft from each squadron got airborne. We were to pick up troops from Gwalior, Hyderabad and Chennai and fly them to Palaly, Jaffna. The take-offs were in the morning at around 0400 hours. We flew in ‘line astern’ formation, strung out one behind the other. Almost all members of the squadron were involved in one way or another. The troops we airlifted were generally in the dark about their mission, role and purpose. They came to the aircraft literally Lock, Stock and Barrel (LSB), prepared to take on whatever they would have to face. Having interacted

mission, we gratefully filled our bellies with whatever the crew cafeterias offered, typically cold ‘*anda bhurji*’, soggy puris and potato sabji. This happened to be our staple diet for the next few years, and I almost developed an addiction to it...

The outbound flight was generally overloaded, while the return trip would be empty. We would invariably land at Chennai, Hyderabad or Bangalore for replenishment. Arrival back at base would be at around 2300 hours, followed by an early morning departure at around 0400 hours. My wife and child hardly caught a glimpse of me since they would be fast asleep when I left or when I returned. To put it mildly, life was a little challenging, since we flew more than 10 hours a day, with little sleep.

On 30th July 87, a total of 34 transport sorties were flown by IAF aircraft into Palaly in a single day, for the induction of troops of 54th Infantry Division. The troops that were airlifted moved into positions hitherto held by the Sri Lankan Army, tasked to ensure cessation of hostilities and surrender of arms by the Tamil militants in the Jaffna peninsula. Operations were initially into Palaly airfield of Jaffna, extending to Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa. Jaffna was a 7500 feet long runway, with no night operation facilities. Our orders were to land, offload, and take off by dusk. The airfield dispersal was small and parking was a nightmare. We had to take off in the same sequence as our landing, for lack of ground manoeuvring space. I remember in the initial days, one of our four-engined heavy jets opened throttles just a wee bit, caused a tent to blow off, leaving some hapless personnel without a roof over their head. Things did become more orderly, as operations evolved and intensified.

After the initial induction there was a lull in September 87. We were operating a three aircraft detachment at Sulur. We stayed at a hotel in

with them in Operation Meghdoot and various other operations, we had more than a soft corner for them. We well understood the importance of the lock, the stock as well as the barrel. They were going into totally unknown territory, uncharted and foreign to them, and would have to fend for themselves. So, *no questions asked*. They were allowed to load the aircraft to the brim. The heavily laden aircraft barely managed to reach cruising altitude; and after that, had to fly with tails heavy and the nose up. I remember many a pilot grumbling about their travails, but never did even one refuse a soldier his ‘LSB’.

Landing at air bases any time of the day or night as per the dictates of the

Coimbatore and were briefed to take instructions only from the Air Headquarters, even if it were only to start a plane for maintenance. This period was more like the period of the “phoney war” during World War II. No action, all anticipation. We walked the streets of Coimbatore, had our fill of South Indian cuisine, shopped and finished reading all the books in the local circulating library. One of the Para Commando units was also stationed with us. They were tasked with providing proximate security to the Sri Lankan President. Our task was to ferry them every week to Colombo for rotation of their troops. Such was the trust factor during those days. They generally flew in civvies and most were familiar faces, since they trained in our unit for their para jumps or were contemporaries from National Defence Academy (NDA). The evenings were spent playing cards and partying.

This was just the calm before the storm. I remember we were in Vavuniya being escorted around by the Sri Lankan Air Force officers, when we heard the news about the collective suicide of LTTE cadres at Palaly. This was the spark that ignited the flame of conflict between the Indian Armed Forces and the LTTE. The tension in the air was palpable. Everyone was nervous and no one had a clue about what the future course of events will be like. We flew back to Sullur, the honeymoon over.

India decided to rein in the LTTE and for us, the war had broken out. The next few days saw a massive build-up of troops and tanks in Sri Lanka. IL-76 aircraft of 44 Squadron carried out a Herculean task of ferrying in T-72 tanks. Though the tanks and the aeroplanes were both Russian, the crew had not received the requisite training to load tanks into the aircraft. After experimentation and brainstorming, the trick was unravelled and the task mastered.

Along with the AN-32s, HS 748 and IL-76s, we also had aircraft of the Indian Airlines ferrying in troops. Jaffna airfield resembled a battlefield airfield in all respects. There was smoke all-around, fire in the distance, sounds of machine gun fire and mortar explosions ringing in our ears and all types of aircraft landing in and offloading troops. Our drill was, Quick Turn Around and take off, only to return with more troops. Chennai always gave us priority landings, since we were invariably low on fuel and had critically injured troops on board. Jaffna had no aviation fuel, so we always carried fuel for the return on the way out, and ended up low on our way back. Casualties were heavy. There were of course the odd bits of excitement when one ran into one’s course mate from NDA in the din of war. All black with soot and covered in camouflage, it was still a surprise we could recognise each other and catch up a little.

Trincomalee was a tricky airport for us to operate into. It always had a ship with a high mast obstructing our final approach. By the time we observed it and cautioned our other pilots, the ship would have changed position. Batticaloa

runway was another surprise item. Just a little over 3000 feet long and with no ground aids, it could challenge the best of the best especially in bad weather.

The operations continued through 1987 right into 1989. The crew were exhausted to the core of their beings; the aircraft had proven their worth. It was in April 1989 that the LTTE, forced by intense military pressure from India decided to hold direct talks with the Sri Lankan Government. The Sri Lankan Government decided to ask Indian Forces to return to India.

For the duration of the IPKF Operations, the IAF had flown a total of 70,000 sorties in a span of 32 months, without a single mission aborted and without the loss of a single aircraft. **The “silent force” had unleashed the largest transport operation ever conducted by any country. The diplomatic and foreign policy achievements of our intervention maybe debated upon for years, but the use of air power as an efficient tool of implementing the will of our nation was proved beyond any doubt.**



Wing Commander S R Swarup (Retd) was commissioned into the transport stream of IAF in June 1980. During his 25 years of service, he flew a number of types of aircraft ranging from gliders and microlight to AN32s and IL76. After hanging up his boots, he flew with established airlines like Sahara and Indigo. For the last 10 years, Swarup has been a 'Private Jet Pilot' flying a Gulfstream 550 with Aditya Birla Group as their Chief Pilot and Head of Operations. In an aviation career spanning 40 years he has over 12000 hours of flying experience.



**Wing Commander
S R Swarup (Retd)**

THE MAN AT THE HELM OF IPKF

*An interaction with
Lieutenant General AS Kalkat,
SYSM, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)*

Lieutenant General AS Kalkat, who is from my Regiment 8 Gorkha Rifles, took over as the Overall Force Commander of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) after the violent turn of events in Jaffna in October 1987, wherein Indian troops initially suffered reverses. His insight of the politico-strategic dimension of Operation Pawan gives us an excellent overview.

Having first sent him the questions in writing I requested former Vice Chief of the Army Staff, Lt Gen SK Singh, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd) who had served with him on his staff, to arrange a face to face interaction at the General's residence in Delhi. Spread over three hours and lunch Gen Kalkat was completely candid with his views drawn from a sharp memory of what transpired on the island.

From London to Lanka – a sudden change. When you took charge of IPKF what were your immediate challenges, worries or difficulties?

My memory flashed back to Ceylon, now called Sri Lanka. I went to the UK High Commission to get my visa re-validated and picked up a Tourism Map of Sri Lanka too. That was my first preparation for Sri Lanka. We had no maps of Sri Lanka therefore we enlarged this tourism map and distributed it to the Divisions. I observed that we were involved in counter-insurgency operations and conventional tactics wouldn't work. Further, that it was not just a purely military operation but a politico-military operation.





Lt Gen AS Kalkat at his 'work from home' station.

Lt Gen SK Singh, former VCOAS and Col David Devasabayam, our Founder.

The other difficulty I encountered was the IPKF command and control. My immediate superior HQs was Southern Command and the Southern Army Commander wanted to armchair and micromanage the operations sitting in Pune. He had no idea of the ground situation. At this stage I had divine intervention. Field Marshal Manekshaw was living near Ootacamund and used to visit his daughter in Madras (now Chennai) often. Whenever he visited her, I was invited for dinner as he had been the Colonel of my Regiment (8 GR). On one such occasion, when we met, I told him my predicament regarding the Army Commander. He remarked: My advice is *'Take the bit in your mouth and run'*. I just did that. Seeing this situation, Army Headquarters (HQ) placed IPKF under their direct control for operational, intelligence and civil affairs. That solved my problem but thereafter the Army Commander and myself were not on the best of speaking terms.

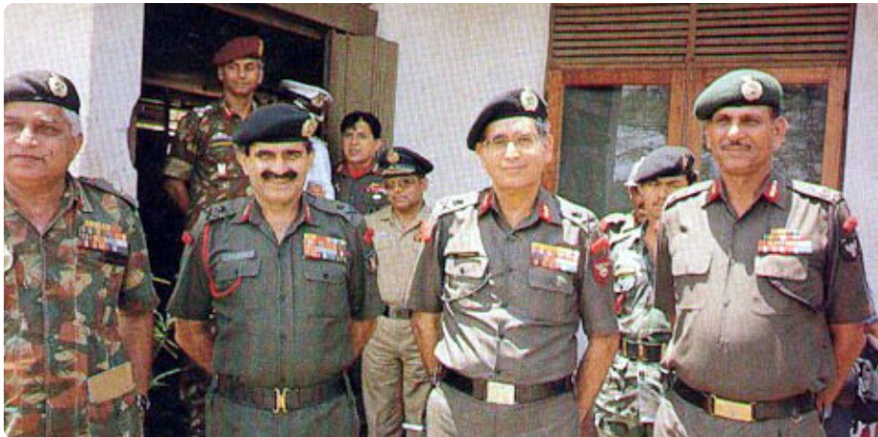
The other major problem was our firearms. The Indian Army had the Ishapore 7.62 mm Self Loading Rifles which had a single shot rate of fire and a long barrel which interfered in jungle warfare, while the LTTE had AK 47 rifles, which incidentally had been procured from Czechoslovakia. After checking with our Chief Armourer, I got part of the barrel sawed-off and changed the trigger mechanism to automatic rapid fire. It was still not as good as the AK 47 but served the purpose.

Please give us an overview of the prevailing situation in Sri Lanka at that time in 1987 with regard to the Tamil Eelam movement?

The genesis of the Tamil Eelam movement lay in the deprivation and discrimination of minority Tamils by the majority Sinhala State of Sri Lanka. The Tamils were seeking protection of their identity, language and areas of their

inhabitation from the spread of massive Sinhala influx since 1956. The Tamil movement, starting with civil unrest, gradually escalated to open confrontation with the civil administration. The Sri Lanka response was to seek a military solution by launching a military operation designated **"War of Liberation"** against the militant Tamil groups. The Tamil parties upped their demand to independence and a separate Tamil State (Tamil Eelam). Due to the atrocities committed by the Sri Lanka Forces, the Tamil Eelam movement got a fillip in 1987. The Tamil groups were determined to seek an independent state for their survival. The LTTE was in the forefront of this movement due to its aggressive leader Prabhakaran.

Out of Sri Lanka's population of 14.8 million, 75% were Sinhalese, 11% were Tamils & 14% were other communities. The Northern Province consisted of 80% Tamil population



Lt Gen AS Kalkat, third from left with Maj Gen Ashok Mehta and Maj Gen SC Sardeshpande (Photo credit www.bharatrasbak.com)

mainly concentrated around Jaffna city which was the Provincial Capital. Tamils constituted one third of the population in the Eastern Province along with one third Sinhala and one third Muslims (Moors).

There was a hue and cry in Tamil Nadu on the discrimination of Sri Lankan Tamils by the Sri Lanka Government and atrocities being committed against them by the Sri Lankan military. The Indian Tamils demanded intervention by India to ensure the safety and security of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Indian Prime Minister decided to intervene in the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka against the atrocities being committed by the Sri Lankan Army. At that time, India had the brightest and the best of its Foreign Service manning the High Commission in Colombo - Mr J N Dixit, the High Commissioner, was to later become India's National Security Advisor; Mr Hardeep Puri, the Counsellor Political is today Minister for Housing & Urban Affairs and Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas and Dr Jai Shankar, the First Secretary, is our Minister of External Affairs.

What was the organizational structure of LTTE? Why was LTTE unwilling to accept other Tamil groups like TELO, EPRLF, ENDLF, PLOT?

The LTTE structure was pyramidal with Prabhakaran at the helm and he brooked NO dissent. The LTTE group leaders were under Area Commanders and the LTTE harnessed the seafaring traditions to form what became Sea Tigers. Women cadres came up formally in ground operations around 1988 onwards.

Prabhakaran, the supreme leader was assisted by Anton Balasingham, Political Commissar, and a military council comprising of G. Mahendra Raja a.k.a. Mahattaya, the second in command, Sathasivam Krishnakumar a.k.a. Kittu, Kumarappa in Jaffna, Pulendran (later Karuna) in the East and Pottu Amman (intelligence wing). The military council was assisted by Yogaratnam Yogi (political wing), Sornalingam (Air Wing) a.k.a. Shankar, Sivanesan a.k.a. Soosai (Sea Tigers). The LTTE strength was assessed as 7000 hard core, 3000 helpers (Podyan) and an indeterminate number of sympathizers.

The other groups were more democratically aligned and therefore loosely grouped. They were easy prey for the LTTE. Prabhakaran was highly ambitious and ruthless; and dreamt of becoming the sole arbiter of Tamil destiny. He systematically eliminated leaders of the other insurgency groups and used this to strengthen his cult and the LTTE.

How did LTTE manage its finances to acquire weapons and ammunition? Was there rampant extortion?

Beginning from 1983 to 1987 almost all major extremist groups including LTTE had established overseas cells among Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora particularly in London. They became a major source of support. The LTTE developed their financial revenue network by extortion of the shopkeepers, taxation of the Tamil population, looting banks and government treasuries and smuggling and trafficking of arms, people and drugs. In addition, hijacking of maritime traffic was easily possible due to Sri Lanka's strategic location on the international maritime routes. Overseas Tamil diaspora sympathetic to their cause also contributed immensely to the LTTE.

The IPKF went in as a 'peacekeeping force', but got drawn into violent peace enforcement, and possibly ended up doing the tasks which were of the Sri Lankan Army. In hindsight, should we have handled this situation differently?

Yes. We had NO business to be there. It was a political decision. India's direct involvement in the civil war in Sri Lanka came about in July 1987 as a result of an agreement for a political resolution within the ambit of the Constitution of Sri Lanka called the Indo Sri Lanka Accord of 27 Jul

1987. It envisaged a cease-fire between the belligerent parties, surrender of weapons by the armed Tamil militant parties, amendment of the Constitution of the Unitary State to create a Federal structure thereby ensuring provincial autonomy for the Tamil majority Northern & Eastern Provinces. The Accord also envisaged India providing a peace keeping force if asked by Sri Lanka Government for accepting the surrender of weapons by the Tamil militants and for ensuring security in the two Provinces. The Sri Lanka Army was to confine to barracks in the Northern & Eastern Provinces. The LTTE refused to disarm, and the IPKF was ordered to use force to disarm them. Thus we got drawn into the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka.

Possibly, the difficulty of enforcing surrender of weapons should have been foreseen, and the Accord could have been limited to a ceasefire between the warring parties while the political changes and devolution of powers was executed.

Several after action reports have assessed that Indian forces which inducted into Operation Pawan were not fully prepared for a guerrilla war and were mentally attuned to a peacekeeping plan. How well did units adapt to the changed dynamic and confront the LTTE threat?

After the Jaffna University debacle, it was realized that the IPKF was undermanned, under equipped and over stretched. It needed more Infantry, T-72 tanks and Infantry Combat Vehicles (BMPs). Therefore, another airlift began with IL 76 and AN 12 aircraft; so heavy was the air traffic at Tambaram Airbase in Madras (Chennai) that the runway cracked. By end October, the IAF had flown 2200 transport and 800 helicopter sorties to ferry material and men for IPKF. I received

three more Divisions and now had a strength equalling five Divisions (15 brigades).

IPKF resumed operations in early November, it was a hard and dogged fight for control of Jaffna. The Indian soldiers brought peace in a foreign country where it was impossible to distinguish between LTTE cadres and Tamil civilians; the LTTE would often hide their weapon under the lungi (dhoti) and fire at the IPKF soldiers in crowded areas and then hiding their guns, melt away among the people. Anyone over the age of 10, male or female, could be an armed and deadly adversary. After hard fighting, the IPKF was able to wrest control of the Northern & Eastern Provinces.

What difficulties did you face in administering the Northern and Eastern Province and what set-up did you put in place?

I found myself in the unenviable position of having to administer these Provinces comprising one-third of Sri

Lanka. This meant catering for the daily life of the population. I appointed Town Commandants of Brigadier rank for Jaffna and Trincomalee. The Police Service was non-existent to look after criminal activity and I asked the Indian Government for assistance. Two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Battalions and much later a Mahila (women's) Company were sent from India. To cater for electricity, staff from the Tamil Nadu State Electricity Board was provided. For running the railway, Tamil Nadu Railway TA Company was sent. For the medical service, the Indian Red Cross sent a detachment. I found myself involved in the political affairs in the two states for which the Indian Army is not trained. I asked for Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers. Two IAS officers were placed with the two Town Commandants and I located the IFS officer with me as Political Advisor. The IFS officer fell ill due to the difficult environment and had to be evacuated to India; the IFS officers



Lt Gen AS Kalkat with the Sri Lankan President Mr JR Jayewardene and (inset) with Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike

were not accustomed to living in harsh conditions and there were no takers for the job.

How did you manage the conduct of elections successfully, which was a major responsibility?

I was keen to get the Political and Administrative role off my hands and consequently, I formally intimated the Governments of India and Sri Lanka that the conditions for conduct of elections have been created and the elections may be ordered. However, no census had been conducted for many years due to the prevailing insurgency situation and the electoral rolls had to be prepared for the elections. Along with the Sri Lanka Chief Election Commissioner, their Attorney General, the Sri Lanka Election Staff and my officers, and with transport including helicopters we were able to get the electoral rolls prepared. I had to visit Colombo often, where Mr Lalith Athulathmudali, the Sri Lanka Foreign Minister was a great help and guide. A brilliant person, he was also a Privy Counsellor of UK.

The IPKF assisted the Sri Lanka Government in the conduct of elections in the two Provinces without the LTTE being able to disrupt them. In many cases IPKF secured the routes for voters from their home areas to the polling booths and guarding of the booths and transportation of the Ballot Boxes and Polling Staff by air and road transport. The elections were held successfully with 60% voting and consequently the Northern & Eastern Provinces were merged as one North Eastern Province (NEP Province) with the enactment of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lanka Constitution. A Tamilian Chief Minister, Mr. Vardaraj Perumal of the EPRLF Party was sworn-in by President J Jayewardene of Sri Lanka. I signalled to Delhi **"Mission Accomplished"**.

After President Premadasa assumed power in Colombo, he demanded the withdrawal of IPKF from Sri Lanka. How did you walk the tightrope between his demands, and the situational necessity?

President Premadasa had always been antagonistic to the Indo Sri Lanka Accord and had absented himself from Sri Lanka at the time of signing of the Accord by planning a visit to Japan. He was against the presence of Indian Forces in Sri Lanka and his election manifesto had spoken of expelling the IPKF from Sri Lanka. I was informed that the President's representative would meet me and hand over a letter to me. I went to the airport to receive the President's representative and as the plane from Colombo landed, out stepped the Sri Lanka Army Commander, Lt Gen Hamilton Wanasinghe. Gen Wanasinghe, a good friend, said *'Amar, can we take a walk on the tarmac'* so we walked together on the airfield.

He said he was in a quandary; his President had ordered him to serve me an ultimatum for IPKF to leave the shores of Sri Lanka within 72 hours and if we did not do so he will declare IPKF an Army of Occupation and order his Forces to attack it. He asked me what should he do? I replied if I were him, I would obey the orders of his President. He then turned and said if he did so *'what will you do?'* I replied, *'I will do what I must do; fight to defend my mandate, and it can have unpredictable consequences'*. He said nothing more and left for Colombo without handing me the letter from the President. I took a clear and unambiguous decision that I will fulfil my Mission (Accord) at all costs. As a precautionary measure I ordered a Combat Command (a combination of tanks, Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC's) and infantry brigade sized force to take positions at the entry of the road leading to the Eastern Province from Sri Lankan controlled territory.

Our T 72 tanks make a frightening sight; Sri Lanka responded likewise lining up their armoured cars which of course were no match for the T-72 tanks. Consequently, President Premadasa changed his strategy for getting rid of the IPKF.

You had inputs that President Premadasa had struck a deal with LTTE and was supporting them clandestinely to fight against IPKF. Could you throw some light on this devious design?

President Premadasa secretly contacted the LTTE leadership and Prabhakaran sent his ideologue Anton Balasingham who was based in London and Mahattaya, his military commander. President Premadasa commenced giving them arms and ammunition to fight the IPKF. The LTTE happily joined in. President Premadasa thought that after the IPKF left, his Army could then take on a considerably weakened LTTE as a result of IPKF operations; while Prabhakaran thought that LTTE could take on the Sri Lanka Army if the IPKF was not present. I came to know of these goings on when an IPKF patrol intercepted an LTTE cadre. The LTTE had the practice of getting everything on record and they had secretly video-taped the meeting with President Premadasa; this LTTE cadre was carrying the video tape towards the coastline for conveying it to Prabhakaran hiding in the Wanni Jungles. I also had reports of Sri Lankan helicopter landings in the Vavuniya area in Central Sri Lanka where arms and ammunition had been delivered to the LTTE.

A lesson that came out from Operation Pawan was the importance of having an exit strategy, a failing which has been noticed in other conflict areas too. What should have been our exit plan?

The Exit Plan must be in place before you intervene in another country. The intervening country must ensure that the commitments are guaranteed by the host government. If the host government thereafter reneges on its commitments, the only alternative left would be to resort to 'regime change'. In this case, there could have been NO exit strategy except Regime Change by use of force.

While at the helm of IPKF, you faced innumerable challenges and hurdles in the military and politico-strategic dimension. Could you narrate some of the most significant challenges and how you surmounted them?

My first and most important military challenge was to capture Jaffna, before Shri Rajiv Gandhi, the Hon'ble Prime Minister reached Washington on a visit in end October 1987. I observed that all previous attempts to capture Jaffna had been by frontal attacks which involved fighting in difficult built-up areas, which entailed clearing house by house with possibly heavy casualties to our troops. I decided to launch only a feint frontal attack employing tanks, and carry out a double envelopment with the infantry and attack Jaffna from the rear. The Western force of the envelopment faced fierce opposition, but ably led by Brigadier Manjit Singh, they succeeded. In this action Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran bravely fought his way and was killed in action. He was awarded the Param Vir Chakra (PVC) posthumously, India's highest award for conspicuous bravery above and beyond the call of duty. Brigadier Manjit Singh was awarded the

Maha Vir Chakra (MVC). We captured Jaffna incurring much lesser casualties than would have resulted by the frontal approach.

In the politico – strategic domain, one problem I faced was dealing with the Sri Lanka President. I was very ably helped by my Political Advisor who I always took with me in my meetings with the President. He was Mr. Jai Shankar, then First Secretary at the Indian High Commission in Colombo, today our Foreign Minister.



Lieutenant General Amarjit Singh Kalkat was commissioned into the 8 Gorkha Rifles in 1955. He retired in December 1993 as Army Commander of Southern Command and prior to it he was the Army Commander of Army Training Command (ARTRAC) that he raised. He is a Graduate of Australian Army Staff College & his early schooling was in Modern School, New Delhi. Some other appointments held by him are Commander Indian Peace Keeping Force, Sri Lanka (IPKF) from Dec 1987 to Mar 1990; Director General, Defence Planning Staff, Ministry of Defence; Corps Commander of a Strike Corps; Division Commander of a Mountain Division; Brigade Commander in a desert sector; Battalion Commander in J&K, GSO 1 Cabinet Secretariat (Military Wing); Directing Staff at Defence Services Staff College.

He has seen combat in the Indo-Pak War 1965 as a company commander, in 1971 Indo Pak War as a battalion commander and in the 1987-1990 Sri Lanka IPKF Operations as the IPKF Commander. Amongst his war-time awards is the rare Sarvottam Yudh Seva Medal (SYSM) in 1988, the country's highest award for Leadership & Command in War & Conflict. He was the first recipient of this award ever since its institution in 1981, only two have been awarded thereafter.

He served as India's representative on the Indo-Sri Lanka Security Coordination Group along with Sri Lanka Foreign & Defence Ministers for overseeing implementation of Indo-Sri Lanka Accord 1989-90 and as Co-Chairman with Sri Lanka Army Chief of Observer Group under President of Sri Lanka to oversee cessation of hostilities.

His academic record includes Resident Fellow, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) London 1986-87; Faculty Member, Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA) New Delhi 1983-84. He has been annual speaker on South Asia Security Environment at Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and Peace Keeping Operations at HQ NATO Allied Land Forces Central Europe, Heidelberg. He has also been Associate Member of International Alert, UK, the United Nations consultative status Standing International Forum on Ethnic conflict resolution, Genocide and Human Rights; Invitee for Formal Consultation by Consortium on International Dispute Resolution (CIDIR), Geneva. He is the Founder & Mentor of Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), a government sponsored think tank for Synergizing National Capabilities to meet threats to India's Security.

— ■ Col David Devasahayam (Retd) *Founder and Publisher* —

JANGI PALTAN'S VALIANT OPERATIONS IN JAFFNA

A first person account of the operations of his unit by the Adjutant of 1 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY (LI), the first unit to be inducted into Jaffna, Sri Lanka as part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

In early 1987, while at Madras (now Chennai), the internal rumblings in Sri Lanka were heard loud and clear and keenly followed by 1 MARATHA LI, the Jangi Paltan, my unit. The conflict between Sri Lanka Security Forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was rapidly spiralling out of control of the Sinhalese Government. The battalion officers followed the events in Sri Lanka in anticipation of some military action, should the unit be deployed in Sri Lanka. By the first week of July, the induction of the Indian Army troops into Sri Lanka seemed a foregone conclusion. The much awaited Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was finally inked on 29 July 1987.

At 1805 hours on 29 July, Colonel TPS Brar, the Commanding Officer (CO) received a call from Army Commander, Southern Command, directing the Paltan to embark forthwith, INS *Ranjit* and INS *Rajput*, two frigates of



Map showing Indian Brigades as they moved towards Jaffna



Major SK Sarin, Captain Ashok Ambre and Lt BK Tyagi enroute to Jaffna Fort

the Indian Navy and move to Sri Lanka. There was no clarity on the role, task or location of deployment on induction. The immediate mobilization sent the unit into a frenzy of activities.

The Battalion Headquarters (HQ), A and D Companies embarked INS *Ranjit*, while Y and C Companies with elements of HQ Company embarked INS *Rajput*. It was a historic moment for the Jangi Paltan when 15 Officers, 29 Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and 440 Other Ranks (OR) commenced their voyage to Sri Lanka at 0230 hours on 30 July 1987. Officers and men were excited, discussing the possibility of war and a chance to prove their mettle.

The Paltan was well equipped with arms, ammunition, tents and rations. It was self-contained for the initial days. Despite the known destination of Trincomalee, the actual operational task of the battalion remained foggy.

Within a few hours of sailing, a Chetak helicopter of the Indian Navy, dropped a package on the deck of INS *Ranjit*. It contained general orders for activities post disembarkation in Sri Lanka. To his surprise, the CO was informed by the Admiral onboard that the revised orders were to sail to Kankesanthurai (KKS), a port near Jaffna instead of the original destination of Trincomalee.

First Steps on Foreign Soil

Both the ships anchored 3-4 kms from the shore at KKS. I moved in a small Sri Lankan boat alongside INS *Ranjit* to carry out liaison with the Sri Lankan Army post at Hotel Harbour View near the jetty. I was received warmly by Major Botheju of the 1 Sri Lankan Light Infantry, who passed orders to his troops to arrange the reception of the Paltan. The KKS jetty was very small and not suitable for big vessels. The troops were trans-shipped to INS

Kaihalli, T-59 landing crafts and smaller vessels of the Sri Lankan Navy. They ferried the troops ashore. Landing at KKS was quite tricky because of the mine fields laid by the Sri Lankan Security Forces for the LTTE Sea Tigers. Disembarkation was completed by about last light on 30 July.

We received orders to move to Jaffna, 20 kms away. There were no maps, no knowledge of the terrain, LTTE or the Sri Lankan Forces operating in the area. Troops were warned to be careful while entering the houses as they were likely to be booby trapped by the LTTE. Colonel TPS Brar, the CO met a Sri Lankan Army (SLA) officer who gave him a tourist map and informed him of the 1500 metres wide minefield at the edge of KKS jetty.

First Interaction With LTTE

At 0830 hours on 31 July, we commenced our movement to Jaffna, but the column was halted by the LTTE barely a kilometre ahead of the

minefield at Maviddapuram. Kumarappa, LTTE Commander of Jaffna town, met the CO and did not permit further movement to Jaffna till Prabhakaran, their leader, returned from India to Jaffna. He gave a Motorola radio set to Colonel Brar to enable further communication with the LTTE. The LTTE was in complete control of Jaffna peninsula and the SLA was confined to a few pockets like KKS Jetty, Jaffna Fort, Palaly, Kayts and Elephant Pass. The LTTE cadres appeared to be well trained and highly motivated with a cyanide capsule around their neck. They were ready to sacrifice themselves for the Eelam War rather than face capture. Some of the LTTE cadres were dressed in shirt and trousers, while most wore lungis and slippers with ammunition pouches strapped on their chest. They were equipped with AK-47, M-16 rifles, GPMG and RPG 7V and enjoyed mass appeal amongst the locals, who affectionately called them 'Boys'.



Major VP Singh, Captain Ashok Ambre and Lt BK Tyagi with Kumarappa, LTTE Jaffna Town Commander



Jaffna Fort

In the evening, Major General Harkirat Singh, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) and the CO met Kumarappa who suggested that they meet the Deputy Commander of LTTE, Mahendrajah alias Mahattaya at Jaffna. Two cars were arranged and they along with some LTTE cadres moved to Jaffna. The LTTE had enforced a curfew in the area and their cadres were all along the route. After travelling about three kms, the cars were stopped at a road block established by women and children. They demanded that Prabhakaran be brought back immediately and the IPKF return to India. After much persuasion, the party moved on and the team reached Jaffna to meet Mahattaya. Despite immense efforts, there was no breakthrough as Mahattaya reiterated the demand for Prabhakaran's return as a precondition to any further movement of the IPKF.

On 02 August 1987, Prabhakaran was flown from India to Palaly. The LTTE cadres arranged a big reception for their

leader, demonstrating a massive show of strength. Prabhakaran was taken from Palaly to Nallur under tight security due to the rivalry of the LTTE with Peoples Liberation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) who were planning to avenge the killing of their cadres.

Jaffna Calling

On 03 August, Y and D Companies under Major JC Joshi, the Second-in-Command were heli-lifted from Palaly airfield to Jaffna Fort in SLA helicopters. Subsequently, on 04 August the rest of the unit fetched up in unit transport from KKS to Jaffna Fort. The local LTTE area commander escorted

the convoy short of the Fort. The entire area seemed to be under the control of the LTTE. Photographs of LTTE martyrs, laden with arms and ammunition, pasted on compound walls were a common sight. There were many road junctions dedicated to display of pictures of the martyrs killed in action. This was a significant propaganda and motivation tool of the LTTE. Both sides of the road KKS-Jaffna, bore testimony to the extensive devastation caused by shelling, the use of tanks, Armoured Personnel Carriers and airpower of the Sri Lankan Security Forces. The houses had been badly damaged, lay dilapidated and mostly abandoned. The local people and LTTE cadres greeted the troops and many impromptu photo sessions took place enroute to Jaffna. Some even enthusiastically travelled in the unit vehicles. At 1530 hours, the Jangi Paltan finally reached Jaffna Fort, which was under the control of the SLA.

Jaffna, a small town was densely populated, had concrete buildings with excellent network of lanes and by-lanes. From the military point of view, the buildings had good defence potential. Jaffna Fort, a historic building, had been constructed by the Portuguese in 1618 CE and was later occupied by the Dutch and the British. In the prolonged on-going hostilities between the SLA and the LTTE, the Fort was subjected to heavy shelling and was in a dilapidated state. The entrance to the Fort was extensively damaged due to the suicide attack by Nelson, an LTTE cadre, who had rammed an explosive laden truck into the main gate. The Church inside the Fort was also badly damaged due to shelling and the accommodation was in a pathetic state. The area was littered with

minefields laid by the SLA and it severely restricted the movement of the troops.

By 05 August, HQ 54 Infantry Division was deployed at Palaly, 47 Infantry Brigade was at Vavuniya, 72 Infantry Brigade was at Trincomalee and 91 Infantry Brigade was near Jaffna. With passage of time, some clarity regarding the tasks of the IPKF started to emerge. Monitoring the ceasefire, collection of weapons from the Tamil groups and maintenance of law and order commenced straightaway. Major VP Singh and Captain JNS Bisht established weapons collection posts at the Jaffna bus stand and Kayts Island.

1 Sri Lankan Light Infantry had converted the Jaffna Police Station into a very strong company defended locality. It had a ring of bunkers, strong enough to withstand RPG attacks and guarded the main approach from Jaffna. Immediately, in front were two abandoned buildings, Town Hall and the Jaffna Library. These buildings were heavily booby trapped by the LTTE. On being relieved by the Indian Army, the SLA withdrew into Jaffna Fort and later, on 06 August, was escorted to Palaly airfield, leaving behind a small detachment. They seemed frustrated at being confined to the barracks and perceived the IPKF as pro-Tamils. With the arrival of IPKF, the civilians were relieved as the ceasefire was in place and they could now move about freely. Gradually, the locals started to return to their homes, but remained mortally scared of the on-going fight between the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups.

The Flash Point

On 03 October, the centuries old mistrust between the Sinhalese and the Tamils took an ugly turn as 12 LTTE cadres and five Tamil civilians, including Kumarappa, the Jaffna Area Commander

and Pulendran, the Trincomalee Area Commander, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy off the coast near Point Pedro for violation of the International Maritime Boundary. The LTTE cadres claimed that this was a routine movement and the weapons were for the protection of the two leaders. As directed by the GOC, the CO proceeded to KKS to diffuse the situation. Despite best efforts, the SLA displayed animosity and refused to hand them over. The captured LTTE cadres were staged forward to Palaly airfield for move to Colombo. The SLA detained them in a heavily guarded lounge till the aircraft arrived. Realising no possibility of release, the LTTE cadres consumed cyanide and their bodies were removed from the lounge at 1600 hours. On hearing of the suicide by their comrades, the LTTE unleashed a reign of violence and terror, especially in the East. They massacred 200 innocent Sinhalese down South, killed the eight Sinhala soldiers in their captivity, some senior functionaries

of KKS Cement Factory and policemen in Valvettithurai (VVT). The IPKF tried its best not to let the situation precipitate while it appeared that the SLA was hell bent on doing the opposite.

On 07 October, President JR Jayewardene categorically stated that in the event the IPKF was unable to restrain the LTTE, the SLA would move out of barracks and protect the Sinhalese. On 09 October, Major VP Singh was tasked to carry out discreet reconnaissance of the LTTE TV Tower located near Jaffna Railway Station and five newspaper printing presses including two of LTTE (Moorasoli and Eelam Murasu). The cover up was to publish advertisements in newspapers, instructing all refugees returning from India to report to IPKF office at KKS for registration and relief.

D Company under Major V P Singh was tasked to raid and destroy the two LTTE newspaper printing presses of Moorasoli and Eelam Murasu, by



Jaffna Public Library



Raids on Moorasoli and Eelam Murasu

Two teams from D Company, each comprising of one Officer, one JCO and 20 OR were tasked for the raid. The teams were led by Major V P Singh and Captain JNS Bisht. Destruction of the TV Tower was the responsibility of 5 MADRAS. For the destruction of the printing machines, a JCO from the Assault Pioneer Platoon was detailed with adequate explosives and detonators. ANPRC radio sets were carried for communication and radio silence was to be observed till the execution of the task. On 10 October, both raiding parties moved out in four 3 ton vehicles at 0400 hours. Captain JNS Bisht's party peeled off near Moorasoli and Major VP Singh's party went further ahead to Eelam Murasu. The printing presses were located in built up areas and the houses around them were

occupied. Surprise was achieved while moving to the target area and it was cordoned off with speed. The printing of newspapers was in progress and there were 21 unarmed workers at Moorasoli and 12 in Eelam Murasu. The search parties entered the building, rounded up the workers and frisked them for weapons and cyanide capsules. The assault pioneer team quickly placed the explosives on the machines. In the meantime, the civilians in the adjoining buildings were evacuated. At 0500 hours, a loud explosion shook the three storey building bringing it down like a pack of cards. The LTTE militants immediately instigated demonstrations by civil organisations and retaliated against the IPKF with automatic and mortar fire on the IPKF post at Tellipallai. They ambushed a CRPF convoy near Tellipallai and killed four jawans. A jeep of 10 Para Commando was hijacked and the five occupants were killed. The conflict between IPKF and LTTE had started.

0500 hours on 10 October. In the evening at 1800 hours, Shankar, a senior LTTE cadre along with his comrades came to the company desirous of knowing the reasons for IPKF movement in certain places during the day. He had brought a verbal message from Prabhakaran: *"The LTTE did not want to fight IPKF, but were ready to retaliate in case the situation demanded"*. Shankar returned at 2200 hours with a letter from Prabhakaran to the Prime Minister of India, Mr Rajiv Gandhi. The letter was read on telephone to the Brigade Commander and GOC. Before melting away into darkness at 2300 hours, the LTTE leaders mentioned they would always respect the Indian Army as an institution. They expected the Indian Army to reciprocate and respect the LTTE as it was fighting for a cause. The CO shook hands with the LTTE leaders. This was a very sad moment as it was their last meeting as friends.

Action at Cross Streets

On 10 October, the Company Commanders were urged to be proactive and occupy dominating buildings around Jaffna Fort. Occupation of the reconnoitred locations commenced at 1230 hours. D Company reconnaissance party led by Subedar Laxman Shinde with 15 OR observed four vans parked at the Cross Streets, when crossing Town Hall. Subedar Shinde was convinced that the LTTE cadres in the vans, armed with weapons, had arrived with a purpose. Before he could act,

his party came under heavy small arms fire. The reconnaissance party retaliated immediately and compelled the LTTE cadres to scamper for cover. Suddenly, the serene atmosphere reverberated with sound of automatic firing from the area of the Cross Streets. The encounter site was 250 metres away, in a dense built up area and Major VP Singh rushed to the site to assess the situation. He deployed the troops in the outer areas of the Town Hall. Heavy exchange of small arms fire continued between 10 Platoon and the LTTE. 12 Platoon under Subedar Mahadev Barge moved along with two BMPs to reinforce 10 Platoon. 12 Platoon positioned itself in the general area of Subramaniam Park and deployed the BMPs to cover the main road leading to Jaffna Fort. Major VP Singh, controlling the operations standing next to a BMP, observed an RPG round explode 100 metres behind the BMP. It was a close shave for 2nd Lieutenant Menon, the Mechanised Platoon Commander and his crew. Simultaneously, Captain Bisht moved from the CTO Complex with two BMPs and went behind the LTTE positions. The LTTE had not anticipated this unexpected manoeuvre and fled from the site. Subsequently, Captain Bisht deployed the BMPs to cover the right flank of 10 Platoon along the lagoon. Colonel TPS Brar asked Major VP Singh to advance along the First Cross Street and secure the area before last light. 10 Platoon commenced its movement supported by the two BMPs and crossed the second road junction successfully. The BMPs moved behind the leading section and carried out speculative fire on the buildings astride the road.

At First Cross Street, an RPG round had hit a BMP, killing Naik Jai Bhagwan, the driver, on the spot. The remaining crew and stick were seriously wounded. They

were given first aid and immediately evacuated. A radio intercept revealed that the LTTE had suffered heavy casualties and were planning to storm the Fort at night. At 0530 hours, on 11 October, the LTTE carried out a heavy fire assault on D Company location. It was not effective and the retaliatory fire by the company forced the LTTE to withdraw. The expended small arms ammunition was replenished by helicopters and the previous day's experience cautioned the unit to maintain strict fire control. On the second night, fire control had improved, especially after some tough talking by the Company Commanders.

In the meantime operations continued around Jaffna Fort, on 12 October, C Company was ordered to capture the Veerasingha Hall by 0500 hours the next day. The attack on Veerasingha Hall was a big success. The operation went exactly as planned and there were no casualties.

Since no substantial progress was

made on any of the axes by the advancing columns of the other battalions, plans to establish a link up were shelved by Higher HQ. Columns were sent out to secure the areas two to three kms around the Fort. These columns had to ultimately fall back as it was not possible to hold these areas. The Mortar Platoon of Jangi Paltan played a vital role in the operations of 8 MAHAR and 18 Infantry Brigade.

Link Up with 41 Infantry Brigade

On 19 October, at first light, 41 Infantry Brigade advancing along the coastal road reached Mile Stone-3 (MS - 3). Major SD Patil and Major Vinod Sud were directed to secure MS-1. This was accomplished speedily, but 41 Infantry Brigade was unable to move ahead of MS-2. The LTTE had interposed itself between Y and C Companies and 41 Infantry Brigade. In the meantime, Brigadier Manjit Singh, Commander 41 Infantry Brigade sent an SOS message as the advancing columns were left with



Jaffna Police Station - Capt SS Shinde Maj Vinod Sud Col TPS Brar Lt BK Tyagi Maj SK Sarin Capt Ashok Ambre and AS Khatri



no ammunition. The CO decided to take a risk and directed the Mechanised Infantry Platoon Commander, 2nd Lieutenant Menon to take a platoon in the BMPs and rush through the last kilometre, pulverising the LTTE on either side.

Since there was some delay in the move of the BMPs, Subedar Shinde was tasked for the link up. The Sappers used a Charge Line Mine Clearing to clear the road. This action broke the will of the LTTE to fight and forced them to abandon their positions. The much awaited link up with 41 Infantry Brigade was finally established. Commander 41 Infantry Brigade complimented the Paltan for the dare devil action.

1 MARATHA LI was then tasked to clear a densely built up area, West of the Road Jaffna Fort-KKS. The civil population had already abandoned their houses and moved to the nearby temples and to Jaffna Hindu College. The operations commenced at 0700 hours on 26 October. Y Company under Captain SS Shinde and C Company under Major

with a causeway at Moolai and with Kayts by a ferry. The unit concentrated at Mandaitivu by 0400 hours and was airlifted in 41 MI-8 sorties to the Sri Lankan Naval Base at Karaitivu. On 07 November while Operation KARAITIVU was in progress and the Northern and Western regions of the island were yet to be searched, the Paltan was ordered to reel back to Karaitivu Naval Base and carry out search of Kayts. This was followed by securing Moolai and capture of Araly Bridge which the LTTE was holding in strength. During these operations large quantities of arms, ammunition and other warlike stores were recovered.

The Jangi Paltan had been involved in intense operations since 10 October. It had moved out of Jaffna Fort on 26 October and had been on the move. It was operating in the monsoons under very challenging conditions. Despite the heavy rains, troops did not wear rain capes as it hampered the use of weapons. Meals were usually on the go and majority of the troops did not even have an extra pair of uniform.

Setback at Sandilipay

November was a month of relentless search and destroy operations. On 29 November, a milkman came early in the morning and informed Major SK Sarin about 8-10 LTTE cadres hiding in a house 500 metres away. He carried a handmade sketch marked with the exact location of the hideout. The target house was in a heavily built up area, had a fairly open area all around with a fencing of palm leaves held together with barbed wire. Major SK Sarin informed the CO and confirmed the reliability of the informer. Y and D Companies were to provide two platoons each for the operation. By 0930 hours, everyone –

Vinod Sud reached Navalur road by 0800 hours, eliminating three LTTE cadres and apprehending six enroute. After Y and C Companies reached Navalur Road, D Company commenced its advance to capture the area from the Araly-Manipai Road junction to the Jaffna Hindu College. By twilight, they succeeded in securing the area upto Araly-Manipai Road junction and Jaffna Hindu College 'T' junction. The LTTE avoiding a pitched battle, continued to fire and break contact.

Operation Karaitivu, Kayts, Araly and Moolai

On 05 November, the Paltan received orders to secure Karaitivu. It was a big island connected to Jaffna

including an adhoc platoon from the Battalion HQ reached the company location. The officers present were briefed regarding the plan viz Major SK Sarin, Major SD Patil, Major VP Singh, Captain AK Basu and Captain JNS Bisht. Y Company was to move along the Keerimalai road up to Hindu College and establish a block South of the target area, while D Company established a block West of the LTTE hideout. A Company was to raid the house from the East.

The operation commenced at 1100 hours. D Company moved on foot with Major VP Singh and Captain JNS Bisht. Major VP Singh narrates *"Just short of the road, where the block had to be established, we decided to take a small lane and join the block in the centre. As my party reached the area of the roadblock, we came under very heavy fire and we suffered few casualties. Grenades were lobbed by the LTTE from a nearby corner house in the lane. Some of my boys rushed out of the lane, took positions in an open patch and retaliated, forcing the LTTE to stop firing. I then tasked Captain JNS Bisht and Subedar Laxman Shinde to take a section and establish a block West of the lane to prevent the escape of the LTTE cadres. In the meantime, I deployed the platoon in the palmyra grove. I ordered Subedar Kenjle, the second platoon commander to clear the corner house from where the grenades were lobbed. My party in the grove also came under fire and my radio operator, Sepoy Nana Patil was hit on the thigh. He managed to crawl under the fence and enter a house.*

I too entered the nearest house along with my runner. Low on ammunition, I took a magazine from a wounded rifleman in the house and continued to engage the LTTE. I saw an LTTE cadre from the window and shot him dead. The fire fight continued as I noticed a female LTTE cadre in a nearby palmyra grove trying to snatch the weapon from a wounded soldier. I fired at her but she managed to run away. After some time, the firing stopped and the LTTE was able to break contact. The body of a LTTE cadre, Kulam, along

with a M-16 rifle was recovered from the site. Further search of the area revealed blood stains at the spot. We pursued the blood trail but lost it near the Nachchamar temple. It was obvious that the wounded cadres had been evacuated in a vehicle".

First aid was given to the wounded soldiers and evacuated to Palaly in helicopters. In the ambush, D Company suffered 17 casualties including nine fatal and eight wounded. Y Company lost one boy and a rifle. The subsequent search and tell-tale signs revealed that LTTE too had suffered many casualties. The Sandilipay operation was a sad set back.

Operations Continue

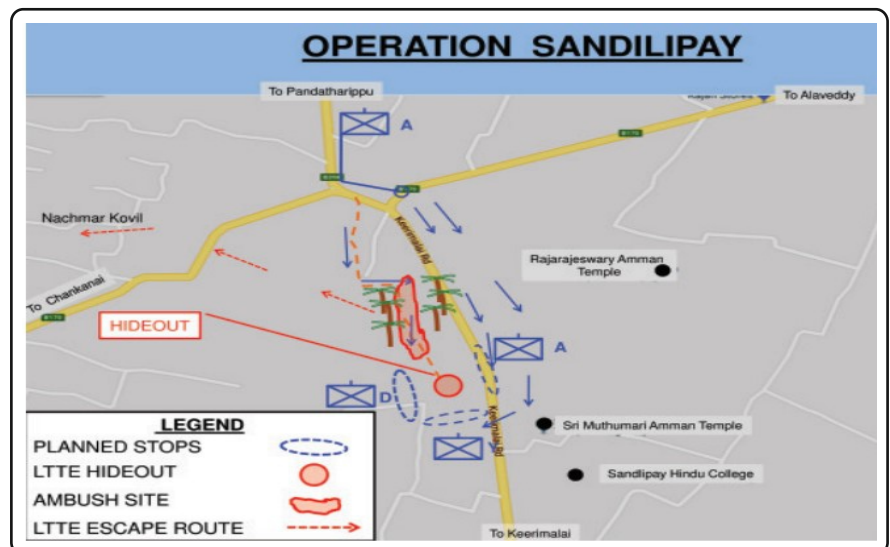
The modus operandi of IPKF changed from large scale cordon and search to operations based on specific information. The LTTE was finding it extremely difficult to re-establish due to the effective counter insurgency grid of the IPKF. While some cadres fled to Tamil Nadu using fishing boats or catamarans, the tougher ones moved to

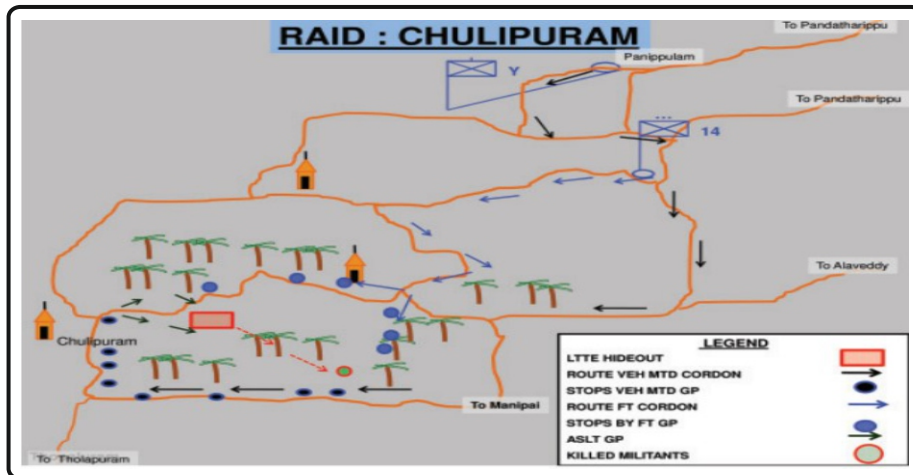
the jungles of Vavuniya and Mullaitivu.

The situation was well under control and movement of troops and vehicles was incident free. The scene of action now switched over to the areas South of Elephant Pass.

In early 1988, Subedar Jaganath Chavan of Y Company did the unit proud by apprehending two militants (2nd/Lt (SS) Manglesh and Prem of Madhi group) near Mathagal. They were in possession of a carbine and some ammunition. In another encounter, the scouts of a patrol from A Company were fired upon by a hard core LTTE cadre Ajit of Madhi group in Vadaliappu. The patrol quickly closed in, and as they were about to nab him, he tried to consume cyanide. Swift action by the patrol saved his life and a pistol was recovered.

One day, a patrol of A Company under Subedar Vithal More spotted a person moving suspiciously on a cycle. On being challenged, he ran into a toilet in a by-lane. He was chased by Lance Naik Balkrishna Gore, the





scout, who forced open the door to apprehend the militant. The militant immediately bit a cyanide capsule and committed suicide. The spotter with the patrol identified him as Prasad, the second highest leader of the LTTE political wing. His funeral was well attended by the locals. It was a big catch and the higher HQ appreciated the action. Lance Naik Gore was awarded Mention-in-Despatches for this act of bravery.

By July-August, things were beginning to heat up, with the LTTE threatening, intimidating and killing civilians who opposed them or helped the IPKF. Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and booby traps were recovered and incidents of encounters with patrols and attacks on convoys were on the rise. Under such prevailing conditions, things were just waiting to happen.

Major Holey had a miraculous escape while patrolling in Chulipuram in an RCL jeep. While negotiating a turn in one of the many by-lanes, he saw some boys pasting LTTE propaganda posters on the compound walls. The militants

fired head-on from less than 20 metres but missed the target. A few days later, Lieutenant Colonel P G Pawar, the CO broke through an ambush laid by the LTTE at Ampani Junction.

The Paltan was tasked to assist in the conduct of the Provincial Council Elections followed by the Presidential Elections. It involved collection of ballot boxes, securing polling stations and depositing the ballot boxes back to the Election Commission's vote counting offices. The smooth conduct of the Provincial Council, Presidential and Parliamentary elections was one of the major achievements of the IPKF.

1989 started on a sad note as we lost Captain Sanjay Dogra, winner of Sword of Honour from the Indian Military

Academy and a brilliant officer, in an ambush near Periyavilan. His death was avenged three days later in our neighbouring battalion when Major (SS) Thumban, the militant responsible for Captain Sanjay Dogra's death was killed in a joint operation.

Raid at Chulipuram

Y Company, under the dynamic leadership of Captain JNS Bisht carried out a daring daylight raid on a militant hideout. In the words of Captain Bisht: "It was 1140 hours on 20 April and we had just returned from a foot patrol, after assisting a neighbouring battalion in its operations. Lance Naik Chellappan, my Tamil interpreter came and informed me "Sabib, Security wala aya hai." By now I had become a bit wary of all these informers since they seldom had any worthwhile real time intelligence to give. All the same, I realised this man had come in broad daylight, quite contrary to his earlier practice of coming at night to avoid suspicion and reprisal by the LTTE. I rushed out of my room in a lungi and called him in. He told me there were three militants resting in a house and one of them was on sentry duty outside. I requested him to draw a sketch and pinpoint the exact house. My biggest asset was the intimate knowledge of the area acquired over a period of time. I was sure of the house the informer was referring to and took out my own enlargement to verify it. I thanked him and asked him to sit inside a bunker in the corner of my post". Bisht quickly worked out the details for the raid – the requirement of men, their positions on ground and the actual conduct of the raid. Lieutenant Colonel PG Pawar, the CO met up with Bisht at Vadaliaapu, Y Company platoon post. The house to be raided was just 500 metres from this post. Lieutenant Colonel P G Pawar, the CO recalls, "The moment the vehicle carrying the main assault group stopped 60 metres from the house, the militants opened heavy volume of fire on the dismounting troops.



(Left) Lt Col PG Pawar, Capt JNS Bisht and the Chulipuram Raid Party. (Right) Surrender Ceremony in Jaffna Fort. Capt R.S Chhettri, Col TPS Brar, Capt Ashok Ambre, Lt BK Tyagi, Maj VP Singh and Capt JNS Bisht supervising.

The blazing fire of militants rather than chilling the brave 'Ganpats' spurred them on. Taking cover of coconut trees the group moved towards the house. Two groups of the raiding party encircled the house from the flanks and simultaneously, Captain Bisht's group closed in on the house. The outer cordon had already been established. Meanwhile, Sepoy Ramling Bhangе knocked down the militant on sentry duty and rushed to the main door. Along with Captain Bisht, he bravely lobbed hand grenades through the windows, thereby neutralising the hiding terrorists. They quickly entered the room and killed the hiding militants".

Three militants were killed and two weapons were recovered. For this dare devil raid on the LTTE hideout, Captain JNS Bisht was awarded Vir Chakra, Sepoy Chellappan, Sena Medal and Lance Naik Ramling Bhangе, Chief of Army Staff Commendation Card.

Reflections

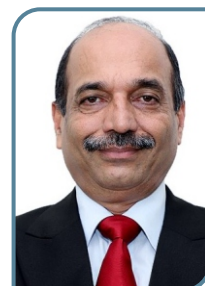
Jangi Paltan was one of the first units to be inducted into Operation PAWAN, in the summer of 1987 and amongst the last to leave the Sri Lankan shores in the winter of 1989. The Paltan had an action packed tenure in Sri Lanka. There were hits and misses, highs and lows but the Ganpats

confronted the challenges like brave hearts. There were always misgivings, uncertainties and lingering questions. Was it really worth fighting someone else's cause and battle? Was such a prolonged stay essential? There were of course no easy answers. The men continued to perform their tasks as soldiers, administrators and diplomats, all rolled into one. In retrospect, many lessons were learnt and many were taught. I was fortunate to be part of the action.

(Author's Note: This account includes some of the notable actions of the Jangi Paltan in Jaffna area, and have been culled from "The Sri Lanka Diary: 1 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY (JANGI PALTAN)", a compilation by the officers of Jangi Paltan, Collated & Compiled by Major CT Sadanandan (Retd), Edited by Lieutenant General TPS Brar, PVSM, YSM (Retd) & Lieutenant Colonel PG Pawar (Retd) and Published by Pentagon Press LLP, Shahpur Jat, New Delhi. I have condensed and abridged the narrative suitably).



Lieutenant General Ashok Ambre, PVSM, AVSM*, SM (Retd) was commissioned in 1 MARATHA LI (Jangi Paltan) in June 1980. He has seen active service in Sri Lanka with the IPKF and has also been the Adjutant at Indian Military Academy, Dehradun. He has commanded his unit along the Line of Actual Control, and later commanded the Tawang Brigade, a Division in the North East and a pivot Corps on the Western Front. He superannuated in March 2019 as the Quartermaster General and is settled in Pune.



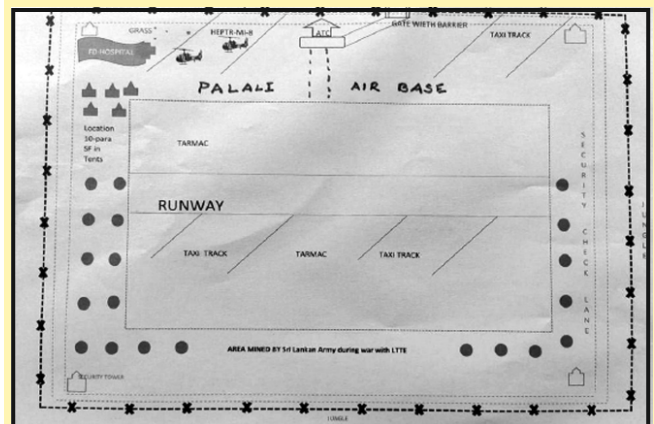
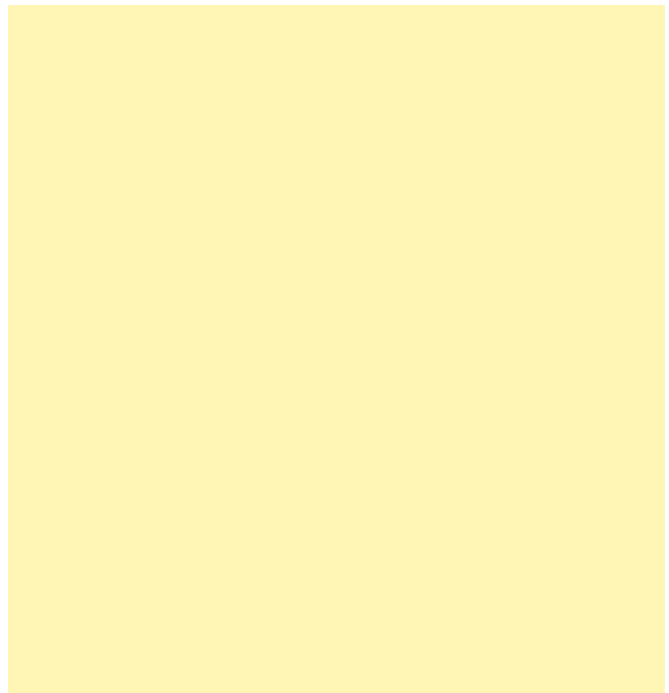
Lt Gen Ashok Ambre

JAFFNA UNIVERSITY

DESCENT INTO THE MAELSTROM

The Jaffna University Heliborne Operation is considered as the most significant firefight of Operation PAWAN, highlighting the folly of launching a large scale heliborne mission in haste, with inadequate intelligence, with unprepared troops and without assessing the capabilities of the opponents correctly. A first person account by the first paratrooper to land there.

The heliborne operation launched to evict the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and destroy their headquarters in the Jaffna University building on night 11/12 October 87 was the most intense and tragic battle in Operation PAWAN. The loss of 29 brave hearts of 13 SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY (LI) and six Para Commandos was the heavy price paid by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). It however set in motion the ponderous Indian Army machinery which applied greater firepower and resources to secure Jaffna having realised the quality and numbers of the LTTE cadres.



Palaly Airfield in 1987



Flight path of the helicopters marked in blue

I was a young strapping captain in 10 Para Commando, when we received orders in mid-August 1987 to move to Sri Lanka in aid of Sri Lankan Tamils. At Jodhpur Airbase, the slow crawl of the aircraft on the runway, was quite the opposite of my pulse which raced madly in anticipation of the challenges. Little did I know that I was heading for one of my biggest near-death battle experience.

The Cyanide Effect

The die had been cast, with the suicide by 12 LTTE prisoners in early October 87 at the Palaly airfield in Jaffna Peninsula. Failure by India to negotiate the release of these LTTE prisoners upset the Tamil Tigers leadership. India was till that point viewed as “*Guarantors of Tamil security*”, the *raison d’être* for the induction of IPKF. Indian attempts to commence disarming the LTTE failed, and events precipitated leading to hostilities.

IPKF convoys were ambushed near Trincomalee and 5 MADRAS located near Headquarters (HQ) 54 Infantry Division at Palaly was attacked. Five of our boys who had gone to Jaffna town for repair of a volleyball on 08 October 87 were ambushed en route, all were killed. It was a rude shock, as we were in operational readiness to engage the Sri Lankan Army. Little did we know that with the turn of these events, we would be fighting the supposedly “*riff- raff*” bunch of Tamil rebels.

The Heliborne Operation

The operational order (executive order) issued on 11 October 87, tasked us to secure a landing zone (LZ) for 13 SIKH LI, then raid the LTTE political headquarters, or any other target in the vicinity. Subsequently link up with 18 Infantry Brigade at Jaffna bus stand by first light on 12 October, or establish a commando base till link up by 72 Infantry

Brigade was complete. This being the first operation against the LTTE, the enemy’s fighting capabilities, his weapon systems and tactics were not known to us. Except for the reliable and versatile 84 mm Rocket Launcher (RL), a couple of passive night sights and Bergun rucksacks, the weapons and equipment with us were vintage, and put us at a serious tactical disadvantage, compared to the LTTE.

At 0100 hours 12 October, it was a half-moon sky, the flying time to the LZ was barely half a minute. Last minute checks were carried out. We were three officers, including the Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) and 96 commandos, and the Second-in-command of the battalion, not wanting to be left behind, decided to join us. Colonel Dalvir Singh, our Commanding Officer (CO) was at Colombo with Mr J N Dixit, the High Commissioner. Having said our prayers, the 100 strong team moved quietly to the waiting MI-8s. One rope had been fixed in each helicopter to slither down. I boarded the leading air craft and my team commander the next. The Second-in-command also got in my lead helicopter. The induction was to be in successive waves of two helicopters, but as things turned out this was not to be.

With our battle cry of “*Durge Bhawani Ki Jai*” the helicopter took off. The silence of the night was shattered as these two helicopters, carrying young enthusiastic commandos with fire in their bellies headed towards Jaffna University. I firmly believe that the only way to fight fear is to totally immerse oneself into the mission and only a fearless commander commands a fearless team. We had barely flown for 2½ minutes (even after taking a detour) and we were at the LZ.

Between the Devil & The Deep Sea

I was at the door with the rope in hand as the helicopter lowered to 10 metres. I threw down the rope and made a quick exit, holding the rope tight for the next man to come down. The enemy’s automatic fire had opened up from the first and second



Jaffna Medical College Building as it is today. The LTTE cadres were firing onto the LZ from the first and second floors.



Col RS Bhadauria at the football ground where he landed that night, during a visit in later years.

floor of the Medical University building dominating the landing ground. The pilot decided to land the helicopter instead of hovering at 10 metres, making it a difficult target to be hit by enemy fire. This fire from LTTE was, in military parlance “*plunging*”, meaning delivered from a height to a target on the ground level, which is not ideal for automatic weapons. This was a boon, as neither we nor the SIKH LI platoon took a single casualty from enemy fire during landing, which continued throughout the hours of darkness.

While landing due to the down draft of the rotors, the lengthy free end of the rope got entangled in my legs. I could see the last commando rushing out of the helicopter with the Second-in-command coming out as the last man. I had two choices, either to jump back into the helicopter and come back with the next wave, or else go back hanging under the helicopter and then come back with the next wave. My commando dagger in my ruck sack could not be taken out unless

luck had smiled on me!!

The next wave of helicopters ferried in the rest of our team. We had deployed on the football ground where we landed. I was directing fire on the enemy position which was nearest to me. By then, we had removed our packs. The third wave of two MI-8 helicopters came in, bringing Major Birendra Singh of 13 SIKH LI, his mortar platoon and Medium Machine Gun (MMG) section. The 81 mm mortar platoon had ammunition, but no mortar to fire that ammunition – a major lapse. It was like having ink but no pen. During the landing of the third wave, one helicopter was hit by LTTE fire. With the second working engine, the pilot skilfully managed to fly back to Palaly airfield. Being a dangerous situation, further induction of the 13 SIKH LI company was abandoned.

Switching on the night vision device mounted on my head, I saw a group of militants rushing in as reinforcement from the left side of the building. I spoke to Major Rajiv Nair, my team commander, if I could move ahead and intercept the LTTE cadres. He wisely declined permission, as taking own casualties at this stage, would impede the main operation, even as we continued engaging them from our present location. At 0215 hours, the MMG section of 13 SIKH LI opened up vigorously, to silence the enemy fire.

At 0315 hours, we moved out of the LZ, as no further helicopter sorties were planned. We asked Major Birendra Singh (13 SIKH LI) to accompany us, but he declined, saying he had orders from his CO, that as the distance was only four kms the latter would link up with them by first light (daybreak). This decision sealed the fate of the braves of SIKH LI.

released from the shoulder. Here I was entangled between the devil and the deep sea. Going back into the helicopter would be embarrassing, going back under-slung was a difficult option with a 25 kg pack on my back. I knew that though I would be able to hold on to the rope, I would swing like a pendulum and endanger the flight movement of the helicopter besides inviting enemy automatic fire from the ground.

It goes without saying that “*when lady luck is with you; you will always be a winner.*” I was desperately trying to untangle myself free of the rope, the helicopter took off to bring in the next wave and I just managed, in the nick of time, to free myself from the entangled rope. I thanked my stars, lady

These valiant men of 13 SIKH LI fought to the last man, last round on that football ground, till 1130 hours on 12 October.

Later, Sepoy Gora Singh, the only survivor captured alive was repatriated when exchange of prisoners took place, and the Indian Army handed over “Kittu”, their commander back to the LTTE. Gora Singh had an interesting tale to narrate. He was asked by LTTE to train them in use of the dreaded and effective 84 mm RL, however he was not familiar with the weapon, so he declined, for which he was beaten up. He then consented to show them how to fire the weapon. He loaded the weapon and fired with whatever skill he could muster. To the horror of the LTTE, the militant standing behind the RL during the demonstration was blown off, and incinerated due to the back blast (well defined conical danger area in the rear of the RL, where the flame and escaping gases are emitted after a round is fired).

Our team moved ahead in the night, like ghosts. We crossed the Jaffna railway line, where we rested near a communication tower. I was tasked to destroy the communication setup. Havildar Shayar Singh accompanied me, covering my move and I managed to place the charges, but the igniter would not light, as a strong breeze had started. At a distance of 200 metres with the night vision we could see some LTTE movement. With a little effort we lit the wick and sprinted away. A minute and a half later, there were two blasts in succession and the communication setup of the LTTE in that area was destroyed / broken.

By daybreak Major Rajiv Nair had contacted a middle-aged civilian and persuaded him to give us some information. He stated that there was a LTTE camp about 300 metres away, which had an approximate strength of 200 plus LTTE. We moved on and around 0710

hours, the quiet stillness of the morning was broken by volleys of enemy automatic fire - all hell broke loose. Fire opened up on us from three directions. When fire comes on you and if it does not hit you, what you hear is the direction of gun fire and possible smoke by day and flash of the gun fire by night. But you will rarely see the man, as he will always be in a well concealed position. The fire was coming from coconut tree tops, which were apparently nesting well concealed snipers. We immediately brought down retaliatory automatic fire on them, and firing seemed to stop momentarily.

Our advance was halted. Havildar Bhanwar Lal had been hit on the thigh and was lying in pain. Identifying the hut from which the fire had come, barely 70 metres away, I directed my RL detachment to fire a round. Sure enough there was no further fire from that direction, but one could hear the cries of women and children in pain.

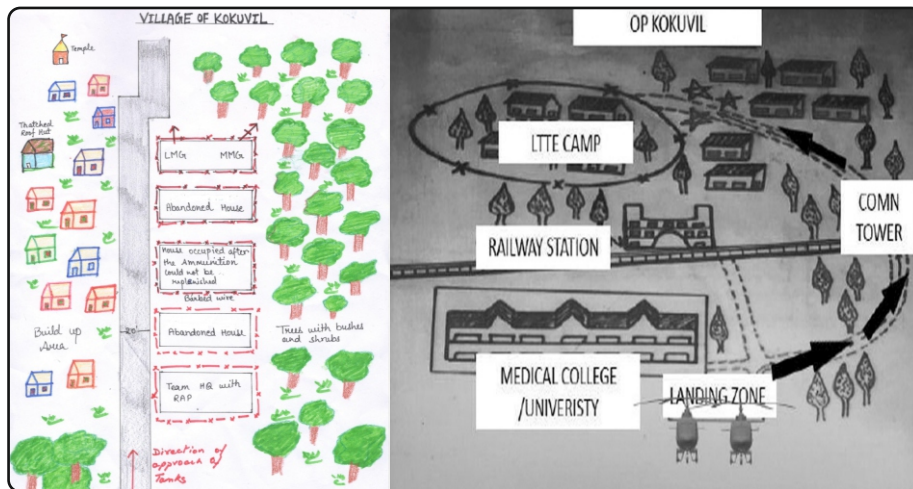
We were in a posh colony of

Kokuvil, with stately well-lined houses on both sides of the 20 feet lane. As we moved on, we came under heavy fire again from a house. The Second-in-command and I sprinted to the door, firing our weapons, our boys tailing us, with the latter unable to fire, as we were shielding their vision while ahead of them. We got into the house, even as a man rushed at us. The Second-in-command fired directly on his chest, at a distance of three feet and a jet of blood rushed out which spilled over on me too (The bullet had hit the main artery). We crouched and cleared room by room. Every man or woman in that house was neutralised by fire. I exited the house from the rear. Intense fire was raining on us from all sides, it was by then 0745 hours. I turned back ordering our troops to take cover, as we too had taken a few casualties.

There was a gap of 50 metres between me and the trailing troops, when I was asked to stop as we had taken about seven to eight casualties, a



The house where Captain Bhadauria and his Commandos had consolidated, but withdrew back from here on orders. The photo was taken a few weeks later after the operation.



few of them, fatal. Captain Ajit Venniyoor, the RMO who accompanied us established his medical aid post and got down to treating our wounded casualties. He would later himself have a narrow escape as the splinter of an exploding grenade hit his camera slung on person. He was later awarded Sena Medal for his unstinted support in the operations.

I consolidated our position in the new location, when we saw a number of young men and women moving, about 100-150 metres away from us. Little did I realize that they were all carrying AK-47 weapons hidden under their lungis (wrapped piece of cloth wear) strapped to their legs. The deserted house where I had set up my post, had a good field of view for 100 yards on the left and 60 yards on my right. My party of 20 commandos had dispersed, when the fire fight broke out. Now we were nine.

We had a MMG and a Light Machine Gun (LMG) with us. I placed the MMG to cover the open area with scrubs on the right, and LMG to cover the passage on the left. I earmarked firing positions for each commando, and positioned myself

next to the MMG. Just then Major Rajiv Nair came up on the radio set, and said that he was sending us some tea. Oh! What a welcome message that was. Not a drop of water had passed between our lips, since we had left the Palaly airfield, it was about 0830 hours. While we were having tea, I saw a man on a bicycle fleeing. He didn't stop when hailed. I fired a burst from my 9 mm carbine which hit him, blood trickled down his back, but he cycled on. Little point in chasing him, I thought. I sat down again to finish my cup of tea, which I thought was well deserved, and then rose. Immediately, I heard the crack of a bullet which missed me, and hit the chair where I was sitting.

Springing up, I returned fire with the LMG.

By then heavy fire was raining on us, a grenade had hit my MMG position, putting it out of action and wounding both the gunners. Another commando firing from a window was wounded. I was manning the LMG with the Number 2 gunner, who was passing me the filled magazines. We hadn't carried any rations, except a few tea packets, but instead had carried double the amount of authorized ammunition. It was paying us good dividends. Just then the Number 2 gunner said "*last magazine Sahab*" (which meant 30 bullets and no more was all that was left). The LMG barrel was burning hot in broad day light, I slowed down my fire and sent an urgent message to Major Rajiv Nair for resupply of ammunition. In the meantime, I instructed the Number 2 gunner to break the belted ammunition of 7.62 MMG and fill up some of the magazines of our personal weapons i.e. Self Loading Rifles.

There were three belts of MMG, each belt carries 235 bullets, so that saw us through, till more ammunition came in. LTTE had made two attempts to overrun my position by sheer fire power and numbers. But we silenced them effectively in the open killing ground. There was a lull. I knew it would not be for long, so I immediately despatched my wounded boys back to the doctor. The ammunition replenishment party was despatched by the team commander, but they could not deliver, due to the heavy fire by LTTE. Major Rajiv Nair directed that I fall back and close the gap between both of us. I asked my men to fall back in twos and threes, till then I kept firing from every window with the machine gun. My buddy and I were the last to move back.

I did not occupy the house immediately behind, but the one after that. The gap between these two houses was 20 metres. Our ammunition had been replenished by the team commander at this new

location. The LTTE took some time to move up and occupy that house after firing a lot of ammunition. They moved to the next one attempting to close in on us. I held my fire till they reached 20 metres short, in open killing ground, between the two houses. It is here that we surprised them and laid a number of them to rest for ever. By now every effort by LTTE to overrun us from all sides had failed. The Air Observation Post helicopter tried to drop some ammunition on our location, but the effort was futile. However, they were able to direct the Sri Lankan Army mortar fire on the LTTE from Jaffna Fort.

As night was descending, we had to decide on our next course of action. By then we had taken six fatal casualties and fifteen wounded. The doctor was working tirelessly to keep the wounded alive. Night brings with it the uncertain fear of darkness. Shadows look like ghosts. But it is a double-edged weapon for both sides. By midnight I felt that no more attacks by the LTTE were likely. All the same, I did not want to be surprised, warning my men to stay alert.

Here I would like to recall the comradeship of my buddies and men who were with me in that intense firefight with the LTTE militants. Of the nine commandos including me, three had been wounded, and we were practically running out of ammunition as the follow-up ammunition party, trailing us at 100 metres was pinned down under accurate fire.

Twice they tried to replenish us and failed, taking a casualty. So, Major Rajiv Nair asked me to fall back. With each casualty, I sent a pair of “buddies” back first. My own buddy and another commando were busy breaking the ammunition belt of the 7.62 mm MMG, to fill the LMG, which I was manning (the ammunition of same calibre being interchangeable). These commandos moved back approximately 75 metres

behind and occupied a house, while I covered their movement with fire.

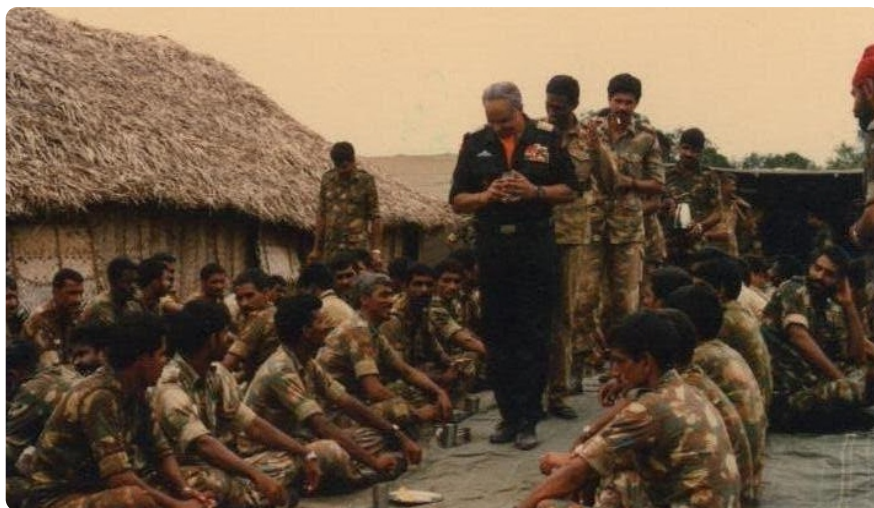
A stage came when the only commando left with me was my buddy Arvind Kumar, an Adivasi warrior from Jharkhand. I asked him to move, but he refused to budge even a step back without me. Ultimately, I moved back carrying the LMG, and as I was crossing the barbed wire fence (all the houses in the locality either had a barbed wire fence or a four to five feet wall around their compound), I got stuck in the fence with the LMG. Arvind Kumar had crossed over and was 10 yards ahead, but turned back as he saw me struggling to free myself. He helped me untangle and got behind me, covering me from direct enemy fire. I haven’t forgotten this act of selfless courage under observed fire to date.

Link Up, 12/13 October

At HQ 54 Infantry Division, a different story was unfolding, after the initial plan of inducting 13 SIKH LI by

air was abandoned. 13 SIKH LI less two companies, were tasked to advance cross country. Colonel Dalvir Singh, our CO had flown back by the first flight to Jaffna from Colombo. He led a separate force to link up with us, consisting of approximately 110 men from 13 SIKH LI and three T-72 tanks of 65 Armoured Regiment under Major Anil Kaul, the Squadron Commander. As it had rained the previous night, the tanks could only move on hard surface. Colonel Dalvir Singh asked Major Kaul to follow the railway line. The tanks moved on the railway line comfortably, with 13 SIKH LI providing close protection.

Colonel Dalvir Singh was sitting on the outside of the leading tank. Just as they entered the built-up area around 1800 hours and the sun had set, the CO spotted a man at very close range about to fire a RPG round. Before he could react, he heard a deafening sound with a flash. The rocket hit the tank frontally, it ricocheted and hit the cupola of the



Brigadier Bhawani Singh, MVC, a former CO of 10 Para Commando visiting the unit at Vavuniya.



The Last Post being sounded at Palahy for the six Para Commandos killed in action at Kokuvil.

tank, where Major Anil Kaul was standing on his seat. Colonel Dalvir Singh looked up and saw blood all over Major Kaul's face. The advance was halted, first aid given, and they returned to leave Major Anil Kaul at the 72 Infantry Brigade first aid post.

As darkness descended, sheets of tropical rain were pouring down. The three tanks advanced, firing at everything that moved. Due to the screening effect of the built-up area the very high frequency radio sets were not in communication.

Colonel Dalvir Singh entered Kokuvil with a troop of tanks and a company of 13 SIKH LI at about 0300 hours. The company led by late Major Rakesh Mohan, whose valour went unrecognized, was unable to locate us in the by-lanes of Kokuvil, as the rendezvous for link up was not visible. Major Rajiv Nair asked me to fire a Verey light, a pyrotechnic signalling device. It was the last one left in our kitty then, and sure enough, he could not see the signal due to

the coconut trees and foliage. He then asked me to kindle a fire, which would be visible for a longer period of time. The only option left was to burn one of the houses. Most of the houses in the locality were made of brick and cement. I then remembered having spotted a thatched hut close by, during the day. Havildar Jogi Ram got up to move with me. All our para flares and signal cartridges used for such requirements had been expended in more than 24 hours of combat. We had some PEK (plastic explosive) which burns well even in extremely soggy conditions, so I closed in with two commandos covering my move and lit the hut. In a couple of minutes there was a huge fire. This was immediately picked up by Colonel Dalvir Singh who was now barely 500 metres from our location. He finally linked up with us at 0345 hours on 13 October.

We placed our casualties on the tank, and wanted to move further ahead. But the tank gunners had finished all their main gun ammunition less 15 rounds of the ranging gun. Furthermore, one tank had a round stuck in the breech, the other had a faulty firing mechanism. Further movement was abandoned, and we turned back, to link up with 72 Infantry Brigade. As we started moving back, LTTE once again went on the offensive and continued firing at us. But their fire was replied by our heavier volley of fire which kept them at bay.

The fall out of the operation was that IPKF realized that it was no child's play in the months ahead. Had Major Rajiv Nair not stopped my movement ahead at Kokuvil, I probably would have bumped into Prabhakaran who was barely 200 metres ahead in a temple. This we learnt from Colonel Nair of 7/8 Gorkha Rifles who was killed in Jaffna town later, by LTTE sniper fire. We later heard from Nirmala, the LTTE girl who had surrendered to HQ 41 Infantry Brigade, that they were aware of the heliborne operation. She had moved with a batch of LTTE girls as reinforcements on the night of 10/11 October 87 from Kopai North to the university ground that night, approximately around 0230 hours.

We cremated our six fallen Commandos at the Palahy Air Field. There is a graveyard honouring our dead, maintained even today, recently visited by one of our officers on duty. A war memorial was constructed there with the assistance of our army, the Indian High Commission and the Sri Lankan Government. In hindsight if the SIKH LI platoon under Maj Birendra Singh had taken cover in the



10 Para Commando War Memorial at Palahy

nearby buildings on the periphery of the LZ, maybe they would have reduced their losses.

This intense firefight with the LTTE constituted the longest day in my life, at the end of which we were exhausted and drained.

(This is an abridged and edited version of “Jaffna University Heliborne Operation”, an article by the same author which appeared first, in the anthology Valiant Deeds, Undying Memories, The IPKF in Sri Lanka, OP PAWAN. By authors:

Lt Col Atul Kochhar and
Lt Col BR Nair, published by
Notion Press on
31 December 21).



Col RS Bhadauria (Retd), an alumnus of Military School, Bengaluru and National Defence Academy, Pune, was commissioned into 10 Para Commando (later renamed as 10 Special Forces) in December 76. He excelled in sports in NDA with a Blue/Half Blue in five games. Having extensive operational service, he was the first commando to belidrop in Jaffna University in Operation PAWAN on 11 October 1987, and later also participated in another covert mission, Operation Jupiter. He commanded 10 Para (Special Forces) from June 1996 to 99 in the North East against the Bodos, in Kashmir Valley in Kupwara sector and in the Batalik sector (Operation Vijay). The unit was commended with a theatre honour and Army Commander's citation for exceptional performance in Operation Vijay. He has been an instructor at Infantry School, Mhow, Officers Training Academy, Chennai and was a founder member of the Army Marksmanship Unit in 1982 at Mhow. He is a winner of bronze medal in shooting at the 26th National Shooting Competition at Kolhapur held in 1985. He has been commended with Bar to Mention-in-Despatches and Bar to Army Commander Commendation Card. He works in a charitable hospital at Sitapur after his superannuation in 2009.



Col RS Bhadauria (Retd)

FIERCE FIREFIGHTS OF FEARLESS 13 SIKH LI

Overcoming an adverse situation, regaining confidence after major casualties and leading the troops back into action are extremely difficult endeavours in combat conditions. This account recalls the recovery of a unit after a tragic and failed mission.

In March 1987, 13 SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY (LI) returned to Gwalior from the exercise area in the deserts, after six months training for a role in offensive operations in the deserts. No sooner had the unit settled down in Gwalior, it was placed on six hours notice in the first week of June 1987, for exigencies in Sri Lanka. Uncertainty prevailed for a couple of months, till the unit moved to Bengaluru on 31 July 1987 and stayed there for the next two months. This period was gainfully employed for training and preparation of mobilisation schemes for various contingencies. In the absence of concrete orders, the period was full of confusion and rumours.

On 01 October 1987, the battalion was ordered to return to Gwalior. The battalion reached Gwalior on 05 October 1987 and was again put on six hours notice with the objective now being Vavuniya. The movement to Sri Lanka was finally ordered at 2000 hours on 10th October for deployment in Vavuniya for garrison duties.



Sepoy Gora Singh, the lone survivor of the 13 SIKH LI platoon

Paucity of aircraft resulted in troops and stores being bundled in the available aircraft. The load tables were of no use and in the chaos some essential stores and troops were left behind. It is worth noting that sanction to break seals of 1st line ammunition was not accorded even at this stage hence troops were not issued with any ammunition.

After a hectic night at Gwalior airfield, the battalion and Headquarters (HQ) 72 Infantry Brigade took off in the early hours of 11 October 1987. The battalion less two companies landed at Tambaram (Chennai) for a refuelling halt around 1000 hours. There was another change in the orders and the unit was now to land in Palaly.

At Palaly

The first aircraft touched down at Palaly at around 1300 hours and the balance followed by 1700 hours on 11 October. A and B Rifle Companies who had taken off in an IL76 aircraft were diverted to Agra as the aircraft developed a snag. These companies fetched up subsequently after the heliborne operation had commenced. Colonel RS Sethi, Commanding Officer (CO) 13 SIKH LI was called to HQ 54 Infantry Division immediately on landing and was briefed by Major General Harkirat Singh, General Officer Commanding 54 Infantry Division and his Colonel General Staff regarding the impending task. Commander 72 Infantry Brigade was not present as he had not yet landed at Palaly. The briefing was extremely sketchy and lacked essential details especially of logistics. The task assigned was to capture the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) HQ in Jaffna University in a heliborne operation in conjunction with a team of 10 PARA COMMANDOS by first light 12 October 1987. The operation conceived at the highest level was aimed at crippling the LTTE. A meeting was

scheduled to take place in Jaffna University LTTE HQ on 12 October 1987 as per the intelligence inputs. To be attended by the LTTE Regional Commanders, the meeting was to be chaired by LTTE Supremo V Prabhakaran.

The Plan

The actual plan crystallised at around 1800 hours after the arrival of Commander 72 Infantry Brigade at Palaly. Four MI-8 helicopters were available for the operation and were to land in waves of two helicopters at a time on the Landing Zone (LZ). 14 MI-8 sorties were allotted for the operation. The Para Commando Pathfinders were to take off from Palaly at 2300 hours on 11 October in two helicopters and secure the LZ. The rest of the Para Commando Team would follow in the next wave. D Company of 13 SIKH LI was to land at the LZ thereafter with a mortar section and relieve the Para Commandos, who would proceed to

neutralise their target which was the political HQ of the LTTE.

13 SIKH LI less two companies was to build up on the LZ in subsequent waves and capture Jaffna University which housed the LTTE Military HQ. 4/5 GR (FF) with HQ 72 Infantry Brigade was to move along the axis Palaly - Urelu - Uramparai - Kokuvil and link up with 13 SIKH LI by first light on 12 October 1987.

Prevailing Disorder

There was no knowledge of the area, and only one 1902 Edition map was available. Photo copies were made by requesting the Sri Lankan Army detachment at Palaly. Torrential rain had welcomed the unit on its arrival at Palaly but there was no cover available at Palaly air field. No time was available for preparing meals and we were told that breakfast would be delivered at Jaffna University the next morning. Evacuation of casualties and ammunition replenishment was not



Two T72 tanks destroyed by LTTE mines during Jaffna operations (Photo credit ilankaisangam.org)



The LZ- Jaffna University Playground. with the Medical University to its right top edge.

planned for. The lack of communication facilities between the agencies involved posed impediments in coordination especially when time was at a premium. The battalion was not trained for heliborne operations and difficulties in such operations were not realized.

The Landings

The Pathfinders took off from Palaly in two MI-8 helicopters at around 2230 hours and secured the LZ. Enemy automatic fire opened up from the first and second floor of the University building dominating the landing area which was a football ground. Instead of hovering, the pilots landed the helicopters making it difficult to be targeted by the LTTE. Six MI-8s carrying the 10 PARA COMMANDO Team and a platoon of D Company 13 SIKH LI landed at the LZ in three waves. While the third wave was landing, one helicopter was hit by LTTE fire but it managed to return with the second working engine. Further induction by air was abandoned at around 0030 hours on 12 October.

The platoon of D Company 13 SIKH LI under Major Birendra Singh, the Company Commander received a fiery reception at the LZ. The 7.62 mm Medium Machine Gun with the platoon was very effective in the firefight. Initially the fire on the LZ was plunging, but the enemy soon relocated their weapons and brought down aimed effective fire on the LZ. The only communication of this platoon with the Battalion HQ was through an ANPRC Radio Set which unfortunately was damaged by enemy fire almost immediately on landing and was thereafter unable to receive or pass information about the situation at the LZ. The only communication available was through the radio set of the Para Commando Team.

At around 0315 hours on 12 October 1987, the Para Commandos moved out of the LZ and occupied a couple of buildings around the LZ. Now they too were out of communication with their Battalion HQ. They asked Major Birendra Singh to accompany them urging him to leave the LZ as further landings were not possible. Birendra declined saying that he was tasked to secure the LZ and would wait for the battalion to fetch up. The platoon was caught in the open football field surrounded by the enemy. They continued to resist but were incurring fatal casualties at regular intervals eroding their fighting capability. At around 1130 hours on 12 October 1987, the last three survivors having expended their ammunition decided to bayonet charge the enemy but were killed in the hand to hand fight. One of them, Sepoy Gora Singh fell unconscious during the charge and survived to tell the tale. He was captured by the LTTE, held prisoner and was exchanged against captured LTTE cadres later in November 1987. The fierce fight by the beleaguered thirty men inflicted heavy losses on the LTTE too. The platoon stood their ground and displayed bravery of a very high order.

An interesting intercept of the LTTE was picked up by Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and describes the fighting in the University area as follows: *"Report from RAW to HQ IPKF (.) Quote (.) in a broadcast over LTTE communication network early on 12 October 1987 the broadcaster conveyed that the survival of the LTTE cadres in the university was doubtful and death appeared imminent and he may not be able to come on air again (.) he directed the survivors to move out to other areas (.) the broadcaster was probably Prabbakaran himself saying goodbye and telling the Regional commanders to take charge and carry forward the struggle (.) message ends"*

The Link Up

Around 2000 hours on 11 October, 4/5 GR (FF) followed by HQ 72 Infantry Brigade commenced movement from Palaly on the axis Palaly – Vasvalan – Kokkuvil for the link up. They faced fierce enemy resistance at Urelu and the movement was stalled. At around 0130 hours on 12 October, 13 SIKH LI less two companies was ordered to link up with 4/5 GR (FF) for which six 3 tons were provided.

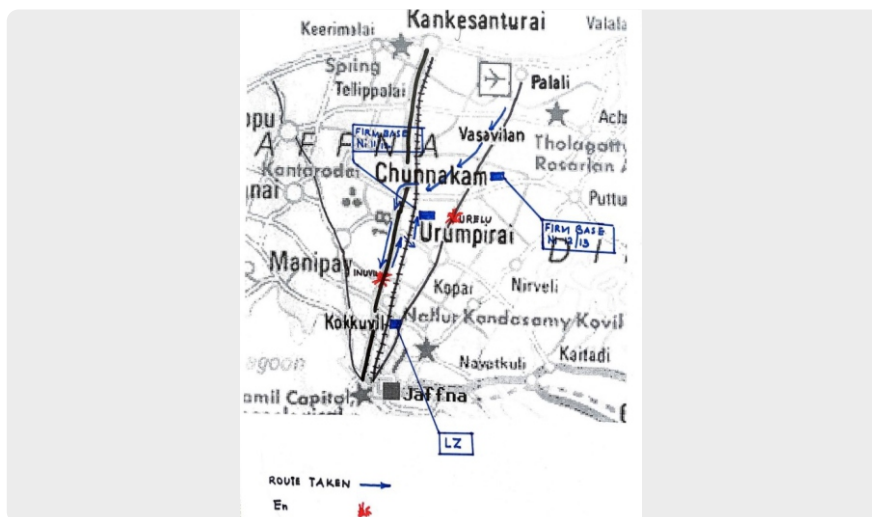
The urgency to link up, darkness, rain and scattered stores on the air field resulted in critical loads like ammunition and radio set batteries being left behind which posed many problems subsequently. Barely two kms from the air field, some vehicles broke down forcing the unit to dismount. The battalion was hurriedly reorganized into foot columns for movement thereafter. Heavy equipment was shed and only personal weapons and ammunition were carried. The foot column linked up with 4/5 GR (FF) around 0630 hours. The Gorkhas had also met with stiff opposition and had suffered fatal casualties.

At 0815 hours, 13 SIKH LI was ordered to take a detour to the right of the axis and move cross country to link up with

the heli-landed platoon. Initially the movement was through thick Palmyra trees with small huts interspersed. The column was sniped at but they moved swiftly and reached the axis Kankasanturai - Jaffna. They were now in the urban outskirts with normal movement of people who were unaware about the onslaught. It was difficult to distinguish between friend and foe as the LTTE was using civilians as shields and firing on the advancing troops.

At around 1100 hours, when the unit was at Inuvil, approximately one km from the LZ the column was ambushed and came under fire of heavy automatic weapons. The troops took cover but suffered fatal casualties and several soldiers were wounded. The LTTE had placed automatic weapons in the houses at the road crossing. A fierce firefight ensued and the SIKH LI soldiers used 84 mm Rocket Launchers effectively to clear the houses. In the melee, spurts of torrential rain compounded the already challenging situation. At this point, the battalion was not in communication with either the heli-landed platoon or with HQ 72 Infantry Brigade. Around 1630 hours, weak radio contact was established with HQ 72 Infantry Brigade and they were apprised of the situation. Lieutenant Colonel IBS Bawa, CO 4/5 GR (FF) moved up with one company and three tanks of 65 Armoured Regiment and reached our unit column around 1900 hours. Five fatal and 25 injured casualties were evacuated. They were sitting on the tanks with the injured soldiers atop the dead, an extremely distressing sight.

The column now moved cautiously along the railway line Jaffna - Kankasanturai to the open fields alongside, where a temporary firm base was secured by 4/5 GR (FF). The casualties were shifted to hutments in the field while the other troops braved the occasional rain in the open, which continued throughout the night. A and B companies of 13 SIKH LI earlier diverted to Agra had fetched up and reached the firm base along the railway line.



Route followed by 13 SIKH LI to link up with heli-landed platoon.



Jaffna University, as it is today.

Extrication of Team 10 Para Commando

The Team of 10 Para Commandos was not in radio contact but it was learnt that the Commandos were fighting their way out. In the early hours of 13 October, a force comprising of A Company 13 SIKH LI, Team 10 Para Commando and three tanks of 65 Armoured Regiment led by Col Dalvir Singh, CO 10 PARA COMMANDO moved to locate and extricate the heli-landed team and the platoon of 13 SIKH LI. The force linked up and extricated the heli-landed Commando Team with their casualties to the firm base by around 0630 hours on 13 October. It was then realised that the heli-landed platoon had perished around 1130 hours on 12th October when the link up force was almost near it.

The troops were reorganized to undertake fresh tasks. A firm base was to be established near Urelu for 72 Infantry Brigade troops. The movement towards Urelu commenced with 13 SIKH LI leading, followed by HQ 72 Infantry

Brigade, 4/5 GR (FF) and 10 PARA COMMANDO. The route was approximately five kms passing through open fields interspersed with small hutments and palm trees. The leading troops of 13 SIKH LI were fired upon after approximately one km which was quickly responded to. After approximately three kms, 4/5 GR (FF) came under heavy fire and suffered casualties, the most demoralizing being the loss of Lieutenant Colonel IBS Bawa, CO 4/5 GR (FF). It was now the turn of 13 SIKH LI to assist 4/5 GR (FF) to extricate from the deadly ambush. The complete force reached the firm base by late evening on 13 October.

At the firm base next day, the units took stock of personnel and equipment, and casualties were moved to Palaly. GOC-in-C Southern Command offered to move 13 SIKH LI to Palaly for rest, reorganisation and refit which was vehemently opposed by Colonel RS Sethi. He pledged to press on and undertake the tasks assigned to the battalion.

Operations 15 - 28 October

After reorganisation and regaining command and control on 14th October, 72 Infantry Brigade cleared the axis Urelu-Uramparai-Kokuvil over the next ten days against a ruthless and fierce enemy well trained in the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Tanks and Armoured vehicles assisted the movement through built up areas. All actions were slow, deliberate and with proper coordination. 13 SIKH LI entered the gates of Jaffna University on 24 October 1987 and its capture was announced on BBC at 1700 hours bringing closure to the unfinished task allotted on 11 October. The battalion redeemed its pride and brought solace to the sacrifice of the heroes of the heli-landed

platoon. After a stay of four days at the University, the unit returned to Palaly on 28 October for subsequent movement to Vavuniya.

Looking Back

Keeping the battalion at six hours notice for four months in an uninterrupted manner resulted in unnecessary mental fatigue - the readiness notice should have been periodically reviewed. The mobilization and movement of troops from Gwalior to Palaly was poorly executed and the battalion paid for it dearly. Palaly was chaotic, with no arrangements for reception and housing of inducting troops. Signal communications were weak between HQ 54 Infantry Division and the airfield.

On arrival at Palaly, the unit was launched into operations without adequate preparation. Though the available intelligence necessitated undertaking the operation without delay, it would have been more prudent to use already inducted troops who were more familiar with the operational area and situation. Incorrect appreciation of the capabilities of the LTTE had disastrous consequences. Contingency planning was lacking and the unit was continually reacting to the changing situations. Logistics support was a glaring problem too. The LTTE was aware of the heliborne operation planned and had positioned themselves to counter it.

13 SIKH LI acquitted itself well by displaying grit and determination and fighting despite adverse conditions. Colonel R S Sethi, the CO, led by personal example by being in the vanguard always without concern for personal safety. It inspired the officers and men to move fearlessly. He also refused to pullback and rallied his troops in the true traditions of our Army, highlighting the importance of

leadership in operations. Major Birendra Singh had volunteered for the task and he proved to be a true infantryman by fighting against all odds when surrounded from all sides.

End Note

The heliborne fiasco at Jaffna University has often been rightly discussed and dissected.

Should CO 13 SIKH LI have refused to undertake the mission considering the existing conditions, the information voids and readiness level? Later, the then Army Chief posed the same question to Colonel R S Sethi to which he replied - THE PRESTIGE OF MY BATTALION WAS AT STAKE. ASSIGNING TASKS IS THE PREROGATIVE OF SENIOR COMMANDERS. IN WAR YOU ARE NOT TO QUESTION WHY BUT TO DO AND DIE.

The heroism of the beleaguered platoon of D Company is comparable to the actions in the Battle of Saragarhi and deserve to be so recognized. An extract of a write-up published in THE HINDU on 21 October 1987 reproduced below

bears testimony to the valour, courage and the indomitable spirit of the thirty warriors:

“Details are now available of the action on the night of 12th October, when 29 Indian soldiers were killed and one taken prisoner in a commando raid in the Jaffna University area.

The commandos came under heavy fire even while landing and lost eight men while disembarking. The SIKH LI jawans were trapped in the heavily built up area and though surrounded they fought valiantly for almost 24 hours before being overwhelmed by superior forces.

THE FACT THAT 29 OF THEM DIED AND ONLY ONE WAS TAKEN PRISONER INDICATES THE TENACITY OF THEIR ACTION”.



Col R V Shirwalkar (Retd) is an alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune. He was commissioned in 13 SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY in December 1981. He was the Adjutant of the battalion during OP PAWAN. He is a graduate from the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington and has served on various operational staff appointments. He has served extensively in insurgency areas in J&K and in the North East. He is presently settled in Pune.



Col R V Shirwalkar (Retd)

COURAGE IN COCKPITS

LANDINGS AMIDST WHIZZING BULLETS

The heliborne operation launched at Jaffna University on night 11/12 October 1987 and the reverses suffered had a telling impact, and steeled the resolve of the Indian Armed Forces to regain control. An Indian Air Force (IAF) pilot recalls the events of that night and thereafter.

The tension in the air was palpable. The ongoing Aircrew Examining Board visit at the 'Desert Hawks' in September 1987, was about to conclude with the final debrief. More importantly, the Flight Commander was to announce the plans for our departure to Sri Lanka to replace the already deployed crew. Armed with the endorsement of 'C-Green' on my aircrew qualification card, we set course by An-32 from Jodhpur to Yelahanka and thence to Palaly airfield, located seven nautical miles North of Jaffna town.

Initial Days

On reaching Jaffna, we quickly familiarized with the airfield facilities and operating areas. Our "Mess" was in the airport lounge and accommodation in a nearby bungalow. To find the 10 PARA COMMANDOS, our neighbours from Jodhpur, camped close to our helicopters, gave us a sense of security. There were four Mi-8s deployed to the island, one each from Jodhpur and Yelahanka and two from Sulur. Flying mostly comprised sorties for shifting recently released political detainees. Subsequently, flying practically came to a standstill to conserve hours for a possible strategic move. Hence it was that we played softball with our Commando friends most evenings followed by camaraderie enhancement sessions with the 'Good Old Monk' in attendance.

The Turning Point

In early October 1987, 12 captured Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres and five Sri Lankan Tamil civilians, including two area commanders were brought to the airport lounge for transportation to Colombo for questioning.



Trincomalee Bay.

Approach towards Trincomalee Airfield

An 'armed guard' was mounted, one by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and one by the Indian Army. However, on the afternoon of 05 October, the Indian guard was withdrawn and we received orders to vacate our first floor Mess premises.

A large SLA contingent arrived at the lounge led by a Brigadier. As soon as the Brigadier entered the lounge, the LTTE men put the smuggled-in cyanide glass capsules, into their mouths. Ignoring the Brigadier's emphatic assurance that they would not be harmed, the captives bit on their capsules and lay back on the ground for faster absorption of the poison. Making frantic efforts to dislodge the capsule from their mouths, the SLA troops bundled them into the waiting ambulances and rushed them off to hospitals. However, the LTTE cadres did not survive. It was a huge setback for the LTTE, and the LTTE supremo, Prabhakaran vowed retribution. That same night, the LTTE killed a large number of Sinhalese civilians in Jaffna. The killings continued over the next few days in Trincomalee and Batticaloa as well. Finally, President JR Jayewardene called out the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) on national television and told them to intervene or go home. The IPKF now had no option but to commence operations against the LTTE.

Initial Assessment

The four Indian Air Force (IAF) Mi-8s available on the island were concentrated at Palaly. Initially, the Mi-8s were tasked to redeploy troops and ammunition to locations in and around Jaffna. On the night of 10th October, Mi-8s moved a large number of troops and ammunition to Navatkuli, Mandaitivu and Karai Nagar around Jaffna town, without any untoward incident.

The Indian Division Commander estimated that the IPKF would be able to

"liberate" Jaffna within 48 hours. For the purpose, all available resources were to be brought to bear. The concept of 'vertical envelopment' using helicopters was to be exploited to induct troops at the Jaffna University grounds by night.

The Heliborne Operation of 11/12 October 1987

Sometime in the late afternoon of 11 October, Wing Commander VKN Sapre and I were pulled out between sorties to board a Chetak helicopter for an aerial recce of a possible Landing Zone (LZ). Within minutes of getting airborne, the Chetak started a left orbit. Not being privy to the conversation on intercom, a football ground was pointed out to me. The ground was in the middle of a built-up area next to a road, barely 13-14 Kms from Palaly airfield. These were the Jaffna University grounds. We returned to base after completion of the orbit and the helicopter took off again with army officers on board for their aerial reconnaissance of the LZ. It

made six to seven such trips always turning around at the same spot; a possible giveaway of the location of the LZ.

At the Divisional HQ, we were briefed of the plan, which was to carry out a Special Heliborne Operation (SHBO) and induct 120 Para Commandos, along with approximately 360 troops of the SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY (LI) at Jaffna University grounds by night. In the intelligence briefing, we were given the assurance that possibility of opposition at the LZ was remote. After induction, the Para Commandos were to secure the LZ by eliminating the initial threat of the LTTE. The SIKH LI, who were to be inducted in the subsequent waves, were to take over the security of the LZ, while the Para Commandos would proceed to their main objective some distance away. The SHBO was planned from 0100 hours onwards on 12 October 1987. Weather conditions were forecast to be fine, with good



LTTE Prisoners at the Jaffna Airport Lounge 05 October 1987



The Causeway near Jaffna.

visibility. At the time of the mission, it was expected that there would be a little moonlight available, which would be invaluable to the aircrew carrying out the SHBO.

We returned to the Air Force Operations Room where the Mission Briefing was conducted. To achieve the envisaged “continuous induction”, we planned to fly in formations of two helicopters (pairs). The second pair would be “staggered” four minutes behind the first to enable deplaning from the helicopters and clearing the LZ. Initial sorties would induct 20 Para Commandos each, while subsequent sorties would carry 15 troops of SIKH LI, and 500 Kgs of ammunition each. The Para Commandos were to mark the LZ with torches after landing, for guiding the subsequent helicopters. The mission was to be flown with all external lights off except the ‘formation lights’ and ‘rotor tip lights’ for station keeping. Each helicopter would fly 7 to 8 sorties to achieve the planned task.

The Captains of the first wave were Wing Commander VKN Sapre and Squadron Leader Vinay Raj. The Captains

totally confident of our collective ability and their absolute trust in me, I explained that, being the first time, we could not predict the reaction of any one of us, when we came under fire. However, I emphasized that as a team, we were more than capable of providing redundancy to each other in execution of our respective duties, in case of a mishap. Mission Accomplishment was of paramount importance.

The helicopters got airborne, maintaining the planned four minute stagger. Setting course at the designated point, I told my Co-Pilot to start the stop-clock and picked up my map for navigation in the dim red cockpit light. Jaffna town and the Fort were visible in the distance. I was monitoring the radio of the first formation making their final approach to the LZ. I asked my Co-Pilot for the ‘running time’ on stop clock, to correlate ground features and ‘fix’ my location. He reported that the stop-clock was not registering. Because of the dark night and bright town lights in the distance, it was impossible to confirm the ground features on such a short leg. On approximated time, I commenced my final approach towards an open space that appeared to be the LZ. Drawing closer, I realized that neither the Commando lights nor inducted troops were visible on ground. Establishing a high hover to confirm correctness of LZ, I saw a few tall trees in the open space and realized that the University buildings were not in sight. A number of militants rushed towards us, firing at the helicopters from the open ground and surrounding trees. I immediately called up on radio, and the formation initiated a quick getaway, returning to the airfield without disgorging the troops.

Meanwhile, the next wave also came under heavy fire on approach for the LZ, as the militants were now concentrated at the spot. However the induction was successful. The Task Force Commander reassigned

of the second wave were Flying Officer Vishwanath Prakash (yours truly) and Squadron Leader Durrai Swamy. As the night progressed, the weather started becoming unfavourable, with clouds drifting in. By take-off time, the sky had become totally overcast, with cloud base down to 200 metres, obscuring the little moon that was there. Visibility had deteriorated to ‘poor’ conditions. The clear night had turned pitch dark raising the challenge several notches.

Walking to the helicopter I realized that with just four years of service, I was the junior-most of the entire lot of aircrew. Being the Captain, I had to give a final briefing to my crew. While I was

the formation members as we waited at the airfield. The re-assigned lead formation was Wing Commander Sapre, with Squadron Leader Durrai Swamy as No.2. The trail formation was Squadron Leader Vinay Raj, with Flying Officer Prakash (the author) as No. 2. For the subsequent waves, we were to carry a mixed complement of troops, viz., the remaining Para Commandos and all the SIKH LI troops. There was a long delay in locating the SIKH LI troops for emplaning and they came on board with heavy ammunition boxes. Being inducted into battle straight from their peace time location, they had neither been briefed about what to expect, nor had the time for any orientation. And it was quite evident that these troops had never been trained in helicopter operations.

We took off and proceeded to the LZ. Since the approach direction had by now been identified by the militants, we were being fired upon right from the word 'GO'. The intensity of fire kept increasing, which included heavy 0.5 inch calibre guns, being fired from multi-storeyed buildings of the University. Our immediate concern was making a safe approach, peering outside to avoid obstructions as we descended into the pitch darkness. A collision with an obstruction would have had catastrophic consequences for all on board.

The place was swarming with militants and fire was coming at us from all directions. We steeled ourselves and continued with the approach, aware that we may take lead in the process. My crew was fiercely loyal to me; placing implicit faith in me, they continued to perform their tasks with absolute composure. I was acutely conscious of the responsibility that I was shouldering. At the LZ, I ordered my Flight Engineer to switch off the formation lights, located on the tail boom, to deny the militants an aiming index to target us. Feeling a blow at the back of my neck, I

thought that my Co-Pilot or the Flight Engineer had been hit. It was a relief to find both smiling in the darkness. However, the bullet severed the thick bunch-shaft cable and metallic cover right behind my seat; the aircraft generator failed immediately. The helicopters had no armour protection whatsoever and bullets penetrated the thin walls with ease. The damage being sustained by other critical parts could only be imagined. The troops were successfully deinducted and we took off.

The battered helicopters managed to return to the airfield only because of the ruggedness of the Russian machines. The astonishing fact that there was not even a single drop of blood spilled inside my helicopter despite more than thirty bullet hits, was sheer providence.

As we landed back at base, the Task Force Commander ordered all helicopters to switch off and carry out damage assessment. It was confirmed that critical helicopter systems like hydraulic, electrical, transmission and engine components were badly

damaged. All four helicopters had been rendered un-flyable. Had the flying time been longer, some of the helicopters would not have made it back, as the shot up hydraulic systems were operating on the last drops of oil, and the Mi-8 is un-flyable without hydraulics.

The inevitable yet tragic decision to discontinue the Mission was conveyed to us by the Task Force Commander. We had flown 10 sorties, of which eight were successful in inducting troops. Against the planned induction of approximately 480 troops, only 150 troops (120 Para Commandos and 30 troops of SIKH LI), along with one ton of ammunition had been accomplished.

Overwhelmed by the realization that the small number of SIKH LI troops did not stand a chance on their own, a message was conveyed to 10 Para Commandos and in turn to 13 SIKH LI at LZ that no further sorties could be undertaken and that the SIKH LI troops should stick with the Commandos. However, the SIKH LI



Vavuniya Camp



(Left) In the Crew Room at Vavuniya. (Right) The author being bestowed the Vir Chakra by The President of India in the Investiture Ceremony at Delhi.

troops were under orders to continue securing the LZ and await reinforcements coming by road, expected to “marry up” by first light, barely three hours away. The Para Commandos moved out to their next objective, while the 30 troops of the SIKH LI, remained at the LZ.

Intensification of The Battle

Since all four helicopters were grounded due to extensive battle damage, reinforcements were flown in early next morning and ‘mixed crew’ operations were resorted to, in order to familiarize the new pilots with the operational environment. Due to the inaccessibility of the forward positions by road, the Mi-8s became the lifeline for the fighting troops in the Jaffna peninsula. More than eighty sorties a day were flown to support the ever increasing numbers of Indian troops. At Jaffna airport, streams of fixed wing aircraft were pouring in, inducting fresh brigades. The scene looked busier than an international airport at peak hours. The rapid deployment of these troops into forward positions was left to the Mi-8s.

treetop level. Manoeuvrability was severely restricted as the helicopter was operating at its maximum All Up Weight (AUW). There was no margin for error.

The descent and run-in were flawless. I could see militants with guns running out into the open, alerted by the sound of the helicopter. However, due to the ultra-low flying and high speed, they could not pinpoint the approach direction. By the time they could bring their guns to bear, we were already out of range or their field of view. I could hear the continuous sound of gunfire but we were practically unscathed. Decelerating on the final leg to the DZ, I started the countdown, and on culmination, gave the order for the drop. Thereafter, the recovery was also carried out with élan. We had just started patting ourselves on the back, when the gunner informed me that the load could not be ejected. The makeshift rollers had sagged due to the weight of the ammo. The load was readjusted and we decided to make one more attempt in the rapidly fading light. Being acutely aware that the militants would have the advantage of anticipating our direction of approach, we still could not change it due to the wind direction and requirement for a direct run. This time they managed to score during the run-in and I could feel the thud of bullets. Sadly, the second attempt also failed in spite of best efforts. On recovery at base, we found that the bullets had entered below the Flight Engineers seat and narrowly missing the starboard fuel tank, had exited through the gap next to the heater.

Interoperability –Transformation to Synergy

On one occasion, I was detailed for carrying out sorties to redeploy troops from Mile-3 helipad to Udduvil. Our orders were to maintain full

Ammunition Drop

On 13 October 87, close to sunset, an SOS message was received for replenishment of weapons and ammunition by troops engaged in a live firefight. The only available helicopter, which I was to fly, was already loaded with two tons of supplies for the last sortie of the day. There being no time to offload, 500 kgs of ammunition was additionally loaded. Due to the pitched battle being fought, the ammo had to be air dropped. The standard equipment of metallic rollers and skid boards for air drop not being available, the ammo was loaded atop makeshift card board rollers. The route was charted out with a descent in safety over the Navatkuli lagoon and direct run-in to the DZ at

throttle for quick getaway as the helipads were under sniper threat by LTTE. The orders were ignored in the interest of expediency because the heavy downwash of the rotors invariably restricted movement on ground and posed a safety hazard for troops boarding or alighting from the helicopter. As I offloaded the first shuttle troops at Udduvil, a few troops got into the helicopter, demanding to be taken to Palaly as they could not establish contact with their unit. I promised to come back for them after completing my task of two more shuttles, but they refused to budge. In the absence of any army officer at the helipad, I had to come out of the cockpit and handle the JCO, in spite of him levelling his machine gun at me – a grave misdemeanour in normal circumstances, but indicative of the high degree of mistrust, insecurity even despair amongst the troops. I carried out two more shuttles as planned and finally carried the troops back to Palaly as promised. As the operations progressed, this mistrust transformed to absolute faith and synergy.

Beyond Skills Levels – The BMP Repair Party

About to take-off for a sortie for troop deployment from Palaly to Mile-3 helipad, an EME party comprising a Major and two soldiers demanded to be taken along, as they were urgently required to carry out repairs on damaged BMPs (Russian armoured personnel carriers). To accommodate the extra weight, I resorted to a roller take off. After landing at the helipad, I offloaded the troops and was in the process of taking two “stretcher casualties” on board, when a number of troops jumped in for the return trip to Palaly. Amongst them was the EME repair party pleading to be taken back as they could not locate anyone to guide them. Much against my better judgment,

I reluctantly took them on board. Take-off into wind was not feasible due to sniper firing from the North. In spite of ‘Nil’ reserves of power available for take-off, a downwind take-off was attempted over the lagoon. The main rotor RPM was already down to 90% and the slightest sink would have meant end of the road for the helicopter and all on board. On sheer willpower and desperate prayers, the helicopter maintained level, skimming barely a foot above the water. After what seemed an eternity, the helicopter crossed ‘transition’, generating the additional lift required to climb away. Heaving a sigh of relief, I sent up a silent prayer for forgiving yet another transgression.

Liberation of Jaffna

Despite getting damaged due to small arms fire, the Mi-8 helicopters did not falter. They repeatedly got airborne after patch repairs. Huge quantities of ammunition and rations were flown into forward positions. Artillery guns were flown to Jaffna Fort. Casualties were

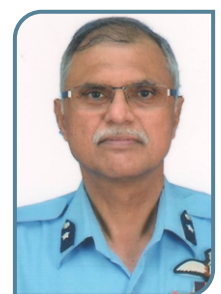
evacuated from areas where active engagement with LTTE was on. SHBO for troop induction also continued to be launched. Finally Jaffna was ‘liberated’ on 26 October 87.

Epilogue

It was a bloody war fought under grim circumstances, made all the more bitter by the fact that there was no glory in it for our warriors of the IPKF. Besides the large number of fatalities, the maimed and mutilated for life were too many. After suffering initial losses, the Indian Armed Forces soon recalibrated and established their supremacy in the war torn land. **The saga of the IPKF is a saga of unsung heroes, for every last one of them was definitely of that category.** For me personally, it was a huge learning experience. Having faced my moment of truth a number of times, the confidence gained through such an exacting exposure at a young stage in life stood me in good stead throughout the rest of my career.



Air Commodore Vishwanath Prakash, VrC (Retd), son of a Brigadier of the Army Medical Corps and an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Pune was commissioned as a helicopter pilot on 28 May 1983. Flight Lieutenant Shruti Prakash, his younger daughter is proudly serving in the Accounts Branch of the IAF as a third generation officer. Air Commodore Vishwanath Prakash has participated in most major operations of the IAF like Operation Blue Star, Operation Falcon and Operation Pawan. He was awarded Vir Chakra for his courage under fire in Sri Lanka operations. He superannuated from the IAF in September 2017.



**Air Cmde
Vishwanath Prakash**

NAVAL OPERATIONS

OFF SRI LANKA

The Indian Navy (IN) played a crucial role during Operation PAWAN, and even thereafter as will be realized from this report.

Operation PAWAN commenced as soon as the Accord was signed in 29 July 1987. The Navy was to induct Army units into Sri Lanka and sanitise offshore sea areas. The first two Army battalions were landed in Kankesanthurai (KKS) Harbour on 30 July 1987 on the day following the Accord. But unknown (or unannounced) to many there were ships on patrol in the Palk Bay, in the Gulf of Mannar and along the Tamil Nadu and Kerala coasts and personnel deployed ashore even before the Accord was signed.

After the Accord was signed a number of ships were deployed in Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay as also along the coasts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala and IN personnel deployed particularly to Kankesanthurai, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Palaly etc., to set up IN Liaison Teams (INLTs)

IN Tasks

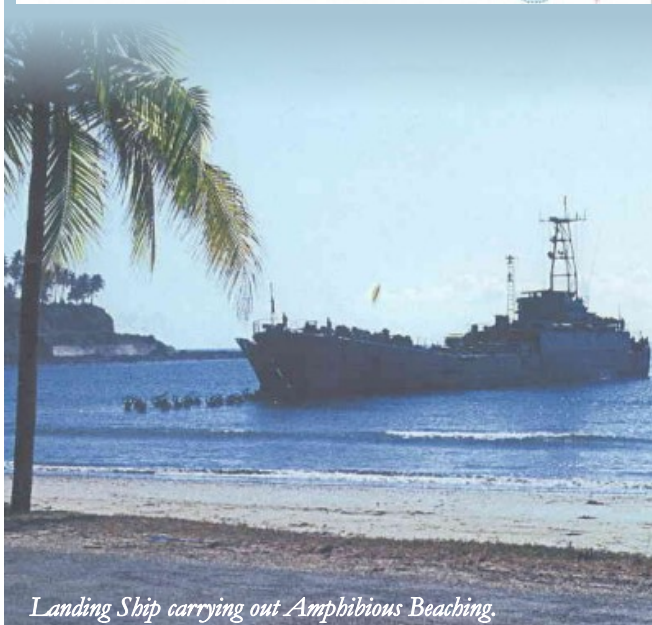
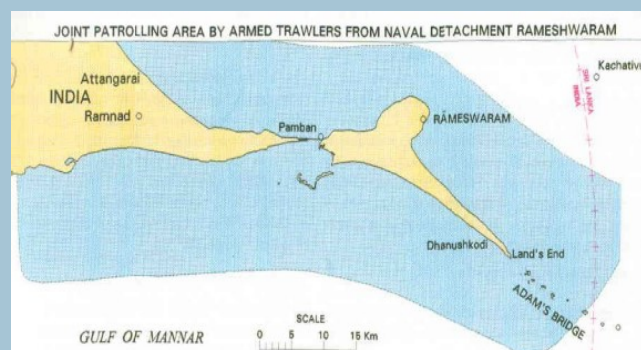
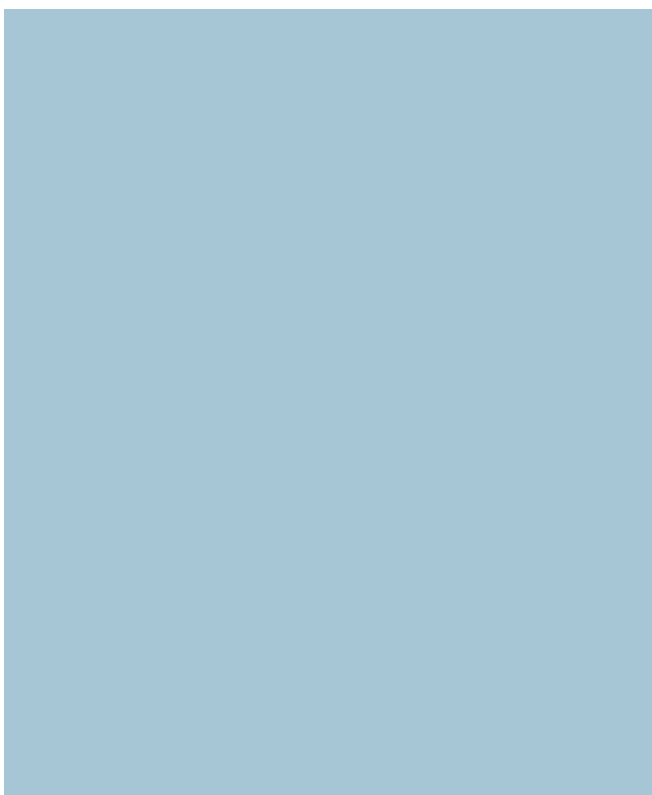
The Navy's tasks were largely: -

- Conduct joint Indian-Sri Lankan Naval patrols off Sri Lankan waters to prevent movement of arms and militants across the water and in and out of Sri Lanka.
- Execute joint Army-Navy operations to combat militant activity.
- Provide logistics support for the build-up and maintenance of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka.
- Carry out general operations to support the Accord, like 'transfer of refugees.'

A rapid build-up followed after 30 July. A sea borne logistics support chain was established with Madras (now Chennai). Merchant ships were chartered for troop and cargo transshipment. Amphibious Landing Ships ferried personnel and stores into the uncharted KKS Harbour and across uncharted beaches.

Coast Guard (CG) Support

The Coast Guard's task was to support the Navy. Three



Landing Ship carrying out Amphibious Beaching.

shallow-draught Inshore Patrol Vessels (IPVs) were placed under the Navy's control for inshore patrolling in the Palk Bay/Gulf of Mannar. The Coast Guard's F-27 aircraft, operating from Madras ensured air surveillance extending 100 miles to seaward of the East coast of Sri Lanka.

Initial Patrols

By 15 August 1987, the Joint Indian-Sri Lankan Naval Patrol had been instituted in the Palk Bay. It aimed at severing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) conduit between Sri Lanka's Northern Jaffna peninsula and the Southern coast of Tamil Nadu by controlling the routes leading to Dhanushkodi, Rameshwaram, Vedaranyam and Nagapatnam, all of which were known settlements of Sri Lankan Tamils.

The disused airfield at Ramnad was activated for air surveillance of the Palk Bay, using Naval Islander aircraft and Chetak helicopters for daylight surveillance. INLTs were positioned at four locations in Sri Lanka – Trincomalee (Trinco), Palaly, Kankesanthurai (KKS) and Karainagar. Ships patrolled in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar regularly and as required on the Eastern and Western seaboard of Sri Lanka too. The initial days were peacekeeping only - regular patrols at sea and the interactions ashore involving all concerned.

Cordon Militaire

On 07 October 1987, the IPKF received orders to 'Disarm the LTTE'. A *cordon militaire* was established across a 310-mile belt. It extended Northwards from Talaimannar through the Palk Strait and along the East coast of Sri Lanka until its Southern limit at Little Basses Island. Ships and aircraft on patrol were directed to use force, if required.

To prevent cross trafficking, a Line of Control (LOC) was established Eastward of the international boundary in the Palk Strait. To curb militant activity on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka, fishing activity at night was banned.

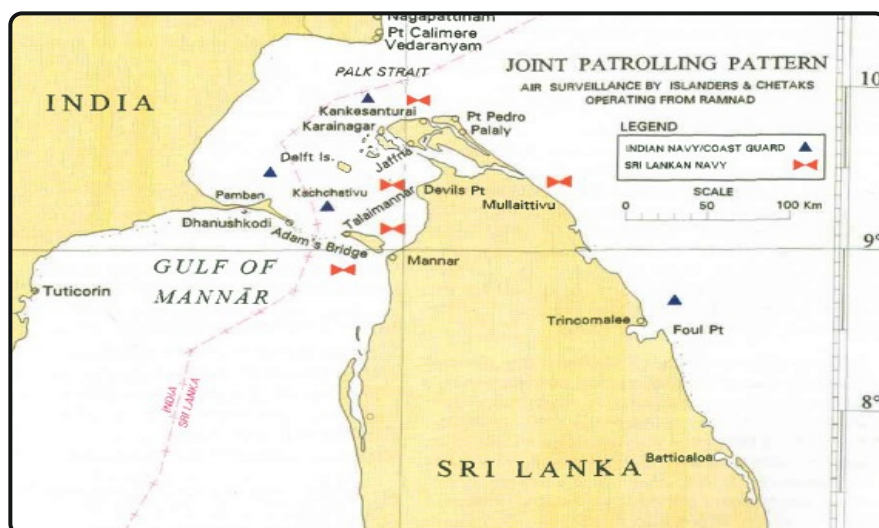
Commodore Ranjit B Rai writes *"that the Naval ships, requisitioned vessels operated to Sri Lankan ports of Trincomalee and KKS. The Navy's rejuvenated Alize's with rockets and helicopter fitted with guns operating from Ramnad threatened the LTTE; and so as not to invite the wrath of the Navy never touched a Naval ship. The Navy did not lose a man."* There is truth in the outcome of this analysis as the LTTE would not have wanted the supply chain to be blocked any more than it was by opening the sea front.

Special Operations

The Indian Marine Special Force (IMSF), a newly formed 'commando' arm of the Navy, made its debut in August 1987. A 40 strong group of 'marine commandos' (MARCOS) participated in 55 combat operations in

its very first year. During their raids, they destroyed LTTE boats, ammunition warehouses and militant camps. They also proved to be a potent force in 'flushing out' operation in the islands, lagoons and inlets and were invariably in the van of amphibious raids.

Commodore Ranjit Rai writes *"Lieutenant (IN) Arvind Singh (subsequently decorated with the MVC), a trained US seal, was head of the IMSF. Along with 10 Para Commandos he executed daring tasks in Sri Lanka. Arvind and his team broke out from Jaffna Fort on 19 October 87 and secured the area which resulted in the link up of 41 Brigade with 1 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY on 20 October. On the night of 21 / 22 October, IMSF team was tasked to destroy Guru Nagar jetty and speed boats in Jaffna lagoon. Lieutenant (IN) Arvind Singh and Leading CDI C Singh were awarded Maha Vir Chakra, Lieutenants Anup Verma and Prakash Chandravarkar were awarded Vir Chakras emphasizing the role of the IMSF."*



Statistical Overview of Navy Operations

| Tactical Support | Jul 1987 to Jul 1988 | Aug 1988 to Aug 1989 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Militant boats destroyed | 76 | - |
| Suspicious boats apprehended | 85 | 54 |
| Militant casualties at sea | 336 | |
| Special operations conducted | 55 | 09 |
| (IMSF) | | |
| Combat landings (LST/LCU) | 35 | 13 |
| Incidents/Interceptions at sea | 152 | 40-50 per day |
| Logistics Support | | |
| Troops transported (to & fro) | 1,60,000 | 2,61,351 |
| Army vehicles transported | 7,000 | 807 |
| Army stores transported | 50,000 tonnes | 54,000 tonnes |
| Detenues transferred | 2,600 | 330 |
| Refugees transferred | 22,000 | 3,139 (520 by naval ships) |
| Naval Resources Deployed | | |
| IN/CG combat ship-days on patrol | 3,676 days | 1,994 days |
| Armed trawler days | 2,690 days | 5,226 days |
| IN/CG aircraft flying hours | 5,115 hours | 3,270 hours |
| Merchant ship sorties | 220 sortie | 285 sorties |

The Sri Lankan Political Scene

In November 1988, the Presidential elections in Sri Lanka posed a new contingency – the safety of President Jayewardene in case his party lost the election. As a precautionary measure, the Navy positioned a Seaking helicopter at Tuticorin, a Seaking-capable frigate INS Godavari (and later INS Taragiri), with an IMSF team embarked. As it happened, the President's party was re-elected.

When Mr. Jayewardene's term expired in January 1989, Mr. Premadasa became the President of Sri Lanka. He had been a staunch critic of the Indo Sri-Lanka accord. He came to power on a political promise that he would "send back the IPKF". Between March and July 1989, he initiated a dialogue with the LTTE, which is presumed to have resulted in a ceasefire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF). He then tried to buy peace with the JVP but to no avail – their subversive activities increased. He

then served the Indian Government with an ultimatum to withdraw the IPKF by 29 July 1989, this being the second anniversary of the Indo Sri Lanka Accord.

Special Contingency Plans

As the deadline approached, tension mounted. The JVP-incited violence intensified. Mr. Premadasa announced his intention to bring out the Sri Lankan Army (from their barracks) on 29 July 1989, to patrol the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This led to planning for the contingency of misguided, unprovoked action against the IPKF by wayward units of SLAF.

Operation Roundup was planned to counter any backlash from the SLAF in the Northern and Eastern province; Operation Trojan was planned to evacuate Indian Nationals from Colombo, in the face of opposition. The third operation, a modified version of the earlier Operation Jupiter of December 1988, was also planned in case the need arose to evacuate Indian

nationals with the support of the SLAF.

The de-induction which started in August 1989, with the bulk of the IPKF having withdrawn by October 1989, led to Operation PAWAN being terminated on 24 March 1990, when the final contingent of the IPKF sailed out of Trincomalee on board ships of the Eastern Fleet. Unfortunately, even when the last elements had withdrawn there was no solution to the political problem.

Strategic Gains of Operation PAWAN

Approximately over 1200 deaths and 3500 wounded was the price that the officers and men of the IPKF paid to help a neighbour in distress. Though often criticised, Operation PAWAN achieved the objectives that had been listed by India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in his letter to Sri Lanka's President Jayewardene when the Indo – Sri Lankan Accord was signed on 29 July 1987:

"You had, during the course of our discussions agreed to meet some of India's concerns as follows:

- Your Excellency and myself will reach an early understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel with a view to ensure that such presence will not prejudice Indo- Sri Lankan relations.*
- Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India's interests.*
- The work of restoring and operating Trincomalee oil tank farm will be undertaken as a joint venture between India and Sri Lanka*

- *Sri Lanka's agreement with foreign broadcasting organisations will be reviewed to ensure that any facilities set up by them in Sri Lanka are used solely as public broadcasting facilities and not for any military or intelligence purposes."*

These objectives were indeed met and in fact highlight India's judicious use of power and statecraft, despite the complicated strategic pulls and pushes of the two other parties involved, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. In hindsight and if one looks at events in a larger perspective, Operation PAWAN and Operation CACTUS (the Maldives Operation) were and are prime examples in exerting India's instruments of force in the larger regional security interests.

The wear and tear on IN ships was substantial. The usage during Operation PAWAN exceeded stipulated norms by 50%. Nevertheless, the experience was invaluable for experience in low intensity conflict and inducting troops over uncharted beaches. Personnel stood up well to the multifarious tasks of providing operational and logistic support for the IPKF, maintaining round the clock ship and air patrols in Palk Strait along the Eastern seaboard of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu and the Gulf of Mannar; this included trans-shipping refugees, many of whom had to be given medical attention at sea.

Operation TASHA in the Palk Strait

After the withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka in April 1990, the protection of the Tamil Nadu coast was entrusted to the Navy and the Coast Guard. Operation TASHA commenced in April 1990 to continuously patrol the International Boundary Line in the Palk Street to curb the smuggling of arms and ammunition, poaching, illegal immigration and activities of Sri Lankan Tamil militants.

From the outset, it was clear that Operation TASHA was going to be a 'low intensity conflict' commitment that was unlikely to end soon. The hiring of trawlers and arming them with Medium Machine Guns for operating from the Naval Detachments at Rameshwaram and Nagapatnam with smaller detachments along the Tamil Nadu coast at Topputhurai, Kodikakkarai (Point Calimere) Mallipattinam, Jagathapattinam and Thondi was institutionalised. The earlier ad-hoc facilities for operating aircraft and helicopters from the Naval Air Detachment centre at Ramnad were gradually improved. Logistics and maintenance infrastructure and maintenance personnel were established at Madras to sustain the Seaward Defence Boats (SDB) and the other shallow draught ships patrolling the Palk Strait. In the years after 1990, India abstained from further direct involvement and encouraged peace-making efforts towards reconciliation between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. But there also were a few occasions when help at sea was rendered, perhaps quietly to assist in early return of peace to Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

The lessons from Operation PAWAN are instructive for future missions of humanitarian but of a political nature, which the Navy will be called upon to undertake, or assist as it grows in eminence. Lessons from Operation TASHA, though largely underplayed have had a lot of learning too. Personnel that participated understood about humanitarian aid in a political milieu that turned hostile, experienced effecting blockades, undertaking boardings / investigations

in unpredictable conditions and undertaking operations with the resources at disposal etc – all invaluable learning.

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Cmde Neriamparampil Anil Jose Joseph (Retd)

Commodore Neriamparampil Anil Jose Joseph (Retd), an alumnus of Rashtriya Indian Military College, Dehradun and National Defence Academy, Pune is an Anti-Submarine Warfare specialist. He has attended prestigious courses at Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Army War College, Mhow and National Defence College, New Delhi. During Operation Pawan, he was part of the INLTs, and saw active service in the Gulf of Mannar onboard Minesweepers and in the Palk Straits onboard INS Cheetah and INS Karwar. The officer has commanded INS Vibhuti, INS Shardul and INS Ranjit. An avid reader, a good sportsman and an active mentor / counsellor, he was Director Maritime Warfare Centre Kochi before superannuating as Commanding Officer Venduruthy and Station Commander Kochi. The officer was awarded VSM in January 2014. He can be contacted at najjoseph@yahoo.com

PIFFER GORKHAS TAKE ON THE TAMIL TIGERS

On 11 October 87, units landed at Palaly, and were ordered to move towards Jaffna, without an administrative and orientation pause, without terrain and intelligence inputs. Was there undue haste? Reverses occurred, but the strength of the Indian Infantry lies in its ability to recover and strike back. The author takes us through the ups and downs of combat situations.

Into Operation Pawan

Fourth Battalion of the 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force) (4/5 GR (FF)) is renowned as one of the finest units in the Indian Army, having proven its prowess against Pakistani infiltrators in Jammu and Kashmir during the 1965 War and in the historic heliborne operations at Sylhet in Bangladesh during the 1971 Indo-Pak War. For its achievements in the 1971 Indo-Pak War, the Battalion was honoured with the Battle Honour of Sylhet and Theatre Honour of East Pakistan.

On 26 August 87, 4/5 GR (FF) moved to Pioneer Corps Training Centre, Bangalore to undergo training. After training, the unit returned to Gwalior and was finally airlifted to Palaly Airfield near Jaffna in Sri Lanka on 11 October 87 in two IL-76 Aircraft. At Palaly, we were briefed by Major General Harkirat Singh, General Officer Commanding 54 Infantry Division about the impending tasks as part of 72 Infantry Brigade. During the briefing, it was reiterated that the Liberation Tigers



Mrs NJD Singh, widow of Major NJD Singh, Vrc receiving the Gallantry Medal from the President of India.



Charlie Company in action at Nelliadi

of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) may not be able to face the Indian Army's might and opposition faced would literally be negligible or nil. But for LTTE, their goal was Eelam (Independence) and they had made up their mind to fight the Indian Army, if need be. Certain parameters were also laid for the operations, namely no fire to be opened on civilians, civilians were to be rendered assistance and no inconvenience was to be caused to them.

There were no intelligence inputs of strength and location of LTTE Cadres at Urumpirai, Kondavil, Kokkuvil and Jaffna, except possible locations of the LTTE Political and Military Headquarters. We were to operate in an unknown area, where the language differed and no effort was made to provide us with interpreters. Only Major Varghese of the Battalion could barely understand and speak Tamil. The unit tried to gather maximum information about the terrain, LTTE tactics and opposition expected. The Sri Lankan Army provided some support, though their deployment and movement was curtailed by the India - Sri Lanka Accord.

Action at Punналаikkadduvan

The task given to the Battalion was to advance along Road Palaly – Urumpirai – Kondavil – Kokkuvil - Jaffna and to link up with the heliborne force comprising of Team ex 10 Para Commando and Battalion less two Companies of 13 SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY (LI) by 0200 hours 12 October 1987. Due to the imperative to link up, the unit advanced immediately on landing and moved along the Road Palaly – Urumpirai. It was difficult to identify LTTE cadres, who were operating in civilian clothes, from amongst the civilian population. A single map of the area was issued and four more sets were issued just before the Battalion moved out. A quick aerial reconnaissance was organised for

general information about the terrain and the route / axis to be followed.

After about four kms, the forward companies (Alfa and Charlie) came under fire from Punналаikkadduvan. The Gorkhas charged and caught one LTTE militant with AK-47 Rifle and grenades. On a further search of the area, some land mines and 40 kgs of explosives were recovered. Alfa Company was moving close to the road and like Charlie Company came under heavy Medium Machine Gun (MMG) fire from Punналаikkadduvan School Building. It was evident that LTTE Cadres in the area were in large numbers. Alfa Company swung into action, silenced the MMG and assaulted the building and destroyed the LTTE hideout. During the process of clearing other houses, the leading elements tripped over a Claymore mine, instantly killing Rifleman Ganesh Bahadur Thapa and seriously injuring four personnel including Major AD Gardner, the Company Commander in the right leg.

Major AD Gardner had personally led the assaults, silenced the LTTE MMG and displayed exemplary courage and bravery while dealing with the LTTE opposition at Punналаikkadduvan. **For his bravery, Major A D Gardner was awarded Vir Chakra.** I took charge of Alfa Company.

The opposition was unexpected and advance slowed down due to the LTTE MMGs, Mortar fire and that too from unexpected directions, even tree tops and civilian houses. The Battalion suffered many casualties, including Major Varghese who was all along in the front and displayed courage and bravery, which became an example for his men. Badly injured, he was evacuated to the nearest Medical Inspection Room and Subedar Bhaira Singh Gurung took charge of the company.

At this stage considering the opposition and casualties suffered, Lieutenant Colonel IBS Bawa, the Commanding Officer (CO) requested



The Naib Subedar Adjutant of the unit with the runner at Scissors Cross, Urelu



Arms and ammunition captured from LTTE by Bravo Company

the Commander 72 Infantry Brigade for tanks. The unit was asked to establish a firm base in the area and advance further on arrival of the tanks. By 0400 hours on 12 October all four companies firmed up in general area Urelu. Three tanks from 65 Armoured Regiment married up with the Battalion soon thereafter.

13 SIKH LI Joins Us

By 0130 hours 12 October, the heliborne operation was abandoned and 13 SIKH LI was asked to move in vehicles and join us along the axis Palaly – Vasavilan- Urelu-Urumpirai. They linked up with us at about 0645 hours on 12 October. Considering the opposition on the main axis and necessity to link up with the heliborne force, 13 SIKH LI thereafter moved on a different route, West of the axis via Maruthanamadam. By midday, 13 SIKH LI had reached the designated rendezvous but were greeted with eerie silence. A revised rendezvous was given by Tactical Headquarters (HQ) 72 Infantry Brigade and they advanced further at 1415 hours to be greeted with intense fire from

houses, trees and areas around. By 1700 hours, 13 SIKH LI had lost five soldiers, two Junior Commissioned Officers and 25 Other Ranks were wounded. The movement was stalled with the situation aggravated by torrential rain. 4/5 GR (FF) was tasked to establish contact with them just North of Kondavil.

Advance to Kondavil

We were to link up with 13 SIKH LI at Kondavil, then link up with Para Commandos near Jaffna University and thereafter return to Urumpirai. Moving cross country along the Kankesanturai – Kondavil railway track, we commenced the advance at 1500 hours on 12 October with the troop of tanks

leading. On reaching short of Kondavil, Alfa Company under my command moved towards the Kondavil area, while remainder of the Battalion firmed in. We soon came under fire. With the fire support of tanks and Rocket Launchers (RLs), amidst pitch darkness and heavy rains, we manoeuvred and charged the LTTE positions. The opposing LTTE cadres quickly melted away and we linked up with 13 SIKH LI, South of Kondavil, at about 1930 hours on 12 October. By 0400 hours 13 October, we regrouped and were deployed along with 13 SIKH LI, amidst torrential rain, along the railway line.

The Team of 10 Para Commando had yet to be contacted and extricated. A company of 13 SIKH LI, two tanks under command Lieutenant Colonel Dalvir Singh, Commanding Officer 10 Para Commando contacted the Team and returned with them to the firm base at about 0615 hours on 13 October.

Events of the past two days had indicated the methodology of fighting by the LTTE cadres, their strength, the hostile and active role of locals and our insecure lines of communication. LTTE cadres held the advantage of regrouping and redeploying after an engagement - methodology of a well-trained guerrilla force. At this stage, the whole force was ordered to move back to Urumpirai.

Return Move To Urumpirai

As the column moved back, the LTTE Cadres regrouped and took up positions along the return route. They fired on the battalion from all directions. Fire was voluminous and effective from the area of a Temple, some distance North of Kondavil. This Temple area appeared to be their main position. Subedar Tula Ram Gurung, Charlie Company

and his platoon came under MMG fire. The platoon charged and destroyed the MMG, but Tula Ram was hit by a MMG burst and was killed.

Lieutenant Colonel I B S Bawa, the CO was physically moving with C Company, since C Company Commander (Major Varghese) had been evacuated earlier. Disregarding the perils, the CO moved ahead with the leading platoon. The Kondavil complex was captured after a fierce firefight, but the CO was wounded in the chest. I rushed with reinforcements and saw the wounded CO passing on instructions to the companies and also to the Brigade HQ.

In the meantime LTTE cadres had surrounded Delta Company. Major NJD Singh, the Company Commander and his troops charged one LTTE position and in a hand to hand fight killed four LTTE cadres with Khukris. In the action, Major NJD Singh and his operator Rifleman Ashok Kumar Thapa were killed. Major N J D Singh had displayed very high degree of bravery and set an example to his command by personally leading the assault on the LTTE position and with his team killed four LTTE cadres. **For this act Major N J D Singh was awarded Vir Chakra (Posthumous).**

Subedar Prem Bahadur Thapa, Senior Junior Commissioned Officer of the company took charge of Delta Company and disregarding his personal safety, veered towards the rear of the LTTE position. He charged with open Khukris and retrieved the bodies of Major NJD Singh and Rifleman Ashok Kumar Thapa. During the actions from 11 October onwards, Subedar Prem Bahadur had displayed high qualities of leadership and bravery. At grave personal risk, he retrieved the body of his senior and another soldier. **For this act of bravery Subedar Prem Bahadur was awarded Vir Chakra.**

Due to excessive bleeding, Lieutenant Colonel IBS Bawa had slid into a coma, and I took over command of the Battalion. Tragically due to casualties, Lieutenant Raj Sinha was the only officer with me. Captain R N Lal, the Medical Officer with the unit had a harrowing time attending to and evacuating casualties.

At about 1300 hours, a Sri Lankan Army Gunship arrived over Kondavil area with Captain Choudhary, an Artillery officer, and I guided him to bring down fire on the LTTE positions. The Gunship destroyed LTTE emplacements, while we engaged the LTTE cadres with two Inch and 81 mm Mortars. Soon thereafter Captain J K Thapa of the Battalion, who was attached with the Brigade HQ, arrived with a tank to evacuate casualties. But the tank got bogged down in the slush and mud. At about 1700 hours, two more tanks and four BMPs arrived and the casualties, including the CO were evacuated. Sadly, Lieutenant Colonel I B

S Bawa succumbed to the wounds. **He was awarded Maha Vir Chakra posthumously.**

By night 13/14 October, the unit arrived at the Brigade Firm Base. Major Yang Bharat, who had been on short leave, arrived at the firm base on 14 October and took over Bravo Company. On 16 October, Captain J K Thapa returned from the Brigade HQ and took over Delta Company. The unit reorganised in the firm base area and was tasked to secure the Road Palaly-Vasavilan - Urumpirai.

Officers Reinforcement

The officer's situation in the battalion was acute, with only four officers present. In a matter of weeks, several officers of the Battalion were posted back on forthwith basis. On 22nd October, Lieutenant Colonel Ravindra Singh arrived from 58 Gorkha Training Centre, posted as 2nd in command with the hope that he will subsequently take over command.



Taking a break in the jungle after an action.



The first mine blast against the unit on 11 October 1987.

Capture of Thirunelveli

On 24 October, the unit was tasked to capture Thirunelveli Cross Roads, adjacent to Jaffna University, reportedly held strongly by LTTE cadres. The LTTE had planned three tier defences with Jaffna Town as the focal point and inner most tier. The outermost tier was around Kondavil and the middle tier was around Thirunelveli Cross Roads defences - a fortified strong point. With tanks and BMPs leading on 25 October, the column reached the outskirts of Thirunelveli by about 1600 hours. At 1630 hours the assault on Thirunelveli was launched by Alfa Company supported by a troop of tanks. In the next two hours, assaulting troops captured the Eastern and Southern flanks of the Thirunelveli Cross Roads. The remaining portion of Thirunelveli Cross Roads was captured by Bravo Company by 2000 hours. With Charlie Company mopping up the area, entire Thirunelveli was captured by 2100 hours on 25th October 1987.

With the capture of Thirunelveli, link up was established with 13 SIKH LI, who had since advanced to Jaffna Town. With

the capture of Thirunelveli, a secure line of communication was now available from Palaly to Jaffna. On 26th October, the unit moved back to Palaly, as the Battalion was to move to Vavuniya Sector.

In Vavuniya Sector

On 13 November, the unit was carrying out cordon and search operations at a nearby village Nedunkerni. While returning to Nainamadu after the operations, Alfa Company came under fire from three MMGs. The leading elements had an engineer party, for the track clearance. The leading elements were engaged from the other side of the road as well.

Subedar Man Bahadur Gurung charged on the LTTE cadres along with engineer elements. During the assault he along with three Engineer personnel laid down their lives. The LTTE cadres, taking advantage of the thick foliage, made a quick get-away. The unit quickly cordoned the forest area and carried out an extensive search but returned to Puliyanikulam without any success.

The weather was hot and humid, which did not suit Lieutenant Colonel Ravindra Singh, the Officiating CO who was suffering from acute bronchitis and was evacuated to Command Hospital Pune on 26 November 1987. I again took over the command of the Battalion at this critical juncture. By end November, we were deployed around Vavuniya and at Puliyanikulam.

30 November Ambush

There was a threat of ambushes by LTTE Cadres, and convoy protection on Vavuniya - Mankulam route was provided by the formation. On 30 November 1987, Captain Mahipal Singh with his company was detailed for convoy protection of the second line transport moving from Puliyanikulam to Vavuniya. The LTTE had buried huge quantities of explosives under a culvert as an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). While the first vehicle in which Protection Commander was travelling passed over the culvert, the following vehicle was engulfed in the blast triggered by a remote from around 100 metres distance. The vehicle was thrown up in the air and was shattered. Of the ten occupants, five were killed on the spot including Subedar Bhakta Bahadur Gurung and five other ranks were seriously injured. The LTTE cadres tried to charge the spot but were fired upon from the leading vehicle under Captain Mahipal Singh. Reinforcements from the Troposcatter

Company under Second Lieutenant Vichitra Singh Gurung and from Vavuniya under Captain Soban Singh were rushed to the spot.

On 22 December 1987, Colonel D D Dhoundiyal was sidestepped from 6/5 GR (FF) and arrived as the new Commanding Officer. He had more or less completed his command tenure in 6/5 GR (FF).

Vazir's Command Contribution

In our unit, 2nd in Command is not called 2IC, but is addressed as Vazir. In all the wars, the unit had been losing the Second in Command. Since December 1971, after losing the 2IC in one of the attacks around Sylhet (East Pakistan), the unit troops decided to address the 2IC as Vazir. It will not be out of place to mention the circumstances and conditions under which I as Vazir had executed responsibilities as Officiating Commanding Officer. I took over Alfa Company on 11 October, when the Company Commander was injured.

On 12 October I personally led the assault at Kondavil, when Lieutenant Colonel Bawa was injured and later died. I took over command in a very difficult situation with only one officer to assist me, and succeeded in bringing the unit back to the Brigade Firm Base. From 14 October till the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Ravindra Singh on 22 October, I continued in command in most trying conditions. I again took over command on 26 November 1987 and continued with search, cordon and protection tasks in Puliyankulam – Vavuniya- Madhukonda Sector, till the arrival of Colonel DD Dhoundiyal.

In January 1988 we were moving to East Karavaddy under 115 Infantry Brigade. During the movement, LTTE militants tried to fire on the convoy on night 03/04 January and exploded a land

mine five kms short of Kokavil, when a vehicle passed over it. The vehicle was damaged and the driver was injured, but he controlled the vehicle. One Junior Commissioned Officer and Seventeen Other Ranks who were in the vehicle received slight injuries. In the cross fire with LTTE cadres, Rifleman Dhrub Kumar Pokhrel was killed.

On 29 January the unit moved North, along the coast line to Polikandy, Navindil, Achuvelli and Uddupiddy. The area was close to Velvettiturai, the birth place of Prabhakaran, LTTE Supremo. The area was an LTTE stronghold and it was difficult to cultivate informers. The unit had to do tight rope walking; strict imposition of curfew, frequent cordon and search, acquisition of intelligence and civic actions to win over their hearts. To an extent civic actions started paying off and information about LTTE started trickling in.

On 17 April 88, during a cordon and search, I fired at a militant who later succumbed at Palaly Military Hospital.

Raid by 2nd Lieutenant RS Rawat

On 28 May 88, information was received that some LTTE militants were in a house at Velvettiturai. 2nd Lieutenant R S Rawat, the Battalion Intelligence Officer, moved with 19 soldiers to apprehend them. The patrol moved in light vehicles, dismounted short of the house and while the cordon was being laid, 2nd Lieutenant Rawat entered the house and charged the surprised occupants, who threw grenades at the raiding party, injuring the right leg of 2nd Lieutenant Rawat. Three hard core LTTE militants were killed, three weapons, a lot of ammunition, cash in Sri Lankan Currency and documents of intelligence value were recovered. Due to the injury, 2nd

Lieutenant Rawat's lower right leg had to be amputated. It was an excellent example of initiative, daring and boldness without regard to personal safety. He had achieved excellent results in a difficult situation with his timely charge. **For his bravery he was Mentioned -in - Despatches.**

Operations at Polikandy, Velvettiturai 25 to 29 May 1988

On 25 May 1988, a boat was apprehended by Delta Company at Boat Check Point on suspicion of smuggling arms and ammunition for LTTE Cadres. LTTE cadres had also started beheading innocent civilians to scare them. A major operation was planned to cover the entire area of Vadammaracchi. Alfa Company each ex 4 Para and 1 MARATHA LI with a half team of Para Commandos were placed under command of the Battalion.

On 26th May, three companies were launched in the area between Polikandy and Velvettiturai and sixteen LTTE militants were apprehended.

On 29th May, during a search for a suspected LTTE Radio Station in Velvettiturai, two militants were fired at, in which one was wounded. The wounded militant instantly consumed cyanide and burst a hand grenade under his body. The militant was later identified as a Lieutenant Seelan of LTTE. One Herstal Belgium Pistol 9 mm along with ammunition was recovered from his body.

The operation had a telling effect and the activities of LTTE Cadres virtually came to a standstill. Amidst all these activities, the unit received orders for its return to India. The advance party of 17 SIKH arrived in the second week of August and I left Sri Lanka on 16 August 1988 for Dharamsala.

Major Dalbir Singh's Hand To Hand Fight

On 17 August at about 1630 hours, while carrying out mobile patrolling from Velvettiturai to Tondaimanar, Major Dalbir Singh (later General and Chief of Army Staff) spotted a cycle with two persons trying to get away. Suspecting them to be LTTE militants, he chased them in his jeep. They left the cycle and tried to run away. Major Dalbir Singh and the accompanying troops chased the suspects who hid behind a bush and fired on the party, which was returned by Major Dalbir's party. Unmindful of the dangers, Major Dalbir Singh ran after them, and apprehended one of them who had an AK 47 Rifle, three magazines, 84 rounds of ammunition, two cyanide capsules and important documents. The captured militant tried to consume cyanide but was prevented from doing so. He was later recognised as a hard core militant, while the other militant escaped in the thick foliage. There were many other such cases of personal leadership and bravery, one of which was exhibited by **Havildar Om Prakash Shreesh, who was awarded Chief of the Army Staff's Commendation Card for his bravery and presence of mind** in one of the operations.

Supervision of Provincial Council Elections - Batticaloa Sector

By end October, the main body of 17 SIKH arrived and relieved the unit from operational tasks for return to India. Our unit was diverted to Batticaloa, under 57 Mountain Division, for the duration of Provincial Council Elections. The Battalion moved to Katankuddi, a Muslim dominated area for the elections which were conducted on 20 November 1988. The unit provided security to polling booths. The elections passed off

peacefully and on 26 December 1988, the battalion sailed from Trincomalee and reached Madras (Chennai). Colonel DD Dhoundiyal had taken over the unit at a difficult juncture, amidst operations. He planned and executed many operations in Vavuniya and Trincomalee Sectors and set many personal examples. **For his exemplary leadership in Counter Insurgency Operations in Sri Lanka, Colonel D D Dhoundiyal was awarded Yudh Seva Medal (YSM).**

Summing Up: *On 11 October 1987, the task given to us was in an intelligence void, with lack of terrain information and termed as an easy job by the Division Commander. During the next 15 months, the unit operated under various brigades. Admittedly operations were of Counter Insurgency in nature but the terrain, people, language was different; the Indian soldiers were operating against a brutal and highly motivated militant group, supported by an alienated population, which made the conduct of operations difficult. Motivation for Eelam (Independence) was so high that even women and underage children had taken up arms against the IPKF. There was a mix of coast line terrain, jungles, cluster of villages and small towns to fight the militants. It was not a classical battle where enemy could be destroyed by set piece attacks. The LTTE was armed to the teeth with modern weapons, used IEDs devastatingly, made cunning use of civilians and had a strong hold over the civil population.*

The Battalion crowned itself with glory with one Mahavir Chakra, three Vir Chakras, one Yudh Seva Medal, two Mentioned-in-Despatches and a Chief Of Army Staff's Commendation Card. The Battalion redeemed its honour and kept its tradition of achieving results during operational commitments, much beyond expectations.



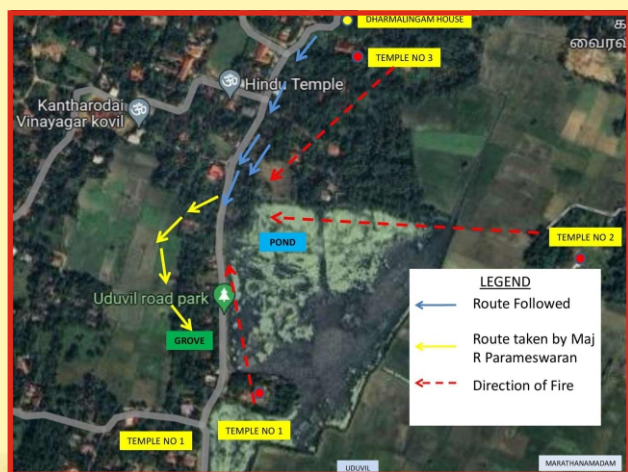
Colonel Randhir Singh (Retd), an alumnus of Army Cadet College, Pune was commissioned into 4/5 GR (FF) on 31st March 1972 from Indian Military Academy, Dehradun.. He has wide ranging experience in counter insurgency operations, high altitude and in desert warfare. During Operation Pawan, as a Major (2nd-in- command), he often officiated as the CO in crisis situations and led his men from the front, with great confidence and professional competence. On 25 November 1993, he took over command of his Paltan, at Chennai. During his Command he laid great emphasis on professional training. He hung up his uniform in August 2002, and is presently settled in Himachal Pradesh.



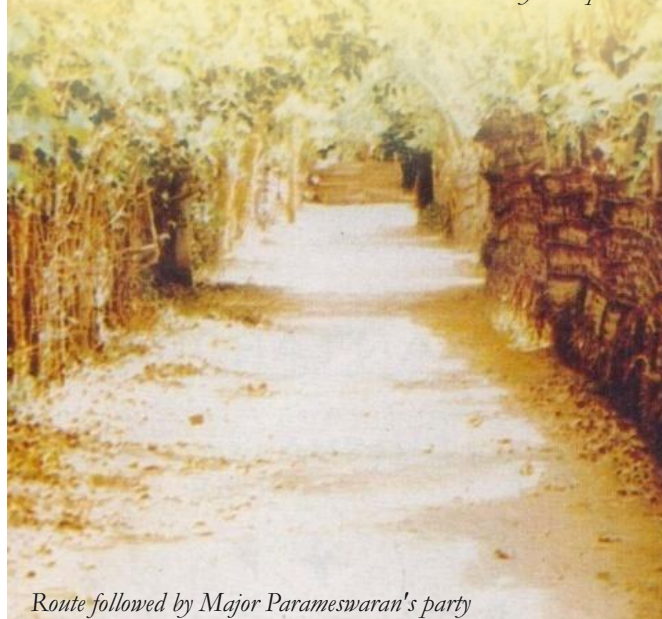
Col Randhir Singh (Retd)



Coconut Grove where Major Parameswaran was killed in action.



Kantharodai and the actions as they took place.



Route followed by Major Parameswaran's party

PARAM VIR PARAMESWARAN

GALLANT ACTION AT KANTHARODAI

Major R Parameswaran, PVC (Posthumous) is the only Param Vir Chakra awardee of Operation PAWAN. His subordinate from the same unit pays tribute to the valiant warrior.

After an intense phase of operations in Jaffna, in October/November 1987, 8 MAHAR was deployed in general area Uduvil and 'A' Company under Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran (affectionately known as Parry) and Captain DR Sharma was deployed in Uduvil Church area.

Kantharodai was a suburb of Jaffna, North of Road Maruthanamadam – Uduvil. The area was interspersed with a number of roads and by-lanes. Houses were located along the roads and these houses had very large courtyards. The houses did not have walls but had hedges of coconut leaves which restricted visibility.

In order to understand the action it is imperative to visualize the scene. Adjacent to the road from Uduvil to Kantharodai, there were two very large ponds and there were three prominent temples in the area. One lay South of the road with a thick stone wall on its boundary. The second was to the East of the road, in between the ponds. The third temple was about 300 metres to the North. The temples were built of stone granite and had large courtyards, which dominated the road from Kantharodai. The area West of the road had several houses with thick coconut groves and many by-lanes. The house of Dharmalingam, which was the target house, was about 500 metres from the third temple.

On 24 November 1987, information was received from the Brigade Headquarters that a consignment of arms and ammunition had been unloaded at Dharmalingam's house in Kantharodai. As the Company had moved in recently and did not have an effective intelligence network, the credibility of information could not be verified.



The pond and the third temple (in the background)

Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran planned the operation and proceeded to Dharmalingam's house at 2300 hours on 24 November. They walked along the road, from Uduvil to Dharmalingam's house and crossed Temple No 1 and Temple No 3 without any incident. They cordoned Dharmalingam's house at about 0130 hours that night and noticed some movement in the house. This aroused their suspicion and they decided to wait for day light. At 0530 hours on 25 November 1987 they searched the house but did not find any arms and ammunition. They decided to return to Uduvil.

The patrol started moving towards Temple Number 1 and Captain DR Sharma was leading the point section. Suddenly, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres opened effective fire from Temple Number 1 which dominated the road. The first burst hit the two Scouts, Lance Naik Gajanam Gawade and Sepoy Ramesh Badgal. Despite being wounded severely in both legs, the scouts regained composure, returned fire and dragged themselves close to the fence.

effective fire from three sides. Seeing that the area on the Eastern side across the pond was open and fire was coming from across the pond, Major Parameswaran directed Captain DR Sharma to move into the built up area, fix the enemy firing from Temple Number 1 and move towards Temple Number 1 by clearing the houses. As Captain DR Sharma started moving towards Temple Number 1, his party also came under fire from houses right opposite him.

Considering that the LTTE had surrounded the patrol from all sides, Major Parameswaran decided to outflank the LTTE cadres who were firing at Captain DR Sharma's group. He took five men with him and moved into a heavily built up area where a coconut grove was located. On reaching the grove, Major Parameswaran realised that he had reached the area behind the militants who were firing at Captain DR Sharma's group.

Meanwhile Captain DR Sharma's party entered a house and started firing at the militants. A militant managed to close in and lobbed a grenade inside the room. Sepoy Tulsa Singh bent forward to pick up the grenade and throw it outside. The grenade burst and full impact was taken by Sepoy Tulsa Singh, who sustained grievous injuries but survived. As soon as the grenade burst, the soldiers rushed outside the room. The militants had taken position and started firing at our troops as they came out. But Dame Fortune smiled and the militants fire missed our men, who retaliated and killed the militants on the spot.

Buttressed between Captain DR Sharma's party and Major Parameswaran's group which had come behind them, the militants decided to break contact. Parry's party took positions behind the coconut trees and engaged the LTTE cadres. At this time the radio operator Sepoy Dilip Maske lost the antenna of his radio set, RS

However, one soldier died of the bullet injury. Realising that the road was covered effectively by fire from Temple Number 1, Captain DR Sharma, (a veteran of Battle of Annacoddai where he had sustained injuries earlier), instructed Sepoy Tulsa Singh to get near the pond across the road and fire a 84 mm round on Temple Number 1. Before Tulsa could fire the Rocket Launcher, the LTTE also opened up from Temple Number 2. The bullets whizzed over Sepoy Tulsa Singh's head and hit two jawans who were firing at Temple Number 1. The LTTE had laid an effective ambush and then they also started firing from Temple Number 3.

The complete patrol came under

ANPRC-25 and the party went out of communication. Parry was firing at the militants with his 9 mm carbine. He took a bullet injury on his left hand. Undeterred by the injury, he moved towards Sepoy Raj Kumar Sharma and picked up his 7.62 mm Light Machine Gun. Initially he slung it on his shoulder and again started firing, but later he placed it on a cut tree trunk and continued firing. The militants who were facing heavy pressure from Captain DR Sharma's group realised that Major Parameswaran's party was very small and they decided to break through the party which had outflanked them.

In a desperate situation, the militants wanting to break through charged at Major Parameswaran's small team. Major Parameswaran got into a hand to hand fight with a militant, snatched the militant's AK-47 and killed him. However, Parameswaran also sustained a second bullet injury on his chest. The bullet ignited a mini flare which he was carrying and burnt his chest. Despite the injuries and burns sustained, Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran continued to exhort his men to fight. One militant was hit by Sepoy/Washerman Rajan Lal and he dropped his weapon and fled. Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran died gallantly fighting in the grove.

Meanwhile, Captain D R Sharma had cleared the houses adjoining the coconut grove and moved outwards. In his party, Naik Appanna Sarje, in a hand to hand fight sacrificed his life but managed to retrieve a rifle from one of the escaping militants. By this time, reinforcements sent from Battalion Headquarters with Captain T C Bhattacharya reached the grove. The militants sensing another trap melted away into the built up areas behind the grove. However, Captain T C Bhattacharya, caught a helper along with two Rocket Launchers, 200 booster chargers and 100 kgs of explosive.



CITATION MAJOR RAMASWAMY PARAMESWARAN 8 MAHAR (IC-32907)

On 25 November 1987, when Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran was returning from search operation in Sri Lanka, late at night, his column was ambushed by a group of militants. With cool presence of mind, he encircled the militants from the rear and charged into them, taking them completely by surprise. During the hand-to-hand combat, a militant shot him in the chest. Undaunted, Major Parameswaran snatched the rifle from the militant and shot him dead. Gravely wounded, he continued to give orders and inspired his command till he breathed his last. Five militants were killed and three rifles and two rocket launchers were recovered and the ambush was cleared.

Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran displayed the most conspicuous gallantry and made the supreme sacrifice by laying down his life.

During the action, five militants were killed, three AK 47 Rifles and two Rocket Launchers were captured. Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran and three other troops died in the action and nine other soldiers were wounded.

For the action of outflanking militants with a small party, and for his

conspicuous and inspiring leadership due to which five militants were killed and one captured along with arms and ammunition, Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran was awarded the Param Vir Chakra posthumously.

A gallant hero indeed!!!



Brigadier Satinder Singh (Retd) commissioned into 8 MAHAR in 1986 participated in Operation PAWAN in Jaffna. An alumnus of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, the officer has held appointments as Instructor in Infantry School, Brigade Major of an Infantry Brigade, AQMG of a Mountain Division and has also served in Army Headquarters. The officer commanded 8 MAHAR and later commanded a Mountain Brigade. Post superannuation, he is presently serving as Director Defence Services Welfare, Punjab.



**Brigadier
Satinder Singh (Retd)**

TOUGH GOING, A TOUGH COMMANDER

BRIGADIER MANJIT SINGH, MVC

Leadership in combat is difficult, and becomes more stressful in adverse situations, when reverses have taken place, when troops are unprepared and when enemy and terrain knowledge is inadequate.

Brigadier Manjit Singh surmounted these challenges and became a hero – a 100-gun salute to him!! The authors saw him operate from close quarters.

"Did you see that eye? I trust that man to do it, but I wouldn't want to serve under him".

(Hitler sharing views on General Modat with his staff officer, in the crucial stages in 1941 during Second World War, after hearing a sharp response and vehement assertion by Gen Modat "Great firmness would be necessary to save the German Army from destruction").

History is replete with examples of tough commanders who were respected by their men. In ancient times it was felt that the effective soldier was one who was more scared of his own officers rather than the enemy! Scores of anecdotes abound about the toughness of late Brigadier Manjit Singh, MVC. He had been handpicked and side stepped as Commander 41 Infantry Brigade, by General K Sundarji, the then Army Chief to crack the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), after the disastrous heliborne landing on 10/11 October 87.



Brigadier Manjit Singh boards a helicopter (Photo courtesy 12 JAT).

Lieutenant Colonel Unnikrishnan (later Brigadier) first met Brigadier Manjit Singh, MVC when he was the Deputy Commander of an independent infantry brigade, while commanding the Signal Company of the same brigade in Udhampur for one month. He remembered him as a lively person, and a good host with whom he got along well.

A few years later, as Commanding Officer (CO) 12 Field Sub Group, an Electronic Warfare (EW) unit located at Delhi, Unnikrishnan received orders to move his unit in 48 hours to Sri Lanka (from Palam to Palaly) with the freedom to take whatever he wanted that could possibly fit into an IL-76. No one briefed him about the situation or tasks. On arrival at Palaly, he reported to the Colonel General Staff (GS) of 54 Infantry Division, who couldn't give any useful inputs. The Chief Signal Officer, Southern Command asked him to deploy at Jaffna Fort. The Colonel GS arranged three vehicles and two guides from 9 Para Commando to take the unit to the Fort that night.

1 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY (LI) welcomed the unit in Jaffna Fort. During the interaction, Colonel TPS Brar, the CO (later Lieutenant General) gave Unni a small Japanese ICOM radio set, which was unserviceable. Unni's foreman repaired the device, and the Sub Group started using it to intercept the LTTE radio communications. This device was best suited for the task and the Group Commander in Delhi procured and delivered five imported ICOMs within 4 days! Ill prepared to start with, the Sub Group found innovative solutions day by day.

LTTE had developed an agile communication system, based on VHF and HF radio. The Sub Group detachments in Jaffna Fort were able to intercept LTTE

communications, yielding substantial tactical signal intelligence and combat information - simmering hostility was evident. From sporadic incidents of violence, to sudden collapse of peace keeping, was a situation that the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was unprepared for. Jaffna Fort came under fire and was isolated by the LTTE. It was an effective siege, and day by day the Tigers were gaining an upper hand. The Fort was in radio communication with Headquarters (HQ) 54 Infantry Division, but there was no physical movement to and fro by road or by air. It was a deteriorating situation.

As the just signed Indo Sri Lanka Accord crisis spiralled out of control in Sri Lanka, 41 Infantry Brigade was moved post haste from Lucknow to Chennai. The brigade had not trained in counter insurgency operations in jungles, nor were they briefed about the nature of their role. They were told that further orders would be given by 54 Infantry Division on reaching Sri Lanka. Initially

they would be in a peace keeping role. The brigade had no maps, no intelligence about the terrain and no information about the ground situation. The Commander had been posted out, the Deputy Commander and Brigade Major (BM) were on leave. The brigade was mobilised and moved by air/special train to Chennai and airlifted onwards to Palaly.

The operational situation in Jaffna was critical and demanded more troops to be inducted. On landing at Palaly, the Deputy Commander and Officiating BM were called to the Divisional HQ and given orders to plan link up with 1 MARATHA LI at Jaffna Fort, to commence movement at 1800 hours on 18 October 1987 – the same evening!

Brigadier Manjit Singh, who had sidestepped from 60 Infantry Brigade, took charge at Palaly. The new commander had just landed, had not even met his Orders Group. On his insistence, the operational movement



In the front seat - Brigadier Manjit Singh (Photo courtesy 12 JAT)



Brigadier Manjit Singh visiting 12 JAT (Photo courtesy 12 JAT)

was delayed to 0500 hours the next morning. The recently failed heliborne operation in Jaffna University where the casualties were extremely heavy, was fresh in everyone's minds. The troops were not ready for such operations.

All that we had been taught about leadership was on test here. A new commander who had no clue about his command, was launched into a critical operation, with little or no information about his command or the enemy. Either the enemy had been misjudged to be a pushover or the commander's capabilities had been over estimated. Brigadier Manjit Singh's brigade faced stiff opposition during the advance from Palaly to Jaffna Fort. The 48 hours that followed after the link up operations had been launched, were most traumatic and bloody.

In the words of Lieutenant Colonel Unnikrishnan, *"I vividly recall the day Manjit linked up and the meeting in the operations room of 1 MARATHA LI. The atmosphere was tense, officers talking in hushed tones while awaiting the commander. Manjit walked in, looking left and right and moving forward slowly*

in a dazed state, his combat dress full of blood and sweat, Colonel TPS Brar smiled but did not introduce me. I stepped forward and wished Manjit, who moved ahead without response. Since it was inappropriate to seek his attention, I stepped aside and watched what was going on. We learnt that Manjit had linked up with a handful of troops after suffering heavy casualties. Yes, it was a great feat but the Commander had lost contact with the bulk of his brigade including the HQs, which not only robbed the sheen of victory but also caused immense distress, loss of face and embarrassment. I could make out the impact of communication failure, which screwed up command and control! I sensed an opportunity to step in and be of help. In the next few minutes, I got in touch with Captain Venugopal, GSO 3, who had been accompanying the Commander. His radio set was not functional, but he had the presence of mind and wisdom to share with me the frequencies of B1 and battalion nets. I asked Major Shankar Murthy, my 2IC to rush to our EW command post and search for the radio nets. I went to Brigadier Manjit and told him as much. His sharp response was to order the entire brigade to reach Jaffna Fort. I got a message from my 2IC, that he could contact B1 (the radio net of the brigade HQ). I told Shankar to convey the Commander's orders to the COs. Brigadier Manjit was excited and asked me whether he could speak on the radio, I took him in my jeep to our radio detachment. On the way we stopped at my den for Brigadier Manjit Singh to discard his combat dress, and wear my sports shorts and T-shirt. At the detachment, Shankar gave him the hand set and the tiger roared! He thundered his orders. He was visibly relieved, and quickly regained composure. He had tea with my boys in the EW command post and thanked everyone. He requested me to keep the communication going through the night and I accepted the challenge."

The brigade arrived in Jaffna Fort next day morning. Sheer courage, dogged determination and unwavering pursuit of his objective despite strong opposition and devastating losses! Manjit arrived as a war hero!

This set the tone for the remainder tenure of HQ 41 Infantry Brigade. Major Jose Manavalan (later Major General) took over as BM from Captain Venugopal (later Colonel), the Officiating BM. Brigadier Manjit Singh was breathing fire and trying to get hold of his command to follow his directive style. He stood no nonsense, and came down heavily on anyone who was not responding to orders. It was actually a crisis in command for all units who landed in Operation PAWAN unprepared. COs who did not lead from the front paid the price with heavy casualties. A peace keeping role had been altered overnight to a

peace enforcing role. How does a leader convey this to his command? How do they emphasise simple but forgotten battle drills? There was no time. On the other hand, the LTTE were fully prepared for this eventuality. The initial inductions did not have the time to train for the new role and paid a heavy price.

Clearing up Jaffna town and dominating it was the first task. After Jaffna Town had been cleared and fresh troops moved in, 41 Infantry Brigade moved South to Vavuniya and was placed under HQ 4 Infantry Division in Vavuniya.

Brigadier Manjit Singh was not one to suffer fools gladly. He would tick off anyone at will, if he felt he was not up to the mark. Captain N Venugopal of 13 SIKH LI who served as his GSO 3 and officiating Brigade Major, remembers his pragmatism and attention to routine administration and concern for the soldier. In operations, he asked the radio operator to put a slip in the battery, and keep a record of usage ie commencement and closure of use every day. One day in a week, he asked the Camp Commandant to close the langar (cook house) to give rest to cooks. For 12 hours, the HQ had to survive on emergency ration like “*shakar para*” (emergency improvised hard ration made of jaggery). Captain Kambalimath, the Camp Commandant, would come every morning for his daily report wearing his helmet and sweating profusely down his chin straps.

A Regimental officer recalled: “*I had the opportunity of meeting Brigadier Manjit Singh in the thick of Operation PAWAN in hot spot Vavuniya at HQ 72 Infantry Brigade, where I was then posted as GSO3 (Intelligence). The overall environment was tense. We had moved to Vavuniya after initial reverses. We had lost our deputy commander, 13 SIKH LI had lost a platoon with their Company Commander, in the unsuccessful Jaffna University operation, 4/5 GR (FF) had lost their senior leadership including the*

CO. Despite being a first-time meeting and the adverse situation, he was spontaneous in his warmth and his Regimental spirit was evident as we spent some time in discussion. During my tenure, I interacted with many formation commanders and most of them avoided road travel beyond the confines of areas of responsibility (AOR). And when done, it was devoid of tell-tale star plates, car flags etc. However, on conclusion of the operational interaction, Brigadier Manjit Singh drove back to his HQ in Killinochi about 70 kms away, in full uniform in his jonga with star plates and car flag fluttering, without any escort or road opening. I am sure that the LTTE was also surprised and taken aback! Operation PAWAN was a great eye opener of human nature, conduct of the unsung soldier, raw courage and real examples of going the extra mile, as well as glaring omissions. Indeed, an unforgettable experience. I can never forget the interaction with Brigadier Manjit Singh, for generations to come.”

Brigadier Manjit Singh became the most talked about Brigadier in the Army, for both the right and wrong reasons. To understand Manjit, you need to know what made him tick. Jose Manavalan unfortunately learnt it the hard way and got his written missive many months after he had been bloodied in! Brigadier Manjit’s personal philosophy of leadership – **My Way Of Command** – was something every leader in the Indian Army must emulate, even today. He had issued this missive as CO of 11 JAK LI. Later as Commander 60 Infantry Brigade he sent out the same directive without changing a word. By the time he sent it around in 41 Infantry Brigade, most leaders had already got a taste of what he was about. There were many who questioned this very intense style of command. Sure, there were many good and easy going leaders. These good guys got their men killed. In war, it was the

tough SOB leader who kept his men safe and strong. Manavalan saw it first-hand, watching and learning from the good leaders, who established strong and well-rehearsed battle drills at section and platoon level. The training of their command at each level was priority. It was also disheartening to see some battalions faltering on their basic tactical skills. And in some units the mistakes kept getting repeated. When men got killed and no corrective action was taken at company and battalion level, it was very apparent. The LTTE studied their ground and the drills followed by newly inducted troops. They avoided confrontation very clearly with units who had strong battle procedures. Food habits, poor communication drills, basic field craft and fire discipline were dead giveaways.

Manjit ensured his presence was felt all over the brigade AOR starting from South of Mankulam and stretching upto Vavuniya on the Anuradhapura District boundary. The four battalions were spread out in company/platoon level posts. Manjit studied the patrolling and ambush plan every day and compared it with results obtained. Often he would call for a helicopter and fly over spots where an ambush or block had been laid. The patrol leader would be asked to fire the Verv Light code given every day. Road and rail opening became an every-day mundane and dreary duty, but some units got it all wrong. One unit mounted Light Machine Guns (LMGs) on the One Ton tail board and advanced along the axis to be cleared and just fired repeated bursts on both flanks and moved ahead!! Companies led by competent company commanders always produced results and kept their men safe and confident.



Brigadier Manjit Singh with Officers (Photo courtesy Goa Chronicle)

41 Infantry Brigade had both the A1 Road and the Jaffna – Colombo railway passing through the Centre of their AOR. The safe passage of trains and convoys became an important but routine task, and a casual attitude anywhere resulted in casualties. Manjit would monitor movements very often initially. When he became confident that his staff would handle it, he focused on other operations. Poor drills very often resulted in large casualties. In one botched operation, 2 Junior Commissioned Officers and 17 Other Ranks of a unit who were on a routine ambush operation, were killed and stripped naked, and everything taken away including weapons. Several such unfortunate incidents took place, and the brigade HQ was unable to react with the resources available. Brigadier Manjit was very hard on COs who did not course correct. Two COs were removed from command. This did make the atmosphere tense. But operational lapses cannot be condoned.

Hygiene and sanitation was another

priority. He did not want sick troops. He would inspect latrines and cook houses wherever he went including at company and platoon posts. Dirty ones would incur his immediate and incisive wrath. Flies were his number two enemy after the LTTE. Did all this bring in good results? An emphatic yes. The operational plan and strategy of Brigadier Manjit brought in good results.

Manjit had a strong intelligence network that was providing real time information constantly. The presence of two Tamil speaking officers in the HQ was a big advantage. Manavalan states *"We were able to listen in on captured LTTE handsets and hop frequencies along with them and understand their next step. We too set up false networks to mislead and trap them. We were able to interrogate the captured "black" tigers and extract real time information, which helped our operations"*.

Helmets were to be worn 24x7. The price of not wearing one was heavy. If the LTTE didn't get you, Manjit would. Brigadier Manjit Singh was a marked man due to his strong actions. He was awarded Mahavir Chakra (MVC) for personal bravery of the highest order.

EW in Operation Pawan

EW is a cerebral exercise for the commander. Manjit was willing to listen, discuss and experiment. And he could employ EW imaginatively. Unnikrishnan shared valuable information with the brigade on LTTE activities and movements from time to time, formalised as dissemination of tactical signal intelligence. Needless to say, Manjit and Unni had a fair amount of professional interaction those days. Unnikrishnan recalls *"I developed a high regard for his professionalism. We could share thoughts and innovate. Intimate EW support to battalion level operations and effective use of combat information were two concepts that we evolved and put to practice. Another brilliant idea was to create two-men EW commando teams, from within the units."*

He was a thorough professional and a demanding leader, who wouldn't tolerate any shortcomings. Once I accompanied him in his jeep. Having come out of the Fort, he stopped suddenly and asked for the rover radio handset. He called the BM, but he was not manning the set contrary to his instructions. He was furious after which he got into a discussion with me. I told him that his staff got tense and often terrified when he was in the office, and it was but natural for the guys to loosen up, when he moved out. Manjit wouldn't agree. He wanted his BM to be more alert, when he was away from the HQ. I couldn't disagree. But he conceded that I had a point, as regards the atmosphere in his

HQ! It used to be his practice to stop his vehicle on the way to talk to the JCOs and NCOs on opening fire and tactics at lower levels. He often told me about the importance of on-the-job training and battle drills. He liked the field R&D that my unit indulged in”.

Unnikrishnan shares a few thoughts that are not pleasant. Major Tripathy, Officer Commanding Signal Company, was a pleasant and sincere, good officer. He was in tears when he met Unni on arrival at the Fort, as he was unable to withstand the pressure. Unnikrishnan helped Tripathy by giving him a magneto exchange, a few radio batteries and some advice. The signal company was ill prepared, no doubt, but it was not an exception. Manjit Singh developed a poor impression about many officers under him in no time, and he often got after them to make life miserable. The atmosphere at the brigade HQ remained vitiated. The commander relied upon one or two officers among his staff. He was unsparing for those guys, as well. He was visibly impatient and ruthless. There was lack of trust and fear among the officers. Teamwork was conspicuous by its absence. These are harsh words!

Well, things improved in course of time. It took a few months to evolve from a one man show to teamwork. A few months later Unni saw a transformed 41 Infantry Brigade HQ. He was impressed by the vibrant atmosphere created by a well-knit team! Manjit looked relaxed and jovial. He had mellowed down. Major Jose Manavalan, the new BM deserves the credit for this phenomenal change. Needless to say, such an atmosphere is essential for good team work resulting in sterling achievements.

Manjit was an outstanding soldier. He was brilliant in employment of EW in the unconventional operations in Sri Lanka. This said, we must also mention that he lacked empathy. That notwithstanding, we

have great respect and admiration for Manjit! In summation, he was our hero!

Brigadier Manjit Singh quietly retired from Bareilly to his farm house in Punjab. He passed away in January 2020, mourned by colleagues, seniors and

subordinates alike, who regarded his leadership with awe, in trying circumstances for which he was awarded MVC, during Operation PAWAN.

(The above article has been combined by the Editor from two separate articles by the authors. Several extracts are from Brigadier BK Unnikrishnan's article "My" Style of Command, which appeared first in the anthology Valiant Deeds, Undying Memories, The IPKF in Sri Lanka, OP PAWAN by Lt Col Atul Kochhar and Lt Col BR Nair, published by Notion Press).



Major General Jose Manavalan, AV/SM (Retd) was the Commandant of MEG & Centre from 2003 – 2005.

He was commissioned on 20 December 1970 from Indian Military Academy, Dehradun and took part in the 1971 War and Operation Pawan in 1987-88, where he was the Brigade Major of 41 Infantry Brigade. An electrical engineer from College of Military Engineering, Pune he is a Graduate of Defence Services Staff College. He retired in 2007 and is settled in Chennai. Presently he is Correspondent of a CBSE School in Chennai.



Maj Gen Jose Manavalan



**Brigadier
BK Unnikrishnan**

Brigadier B K Unnikrishnan, a graduate from Regional Engineering College, Calicut, joined the Corps of Signals in 1968. He commanded two Electronic Warfare units and two signal regiments and also commanded the Electronic Warfare Wing, MCTE, Mbow. He was Commander 2 Signal Group, DDG Signal Intelligence and CSO of an Area HQ. He received the COAS commendation during Operation Pawan. After his retirement, he joined the corporate sector in 2002 to become a wind energy professional. He was Vice President Operations, Head projects and Senior Vice President of leading companies in the wind sector such as Vestas RRB, Suzlon and RRB Energy. He has been working as a freelance consultant in wind energy since 2015. He resides in Coimbatore with his wife Shanta.

UMBRELLA OF FIRE

ON MOOLAI BEACH

During Operation PAWAN, the three services worked in sync and supported each other in many operations. This narrative describes one such action off Moolai Beach, involving all the three services.

During the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) deployment in Sri Lanka in 1987, I was commanding Indian Naval Seaward Defence Boat Number T-56, usually referred to as SDB T-56 in naval parlance. It was a very small-sized ship with minimum facilities. We were based out of Kankesanthurai (KKS) port in Jaffna and tasked to patrol the Palk Bay along the Sri Lankan coast to prevent illicit movement of men and material. Weather conditions usually were very severe and we remained at sea for prolonged durations beyond what SDBs would normally be required to do. On these deployments water and rations had to be severely curtailed so as to avoid frequent trips back to base at KKS for replenishment. The ship and crew earned a good name for hard work, resilience and reliability.

On the night of 02/03 November 1987, at around 2000 hours when we were on routine patrol, we were ordered to return to KKS for briefing of a joint, inter-services mission. The mission involved landing 300 odd Army Para Commandos on Moolai Beach along the Jaffna coast about 20 Nautical Miles from KKS harbour. The beach was uncharted and we could not estimate how close to the beach we could approach. The Commandos were to be landed on the beach in Geminis crewed by Naval Commandos (the newly raised MARCOS, or Marine Commandos), and the Geminis and the MARCOS also had to be embarked. The Commandos were to then proceed inland to capture LTTE leaders who were reportedly sheltering in a nearby hospital. Air support in the form of ground attack from



Boat T56 Ready for action at KKS.



The author being bestowed with VrC by the President of India in Delhi.

Jaguars and MiGs would be available from daybreak onwards. After dropping the ground forces, our role was over and they would make their way inland. Being a small vessel, most of the commandos were crowded on the limited deck-space and were vulnerable to hostile action. The vessel had to anchor approximately 400 metres from the shore and the commandos were then to embark in inflatable rubber craft called Geminis. Each Gemini could only carry 8-10 men and the transshipment from ship to shore took most of the night. Once all the commandos had disembarked, I opted to remain close to the beach to provide any support, if required. At day break, the Air Force fighter aircraft arrived as planned and carried out ground attacks. My vessel was visible and soon there were shots being fired in our direction. I ordered my ship guns to fire and we silenced enemy fire from the shore. Thereafter relative calm existed till early afternoon.

At about 3 pm, I received a message from the Ground Forces Commander that their ammunition was almost exhausted and they were being encircled. I decided to send the Geminis to extricate them. However, realising that they would be vulnerable to enemy fire from the shore during the sea journey to my vessel, I decided to create a fire power umbrella for the commandos. To ensure that we wouldn't end up firing on them in the process of extricating them (these days called "Blue on Blue" situations), I ordered tracer rounds to be fired to observe the fall of the shots. Once we ensured that the shots were falling well behind the commandos I ordered "fire for effect." This "Umbrella of Fire" provided the commandos a safe passage back to my vessel and safety. Incidentally, a Fire Power Umbrella (FPU) is a very naval tactical term for a formation at sea where,

coordinated anti-aircraft / anti-missile defence is coordinated to provide a FPU. That SDB T56 provided a FPU in the land-sea interface was something we had to improvise.

My decision to remain near the area and being able to provide the commandos such a FPU proved to be providential for the safe extraction of the

commandos and gave me immense satisfaction of having made a very good decision.

I was awarded a Vir Chakra for this action something for which I most humbly add that it was a recognition as such for my whole crew doing their duty calmly and valiantly.

CITATION LIEUTENANT COMMANDER DEEPAK AGARWAL (01527W), INDIAN NAVY

Indian Naval Seaward Defence Boat Number T-56, which is a very small-sized ship with hardly any facilities, was given the task of preventing illicit movement of men and material following the India – Sri Lanka Agreement. The ship was commanded by Lieutenant Commander Deepak Agarwal. Continuous vigil was maintained throughout the day and night by the ship and this task increased in magnitude as the situation deteriorated following the violent actions by the militants.

Lieutenant Commander Agarwal showed leadership skills and courage of a high order. Despite adverse operating conditions, he motivated his men and executed the ordered task with exemplary tenacity and skill. On the night of 3rd/4th November, 1987, at great personal risk, he landed Para Commandos and other personnel in pitch darkness and in uncharted waters. Despite heavy opposing fire, he remained undeterred from his purpose and ensured the success of operations.

Lieutenant Commander Deepak Agarwal displayed gallantry, grit and exemplary leadership in the face of heavy odds.

Captain Deepak Agarwal, VrC (Retd), an alumnus of St Francis School, Lucknow and Daly College Indore passed out from National Defence Academy, Pune in 1973. He has served on INS Vikrant, INS Brahmaputra, INS Abbay, INS Talwar and INS Godavari, and specialized in Communication and Electronic Warfare. He commanded SDB 56 during Operation PAWAN. After taking premature retirement from the Navy in 1990, he worked for various mercantile companies as Master. He has settled down in Sector 21, Jal Vayu Vihar, NOIDA.



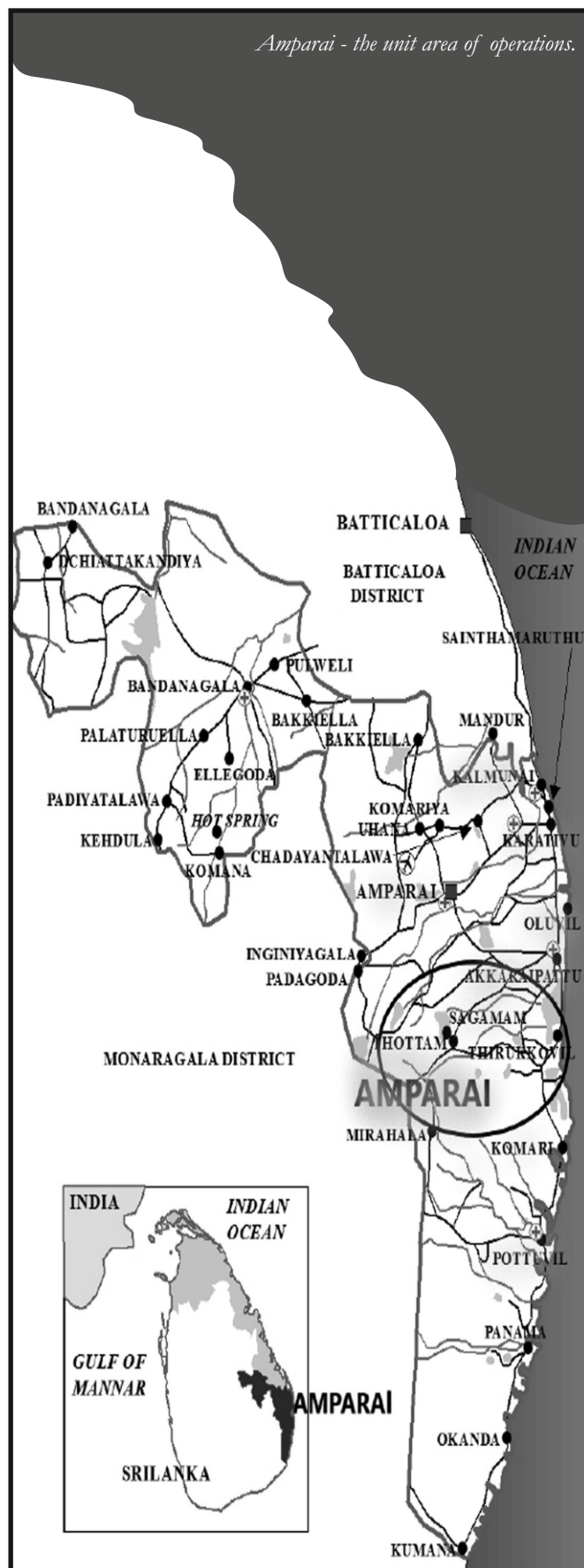
Capt. Deepak Agarwal

OPERATION FOX HUNT

The hunt for Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres was a challenging task, hampered by lack of intelligence and inadequate sources. Units took time to develop and foster contacts and familiarise themselves with the terrain. This narration describes a generic information based search operation. Good luck and speedy resolve by the troops enabled success, leading to a sizeable recovery.

Into Operation PAWAN

In June 89, when I was posted back to my unit from the Regimental Centre, the battalion's tenure in Sri Lanka as part of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), was tapering off and the advance party had moved to Gurdaspur. I landed at Batticaloa and thence moved by road to the unit HQ at Akkaraipattu, a sleepy town with a beautiful coastal road lined with coconut trees. Little did I know of the life and death encounters I would soon be embroiled in, concealed beneath this idyllic façade. Move by road was dangerous and was permitted during day with laid down block timings with a Road Opening Party in place to secure the convoy movement and prevent any disruption in its move.



I took charge as B Company Commander located at Oluvil 10 kms North of Akkaraipattu. I had barely reached my company location, when I received a patrolling programme, entailing a good night out, for over seven to eight hours. As a new company commander, I was out on patrol as ordered, after a relatively salubrious and relaxed tenure of three years at the Regimental Centre.

In our regular patrolling programmes, whenever we visited the nearby Tamil villages the locals would rush off to the forest area. When we entered their houses, the stark poverty hit me greatly. One thing was very clear - that danger lurked all around us, and unexpected surprises could spring up any moment if the guard was let down. The LTTE's skill at the use of IEDs, was nothing short of legendary. They used guile and cunning and were masters in improvisation. In one such incident they pasted an anti-IPKF propaganda poster on the wall of a school, and planted a mine below it, to inflict casualty on unsuspecting soldiers attempting to remove the poster. It was very difficult to determine intent, till it usually became too late. We depended on the friendly militant groups / interpreters who worked with us. In another incident, the troops entered a village by name of Alukhomba to carry out a cordon and search, and realised to their horror that most of the inhabitants were snake charmers. The snakes would pop out, whenever the villagers were asked to open the wicker baskets!!

A few days later, I attended a conference at the battalion HQ, wherein Colonel PC Vashisht, the Commanding Officer (CO) informed us about a planned major cordon and search operation in the area of Sagamam Tank/Vumyadi jungles. Reportedly LTTE used this jungle tract for movement to and from the towns/ jungles. Two days before the operation, during the

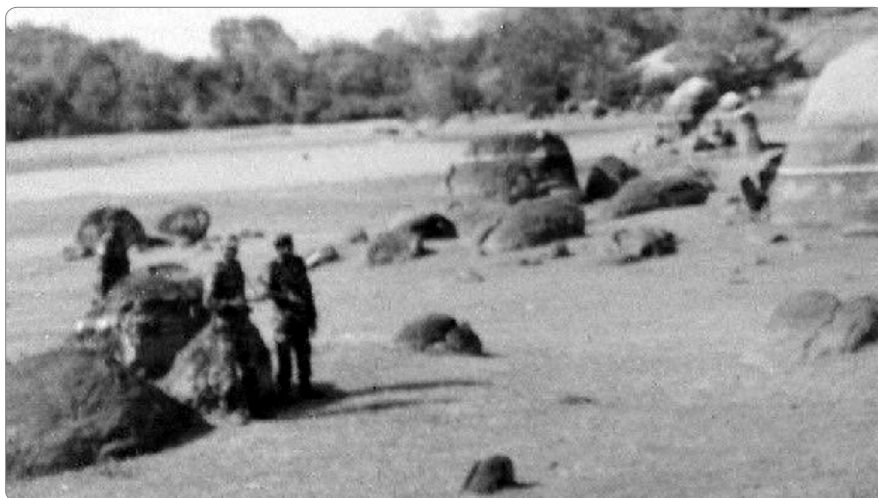
briefing to Brigadier GK Duggal, VrC, the Brigade Commander (a veteran of the 1965 and 71 Wars), the CO mentioned that I would be with him in the main search party carrying out the operation. The Commander immediately intervened and asked the CO not to involve me, and pick up some other company commander for this task. To be honest he possibly lacked confidence in my capabilities, since I was new to the area. The CO tried to convince the Brigade Commander, but the Commander was firm. He insisted that I was to be employed only as a stop, in the operation and not in the search operations. With a heavy heart, I was displaced from the search party to the less "prestigious" cordon party.

D Day

Finally D Day 21 July 89 arrived, and at last light we debussed, at a point approximately one hour's drive, Southwards from our post at Oluvil. The operational plan entailed reaching the

stop location on the second night with an intervening halt at the midpoint / bound on the first night and establishing the cordon to seal off any militant exit / entry. Everyone was to be self-contained for six days including water. This entailed carriage of a minimum of 35-40 kgs of man pack load. As planned, my company commenced its advance towards the first bound at 1900 hours. Enroute we saw a pair of cobras quietly slithering across our path, spotted by the scout in the darkness. My troops acknowledged this as a good omen. In any case it was a sign that my troops were alert!!! A much-needed omen as I would realise later!!

Understandably, I was nervous but excited, as this was my first major operation against the LTTE! I was leading the column in a single line, spaced out and with scouts, number one and two in front of me. In total pin drop silence, we were moving tactically into the jungle, on the track below a



The ambush site, where troops of 1 JAK LI came under fire.



Sagamam Tank Area, where Operation Foxhunt took place.

hilly ridge. Expecting to reach the first bound by about 2130 hours, we were counting our steps using the pebble throw method of chucking stones every 120 steps (100 yards), checking the compass and realigning the map sheets. At about 2200 hours, I felt that something was amiss. On checking my location, I realised that I had overshot the first bound, and I was apparently on the wrong track.

Navigational errors are the worst fate to befall an infantry man in the jungles, and could be frustrating, entailing hold ups, resulting in loss of surprise and letting the target slip away, besides lowering morale of troops. As we had to keep radio silence, I could not consult anyone. I recalculated the second bound location, time and space, and decided that instead of walking back, we would move to the second bound / stop location directly, and inform the CO accordingly, as I would not face his wrath immediately being a six days operation.

The Contact

After a break of 20 minutes, we advanced towards the second bound which

was about 90 minutes' walk. We were supposed to reach the stop location somewhere close to midnight on the second night.

It was not easy to walk in the jungle terrain on the tracks/trails especially in the dark, humid, summer nights carrying heavy packs. All one could see was hilly features on to our left, while we were in a low-lying area throughout the route. Our stop location was near a lake with a rocky feature next to it. I was to carry out a reconnaissance and establish the stops and deploy the company. Engrossed in my mélange of thoughts, I heard some rustling of tree branches, roughly about 20 to 30 metres ahead of me. I asked the leading scout "Kya hai aage?" (What is it?)

"Sabib koi janwar hai" (Sir, it seems to be some

animal) was his reply. He had said only this much, and we were greeted with a heavy volume of automatic fire. All of us in the column hit the ground and returned fire. The firing continued for about 10 minutes. I realised the gravity of the situation and knew that I had to react quickly, or else we would suffer heavy casualties. I ordered everyone to stop firing, except the leading elements, i.e. scouts one & two.

We took suitable safe positions behind huge trees, and scanned the darkness for any movement or sound. I asked the Number 5 and 6 platoons to move back silently and concentrate there. Everyone shed their heavy baggage at one location, only to keep their water bottles with them. The eerie silence of the jungle was broken by the heavy volume of firing. I instructed my radio operator to establish contact with anyone, as I was very sure that everyone would have broken the radio silence on hearing the firing. I would also inform the Commander/CO, that I had established contact with the LTTE. I deployed my leading platoon and spread them out towards the hill. The troops were well trained, after firing they changed their location immediately and silently without being noticed. I told them to stay in pairs of two/three, observe any movement, see the direction of enemy fire and then return fire for effect. In those days, we did not have any night vision devices, everything had to be observed / heard with keen eyes and ears. We assessed that there were about 10 to 15 LTTE cadres, as they were also operating in groups of three to five and changing locations constantly.

After about 30 minutes, my radio operator crept up to me, while whispering, that he was able to establish contact and had received some radio transmission. I got on the set and authenticated myself, and to my surprise I realised that I was talking to the "Big Tiger" ie the

Commander, who was at Kalmunai, the Brigade HQ about 25 km from my location. I informed him that we had established contact with LTTE. He promptly asked for my location which I passed on. The moment I informed him my location, he said, *"Check again, you are supposed to be there tomorrow"*. My reply was *"Sir, you asked my location and I have given you; request inform my CO, as I am not in touch with him or anyone else."* The Commander advised me not to worry, as he was on 24-hour continuous listening watch, and told me to keep him posted of events. During the conversation, there was constant heavy volume of firing being exchanged with the LTTE cadres, which he must have heard in our exchange of communication.

There was a slight lull in the firing. Now it became a question of *"wait and watch."* Our aim was to ensure that the contact should not break, and to keep the LTTE tied down. After a lull of over 15 minutes, we were again fired upon, this time the fire came from the higher ridge line, which meant that the LTTE cadres were trying to move into a position of advantage, making us fire uphill. I immediately tasked the Number 4 Platoon to take a detour and occupy the highest ridge line as quickly as possible. I also moved the leading section further ahead towards the LTTE cadres. One thing was very clear, that we were forcing the LTTE cadres to react, thus retaining initiative. I barely had finished briefing the Junior Commissioned Officer and 4 Platoon personnel, when firing opened up again, and the radio operator rushed to me saying that the Brigade Commander wanted to talk to me.

The Commander inquired, if I had sustained any casualties, I replied in the negative. The next sentence stumped me when he asked me *"Do you need artillery support?"* I thanked him and said that I would manage. As we were in close

proximity of LTTE cadres and also in a depression, I did not trust the accuracy of artillery shells, as it could cause own casualties. The reassuring manner in which Brigadier Duggal spoke to me, gave me a positive feeling, that he had faith in my capabilities as Company Commander to be able to tackle the situation. He closed the conversation by saying that he was on listening watch, should I need anything. I joined the leading elements i.e., the scouts. We noticed some movement / shadows as if a group of people were moving with the tell-tale cracking of twigs. My troops were fully charged up to take the LTTE cadres head on, and would just not let them escape, come what may.

The raw fury in their actions and language was apparent. The moment we noticed the movement/sound immediate fire was brought upon that location, which was hardly 70 yards away. Our firing had effect. We could sense commotion and confusion

amongst the injured LTTE cadres. Our eyes had got accustomed to the darkness around us and we could faintly discern two men writhing in pain. The next thing I saw was my scout numbers 1 & 2 dashing towards the injured LTTE personnel. While taking off they just said *"Sabib ji, yeh log har baar bhag jate hain, pakde nahi jate, inko aaj chhodna nahi, kuch bhi ho jai"* (Sir, these guys run away every time, but this time we shall not let them escape). Despite the exchange of heavy firing, my men rushed to catch the LTTE cadres.

I immediately asked the other troops to stop firing as the leading scouts and troops were giving hot pursuit to the LTTE, in a bid to avoid friendly fire casualties. The action of the scouts, their tremendous courage and grit was exhilarating to see and emulate. The men reached the injured LTTE cadres, and started dragging them towards our location. I joined them quickly with my radio operator



CO 1 JAK LI with Bravo Company troops who succeeded in Operation Foxhunt, with the recovered bounty.

and the elements of the leading section. We ensured that they were not able to consume the cyanide capsule that traditionally was hung around their necks. Both the LTTE cadres were badly injured. I instructed my men to provide first aid and evacuate them to the rear location.

Till date I have not understood how lucky we were, that we were not hit by the heavy volume of fire unleashed on us by the LTTE cadres, when they noticed that we were assaulting their injured colleagues. I was thrilled to see the high standard of training and exemplary courage displayed by my troops, true to the motto of the Regiment *"Balidanam Veer Lakshnam."* (*Sacrifice is the quality of the brave*). The command-and-control structure in the company was so well oiled/organised that all instructions given out by me from time to time were not only followed, but implemented flawlessly. The credit definitely goes to my predecessors. I immediately got on to the air, and informed Brigadier Duggal about the capture of injured LTTE cadres. He was very happy and congratulated me, and told me to keep up the momentum of the ongoing operations.

The news of the capture of the injured LTTE cadres rejuvenated the entire company, and infused a new aggressive spirit in the men. Number 4 Platoon had reached the hilltop and the troops were now effectively engaging the LTTE cadres. It was nearly 0400 hours and this prolonged engagement was definitely building a lot of pressure on the LTTE, as we had inflicted casualties on them. The leading elements of my company were advancing boldly at a fast pace. We were able to push back the LTTE cadres considerably. As we moved forward, I asked one section to comb the complete area vacated by LTTE cadres, which by itself wasn't an easy task as it had to be

done in darkness. The search party recovered about 30 hand grenades, huge quantities of ammunition, 30 odd IEDs with detonators, large quantities of medicines, electric wiring of all kinds and other war like equipment /stores/ explosives. We found traces of blood in some of the areas vacated by the LTTE cadres. One of the injured LTTE cadres captured by us succumbed to his injuries, which was unfortunate.

I informed the Brigade Commander about the recoveries. The Commander was happy and told me that the operation was a success, and I must carry on relentlessly without any let-up. Another thing that was bugging me was, as to why the LTTE cadres did not hurl grenades, when we were capturing their injured cadres. The only plausible reason I could visualize was that they were shell shocked at the swift and daring action taken by the troops and that they failed to take appropriate counter action.

As dawn was approaching, the Brigade Commander informed me that at first light an attack helicopter would be pressed into the operation and I was to guide the pilot on to the targets. Dot at first light, the helicopter appeared and I guided the pilot who carried out strafing of the positions held by the LTTE. We could hear movement and sounds of the fleeing cadres at a far distance, but the jungle being so thick with dense undergrowth, we could not pursue them. Twenty minutes after the attack, the helicopter turned back having despatched its ordnance into the bowels of the jungle.

The MI-25 was feared by the LTTE and nick named as 'Crocodile'. We moved on and reached a huge lake, where there was some open space. My leading elements informed me that there was a boat in the lake carrying people in it. I climbed to a vantage point and in the far distance observed the boat. My men were very eager to fire and sink the boat, I hesitated, as I did not want to kill so many unidentified people, but finally decided to give the benefit of doubt to them. I was tasked by Brigadier Duggal to mark a helipad, and prepare it for landing. The helicopter was hovering over us and due to the dense jungle, the pilot was not able to locate the helipad or observe the smoke signals. I stood on the helipad and told the pilot over radio, that he was vertically above me and guided him to land. Hats off to the pilot who skilfully landed the helicopter.

I received the Commander and handed over the recovered stores, along with the injured LTTE cadre. Brigadier Duggal congratulated me. I said, *"Sir, please inform my CO."* I can never forget the smile on his face as he informed me: *"You have been in a physical depression all along, and hence there was a signal reception problem, just look across the lake at that rocky feature, climb it and all your signal issues will be solved."*

His parting sentence was *"You will be in touch with your CO, and will get further instructions from him."* I gathered my company in a tactical group, thanked and congratulated them on their excellent performance and conveyed that the commander had conveyed his magic one word *"Shabash"* (well done) to them. I also took stock of any injuries to anyone. I redeployed the company and moved to the rocky feature. Sure enough, signals were very strong and I was in contact with everyone. I spoke to the CO and gave a heads up of all that had transpired, with emphasis on the capture of LTTE cadres and recoveries made. He was happy and complimented me. He asked me to position myself on the high rocky feature and

wait for further orders. I would like to say a few words about Brigadier GK Duggal, VrC (Later Lieutenant General). I met him only twice, once during the operational briefing and the second time when he landed in the helicopter to pick up the captured injured LTTE cadre and the recoveries. My only memory is of radio conversations during the entire operations / encounter. I spoke to no one, no staff officer, radio operator, he was always available on listening watch. He was an illustrious commander, calm, composed and infused confidence in me to carry out the operation successfully. He exuded undeniable strength during the entire encounter. His forethought of planning for artillery support, providing attack helicopters, landing personally at the encounter site, spoke volumes about him.

A Job Well Done

The planned six days operation, was called off by the Commander as the element of surprise was lost, and the encounter was over. All companies concentrated at a pre-determined rendezvous. As luck would have it, I noticed a group of bullock carts moving on the same route. I asked my men to place their loads/big packs in the carts and move. I was the last company commander to reach the rendezvous.

As I trooped in leading a convoy of bullock carts, my friends / Company Commanders remarked “*yeh aya Rao Raja and his Fauj*” (here comes Rao and his company). After a while, the CO turned towards me and said, “*You were an impressive sight leading a bullock carts entourage.*” I smilingly looked towards my CO and said, “*Sir, the carts are meant for load carrying, so I used them and now see all this second line transport is standing here to carry us to our company locations, we can't be walking and not using them*”. There was a pin drop silence. I

quickly turned to my friend Major CA D' Cruz asking him “*What happened?*”? He quietly said that “*You have dropped a brick*”. The CO had always felt that companies were supposed to march back to their respective locations. Thankfully, during lunch the order got reversed and we all went back in the second line transport!!

A word about the scouts from the leading section. My scout Number 1 was Rifleman Abdul Rashid, who had completed 13 years of service, missed out on all his promotions and was waiting to complete 15 years' service to earn his pension and retire.

Here was the man who had exemplary courage, and had put his life at stake. The other scout was Rifleman Kamal Singh. They did this because it was for “*Meri Paltan, Meri Regiment*” (My unit, my Regiment). **We earned one Sena Medal and two Mentioned-in-despatches awards in this operation.**

(This is an abridged and edited version of “Searching Squares – In Circles”, an article by the same author which appeared first, in the anthology Valiant Deeds, Undying Memories, The IPKF in Sri Lanka, OP PAWAN. By authors: Lt Col Atul Kochhar and Lt Col BR Nair, published by Notion Press on 31 December 21).



Colonel V K Rao (Retd) was commissioned in May 1974, into erstwhile 1 Jammu & Kashmir Militia (renamed in 1976 as 1 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry). An alumnus of Sainik School, Kunjpura, he was decorated with the award of “Mentioned in Despatches” for his outstanding action at sub unit level in Operation Foxhunt in Sri Lanka. He has also seen active service in Kashmir and in the North East. While commanding 129 Infantry TA battalion (Ecological) at Samba from 1997 to 2002, his unit was awarded the country's highest environmental award, the Priyadarshini Vriksh Mitra award, for special achievement in the field of environmental protection. Colonel V K Rao is now settled in Bengaluru.



Colonel V K Rao (Retd)

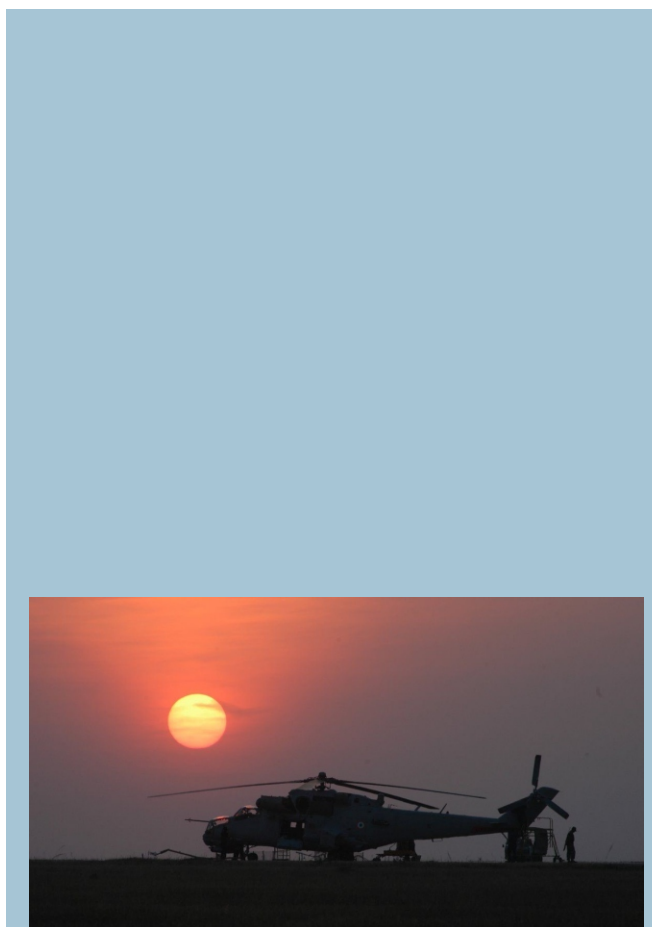
RUGGED AND RELIABLE MI-8s

Workhorse of the IPKF

The Russian Mi-8s proved extremely versatile in the battle situations encountered in Operation PAWAN, rugged and reliable. The pilots too rose to the occasion and went out of their way to support the Indian Army troops, taking grave risks. One such Mi-8 pilot recalls.

Head to Jaffna

Stationed in North-East India in the late 80s, news normally reached us a couple of days late. With communications the way they were in the remote areas close to Mizoram and Nagaland, even this was a trickle. On the morning of 16 October 1987, we, the aircrew of the 'Vanguards' helicopter unit, located at Kumbhirgram (Assam) were, therefore, mystified to learn that two aircraft were to be despatched post haste to Sri Lanka. Based at this remote location for logistic support of Army units operating on the Bangladesh and Myanmar borders, the Unit consisted mostly of Flight Lieutenants and Flying Officers, with a couple of Squadron Leaders for supervision. As a Flying Officer with three years of service of which two were with the Vanguards, Fully Operational, and a C/Green category on Mi-8, I was already one of the more experienced pilots.



Mi-25 helicopter being serviced at sundown.



Mi-8 ready to take-off from a beach in Sri Lanka.

We were aware that there was a problem in Sri Lanka, and that India was playing an active part in trying to solve the problem. But we could not fathom why helicopters were being flown from Kumbhirgram all the way to Jaffna in Sri Lanka, a distance of more than 3000 kms, or what our task would be. Two helicopters were quickly made ready and we took off the next morning on the long ferry to the troubled island country. Just how troubled it was, we had very little idea at that time.

Ferry to the Island

We reached Sri Lanka four days later on 21 October 1987, after halting for a day at Sular. Not having flown over the sea before, the last part of the ferry was an enjoyable experience. It was a beautiful and picturesque country with long beaches and shallow waters on most of the coastal areas. As we approached the airfield of Palaly at Jaffna, we realised that, amid the seemingly serene environment, there was intense activity at the airfield. Barring the main runway, the rest of the taxi ways and the dispersal areas were filled with Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft. A couple of IL-76, a few AN-32s and quite a few Mi-8 helicopters were already parked in the limited area available.

Find A Place

As we made an approach for the main runway, amid the almost continuous R/T transmissions that were on, we were told by the IAF controller to clear off the approach path and make an approach directly for the dispersal. When we asked him where we were to touch down, he paused for a moment, at a loss for words. *"Find a Place and Land"*, he said with a hint of exasperation in his voice. *"Find a place."* – that was a new one. I circled the dispersal area once trying to find a suitable area. I just couldn't find any. The ground

crew on the dispersal sensed that a new pilot had arrived, and started marshalling me into a small gap between four other helicopters. It took some time to sink in that they actually wanted me to land the aircraft in that small area. There was too much R/T going on, to try and ask the controller again. We decided to go ahead and land. With one pilot sticking his head out the window, the gunner frantically guiding us and the flight engineer on his toes with his fingers crossed, we managed to descend into the area from a high hover and touch down. This however, would soon become a routine way of landing there and we thought nothing of it after a few days of operating at Jaffna.

Camp at Palaly

We were welcomed warmly by the helicopter aircrew that were already there and had been operating for some time. We realised that the situation was far from peaceful and was turning more violent every day. Very soon we realised

that *"find a place to land.."* was just the beginning of a series. One had to *"find a place to stay, find a bed to sleep on, a plate to eat in, a bathroom that was not occupied"*, and so on. Most of us were very young and we were thoroughly enjoying the whole experience. We met up with aircrew from all over the country and exchanged notes late into the night, sitting on make shift canvas chairs and camp cots. We found the quality of the food was surprisingly good; maybe we were tired and hungry. There was an air of anticipation and excitement; as if something big was about to happen. In many ways it had already happened and was happening almost every day. We also learnt of the operation that was undertaken at the Jaffna University grounds, where four helicopters were badly damaged while inserting troops in the face of intense ground fire. We learnt of stray incidents of damage to other helicopters due to ground fire while inducting troops and undertaking



Taken just before take off on 23 June 1988, at the centre of the pic is Captain Harpal Singh of 1 Para, the team leader, who died due to the LTTE firing on the helicopter.



A Mi-8 landed near coconut palms

logistic support sorties. And we looked forward that night to start our first experience of operations in Sri Lanka.

Hectic Operations Commence

We commenced operations very early the next morning, after a short briefing. Procedures followed were quite simple – on clearance from the Air Traffic Control Officer, pick up vertically wherever the aircraft was parked, take off in any convenient direction, climb at the max possible power setting to be above the range of weapons of hostiles, head directly to the area where troops were to be dropped, find a place to land, descend at the fastest safe rate, touchdown and hold with the aircraft light on wheels, get everything out as soon as possible, and reverse the whole routine to get back for another trip. We flew from sunrise to sunset, halting only for refuelling. We landed in water logged fields, on roads and mud tracks, on bunds between fields; we landed anywhere we could fit the wheels of the Mi-8 helicopter; and in some places where we couldn't fit all the wheels, off loading from a low hover or with one

wheel on the ground. We got used to the sound of gunfire and ignored it most of the time. We even learnt to refer to places like 'Puthukkudiyuruppu' and 'Periyapuliyankulam' without getting tongue-tied in the process. The aim was clear – get the load off as soon as possible and go back for more. There was a lot of it coming into the island from India and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) numbers were quickly growing.

Indian Army troops were being transported in large numbers from their peace time locations in various parts of the country to Jaffna, with little or no idea of what they were there for. Within hours, they found themselves face to

face with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The airfield was swarming with troops, vehicles and all sorts of ammunition and equipment. Aircraft were continuously arriving and departing in all directions. Somehow, in what seemed like complete chaos, the right equipment was loaded in the correct aircraft and delivered or inducted to the right place in a continuous process. How it was done, I never understood. Perhaps a flight gunner will narrate some day!

The operations soon spread to other parts and we found ourselves landing in other airfields such as Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Mullaitivu. One never knew where one would spend the night, and we had our night kit in the aircraft at all times. In November 1987, I was told to return to my unit and began the ferry back, thinking I had seen the last of the island. It was not to be however, and I was back before long.

The Knights in Action

I was posted to a Helicopter Unit in Sular (The Knights) in February 88 and was back on the island within a few days of reporting to the unit. I found the IAF detachments much better organised, perhaps with the realisation that this was going to continue for some time. The accommodation and messing was better organised and the bases functioned with most facilities, including volleyball courts, in place. The IPKF had grown to over 80,000 personnel. Regular sorties were being flown for troop induction and logistic support, as well as a few armament sorties when required. A Joint Operations Information Room (JOIR) had been set up in Madras (now Chennai), which controlled all IAF operations on the island. I spent most of my stay at Vavuniya in the central part of Northern Sri Lanka, which had a small airfield where An-32s could land. We also carried out a large number of

missions with the Para Commando battalions in Sri Lanka, and it was always a pleasure to be associated with any operation in which they took part. We regularly inducted them into areas where the Tigers were active and picked them up a few days later on completion of the operation. Heliborne operations with Para Commando teams were a memorable experience, as we would usually land in areas which were suspected of being hostile. The troops would disappear into the jungle within seconds of the wheels touching down, and the aircraft could take off almost immediately.

Just Another Mission

In the third week of June 1988, the JOIR received a request from the Army for a sortie involving winching down of a team of Para Commandos into an area near Alampil, close to the Brigade Headquarters (HQ) at Mullaitivu. At Vavuniya, we learnt that this had been deliberated upon and rejected as it was too risky, involving hovering for an extensive period in an area which was known to be hostile and very active with LTTE elements. What transpired later at the JOIR to cause a change of mind, we did not know, but a message was received on the 22nd of June at 2200 hours that the sortie was to be undertaken, but with a smaller team of Para Commandos, who were to be dropped in a clearing in the thick jungles close to Alampil. The Knights detachment at Vavuniya consisted of four helicopters at that time. The pilots on detachment consisted of eight Flying Officers, of whom I was the senior most, with four years of service. *[When I was narrating this to a senior officer, much later, he asked me which Air Force I was flying for!]* I planned myself and Flying Officer MR Anand for the sortie. We were to be briefed at the Brigade HQ at Mullaitivu on the morning of 23rd June

and undertake the sortie from there. We would be escorted by a Mi-35 attack helicopter from 125(H) Squadron which was based at Trincomalee.

The next morning we took off as planned in Mi-8 Z 2454 and landed at Mullaitivu airfield. All the aircrew and the Para Commando team were briefed and we started up for the mission. Group photographs were taken before we got into the aircraft. We took off for the Alampil jungles at around 1000 hours escorted by the Mi-35 helicopter. About 15 minutes later, we reached the small clearing amidst tall trees in the thick jungle. The Mi-35 carried out two low passes to check for any signs of movement of LTTE personnel or any signs of habitation. None were detected. We established a hover over the clearing and commenced winching. A few minutes after we commenced this operation, I noticed puffs of smoke emerge from the leaves, heard the sound of small arms fire and a banging sound on the aircraft. I realised that we were

being fired at and instructed the gunner to discontinue winching and reel in the cable. This took a few minutes, during which I realised that we were under heavy fire. I could also sense that the cockpit was being targeted, as the acrid smell of gun powder filled the cockpit. All the crew members remained calm and continued to carry out the duties assigned to them. The Flight Engineer checked and called out that all parameters were normal, the Co-Pilot that the clearance from the trees on was sufficient and the Flight Gunner continued his commentary on the progress of winching. I gave an R/T call to the Mi-35 orbiting overhead that we were being fired at, and we commenced take off.

After take-off, I took stock of the situation and asked for a report on the damage. The Gunner reported that the Leader of the Para Commando team was hit in the chest and seemed to be seriously injured; one more member of the Para Commando team was injured



A Mi-25 gunship in Operation PAWAN

in his leg. He also reported a number of bullet holes in the cabin compartment, but no signs of any fuel leaks from the external tanks. The Co-Pilot and Flight Engineer received minor injuries in the leg and hand respectively. All other aircraft systems appeared to be functioning normally. We headed straight for the airstrip at Mullaitivu, and on switching off, transferred the casualties to the Mi-35, which had landed behind us. Tragically, it was too late for the Team Leader, and we came to know that he had breathed his last before the Mi-35 could land at the field hospital at Vavuniya.

A detailed assessment of the damaged helicopter revealed that about 25 rounds had entered the aircraft, three of them into the cockpit. It was providence that the crew did not sustain more serious injuries, which could have had disastrous consequences. Besides the airframe damage, a number of electrical cables were damaged, and some of the control rods were bent on taking the force of rounds. We owed a lot to Russian metallurgy, because of which we were able to fly the aircraft back and land safely. I was proud of the professionalism and exemplary behaviour of the crew, who displayed good team work and continued with the mission without any signs of panic. Later, a team from Base Repair Depot repaired the helicopter on site.

A Memorable Experience

It was back to business the next day, and I continued operating as part of the IPKF almost till the end of 1989 – a period of almost 2 years. We changed tactics at times based on intelligence reports of the LTTE acquiring Surface to Air Missiles. For some time, we were asked to ‘hit the deck’ and fly low level, which we enjoyed immensely, though navigation was a problem over the thick jungles (GPS

was unheard of at that time!). For some time we had to fly above an altitude of one km, which was quite a problem as the Mi-8 took its own time to get to that altitude. We flew all types of missions, but we always put in a special effort to ensure that casualty evacuation sorties were undertaken without any delay, even at night with makeshift lighting arrangements at helipads. The memory of some of these sorties will always remain imprinted in my mind; sorties undertaken to pick up 10 to 15 casualties at a time, of limbs shattered to shreds in mine blasts, of the dazed look of shock on the faces of the soldiers, of the helicopter dripping with and leaving a trail of blood on the runway as we came in to land. We took risks at times, and some of them in retrospect seemed to be foolishly brazen. But we considered them worth taking at that time, to achieve what we had to in those situations. Remarkably, throughout the operation, the IAF did not suffer any casualties, despite the large number of aircraft involved, the quantum of flying, much of it in face of direct ground fire, and the long duration of the operation. I have not come across any records of the numbers involved, but I have heard of an estimate of 70,000 sorties flown over 32 months by helicopters and transport aircraft. I think it speaks volumes about the professionalism of all personnel involved in the whole operation. In September 1989, I volunteered and was selected to be a part of the IAF team for the Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica, and, though I did not know it at that time, flew my last sortie on the island. When I returned to Sullur after the expedition in April 1990, Operation Pawan had ended, but to this day I cherish the memory of the experience, and consider myself fortunate to have been able to take part in such an operation, at such an early stage in my flying career.



Air Vice Marshal Samuel Nicodemus, Vrc, VSM (Retd), an alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune was commissioned in the IAF as a helicopter pilot in 1984.

With over 4700 hours of flying experience in various aircraft, he has been involved in several operations - as part of IPKF in Sri Lanka, two Indian Scientific Expeditions to Antarctica, and the United Nations Peace Keeping Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He has served as a Flying Instructor, Rotary Wing Experimental Test Pilot, Test Flying Instructor and the Head of Faculty at the College of Defence Management. Besides command of two medium lift helicopter units and a forward Air Base in the Jammu and Kashmir sector, he has been involved in defence procurement and long term planning for the IAF. His academic qualifications include two Masters degrees in Defence Studies and Management Studies, and an M.Phil in Business Management from the Osmania University.



**Air Vice Marshal
Samuel Nicodemus**



A SURGEON'S MARATHON

IN VAVUNIYA

Armed Forces Doctors have been valuable assets in combat zones, and the emergency surgeries performed in field hospitals have saved innumerable lives. A surgeon describes the pressures of casualties faced on some occasions in Operation PAWAN.

“There is a source of madness deep within every human being which, if developed, leads to a highly evolved sixth sense of a Karma Yogi and an unquenchable thirst to accept risk and go beyond the conventional wisdom in searching new horizons, ideas, innovations and activities.”

— ‘Success From Being Mad’ by Colonel RS Sidhu (Retd)

My memories of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) tenure are the most poignant of my life, where I witnessed the grit and courage of our soldiers worth more than their weight in gold, and how their selfless sacrifice transformed me from a mere surgeon to a Karmayogi.



An amputation being performed (Representational Image)

The Setting

Consequent to signing of the Indo Sri Lanka Agreement on 29 July 1987, the IPKF was inducted into Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. However, by end September 1987 it was evident that Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was playing truant and had no intentions to surrender its weapons and ammunition, compelling the IPKF to launch military operations against the recalcitrant Tamil militant group. 54 Infantry Division succeeded in breaking the LTTE stranglehold over Jaffna peninsula by end October 1987, forcing the militant group to withdraw from the peninsula into the thickly forested Vanni jungles.

The Vanni jungles were sparsely populated and thickly forested, with an ethnic composition of 82% Tamils, 10% Sinhalese, and 7% Moors. The top hierarchy of LTTE entrenched itself in the Vanni jungles to wage guerrilla warfare against the IPKF. By February 1988, the Centre of Gravity of military operations

of IPKF also shifted to the Vavuniya sector. The IPKF military strategy was aimed at confining the LTTE hierarchy to the Vanni jungle, thus cutting off their access from its extensive Tamil population support base in Jaffna peninsula.

The IPKF was now reorganised with 54 Infantry Division responsible for Jaffna Peninsula. 36 Infantry Division was inducted to secure Trincomalee sector. 57 Mountain Division was deployed in Batticaloa sector, and 4 Infantry Division was inducted into Vavuniya to dominate the Vanni jungles spread over Killinochi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, and Vavuniya.

Conduct of military operations in the Vanni region was hampered by three critical factors. The poor surface communication infrastructure was vulnerable to surprise militant attacks. Thick jungles made movement off roads and tracks difficult.

Scarcity of potable water was a deciding factor for deployment of troops. There was greater reliance on air evacuation and forward treatment of casualties. The Forward Surgical Centre (FSC) of 4 Infantry Division was deployed at Vavuniya considering the availability of a military airfield in the near vicinity.

Generally the casualties were brought by unit battlefield nursing assistants (BFNA) to the Unit Medical Inspection Room, where the Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) carried out resuscitation treatment. However, this was not always feasible owing to the difficult terrain and exigencies of the military situation, and the casualties were often directly air evacuated from the battlefield to the FSC at Vavuniya. Here the casualties were operated upon to stabilise them and then moved by air to the IPKF mounting base at Madras (now Chennai).

An FSC is equipped to treat a maximum of 10 casualties in a day, four serious casualties needing life and limb saving surgery and six with minor injuries. The Operation Theatre (OT) of the FSC at Vavuniya was located in a makeshift shelter built upon an abandoned civilian house. Over a period of time, the infrastructure was augmented by military combat engineers to house an adhoc blood bank, refrigerated medical supplies storage and even air conditioning.

The key medical specialists available at the FSC at Vavuniya were one surgical specialist and an anaesthetist. While the anaesthetist was generally rotated on three monthly temporary duty, it was the surgeon posted to the FSC Vavuniya who often made the difference between life and death of the seriously wounded battle casualties. Being the surgeon at FSC Vavuniya, I bore this onerous responsibility, a heavy burden to bear. After completing my Post Graduate (General Surgery) in December 1987, while posted to Command Hospital Lucknow, I moved on three months temporary duty to the FSC at Vavuniya in June 88. On completion of

temporary duty, I returned to Lucknow, but within a week received my posting orders to 4 Infantry Division Field Ambulance manning the FSC at Vavuniya, where I remained till deinduction of the troops from Sri Lanka in January 1990.

The Transition Narrative

During my nearly 20 months operational deployment in Sri Lanka with IPKF, I performed about 2600 time critical surgeries, of which 1890 were performed on IPKF personnel and the rest on Sri Lanka civilian patients, including 15 odd caesarean cases.

But there are two days which hold special significance for me, when faced with the guts and selfless courage displayed by my patients I had to force myself to transition from being a mere surgeon to a Karmayogi, because only a superhuman effort could save these brave warriors in the very limited time frame available for surgery. By God's grace all the surgeries were successful.

23 - 25 February 1988

On 23 February 88, 7 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry (JAK LI) was tasked to establish a cordon before assaulting a large LTTE encampment in the Vanni jungle. The cordon party was trapped in an ambush by the LTTE militants, leading to several casualties to troops of 7 JAK LI, including their Commanding Officer (CO) who was killed in this operation. A Team ex 9 PARA COMMANDO battalion was dropped by helicopter for rescue operations, but they too got entangled in an ambush.

It was 48 hours by the time the last casualties were evacuated to the FSC at Vavuniya. I was constantly on the phone during this time guiding Captain Rajiv Bindal, the RMO of 9 PARA COMMANDO on managing the critical

casualties. **Overall 52 casualties of 9 PARA COMMANDO and 7 JAK LI were received at the FSC in two batches.** In addition, five critical LTTE militant casualties were also evacuated from the battlefield to the FSC.

One of the LTTE casualties had critical gunshot wounds to his liver and right chest, and needed urgent blood infusion. However there were no volunteers willing to come forward for donating blood to the 'enemy'. I did not let this faze me, and immediately donated my own blood before starting the surgery operation. To me, the LTTE cadre was just another patient who had to be saved.

I was the only surgeon at the FSC. The other doctor at the FSC was Colonel Panwar, an anaesthetist, on temporary duty with the FSC. Most of the casualties had limb injuries from landmine blasts and gunshot wounds in the chest and abdomen. The casualties were accorded

priority for surgical operation guided by the criticality factor. Ably supported by Colonel Panwar, we together assessed and reassessed patient priorities after each surgery. The Nursing Assistants (NA) were engaged in sanitising surgical instruments, blood group testing and extensive blood infusion to the critically wounded casualties, to sustain them while waiting for their turn for the surgery. Multiple surgical trolleys were simultaneously prepared for non-stop surgeries.

Then followed 72 hours of nerve wracking and blood soaked non-stop surgery. Hurried light snacks and tea, consumed in between surgeries, provided sustenance to the medical team essential to keep the body and mind alert. Even the Safaiwala of the FSC was pressganged in the role of a NA. Then I came face to face with my biggest quandary during this period.



An emergency surgery being performed (Representational Image)



Operation Theatre in a Field Hospital (Representational Image)

Major (later Major General) BK Jain, 9 PARA COMMANDO, my dear friend, had his leg blown when he stepped onto a landmine.

It was 48 hours by the time he could be evacuated to the FSC. Gangrene infection was setting in and an urgent decision had to be taken for amputating the leg to save his life. It was the toughest decision of my life.

Even now, more than thirty years later, when I look back in time and ask myself as to what kept me going to accomplish this superhuman effort, I have no conscious memory of what enabled it. It just came from within as it had to be done. Post successful conduct of the 72 hours marathon surgery session, exhausted and sleep deprived, I chilled out on beer, before falling into a deep slumber, only to be awakened four hours later for undertaking surgery of four fresh casualties.

One 9 PARA COMMANDO casualty, with severe head injury, was

ensuing action, the unit suffered two Killed In Action (KIA) and twelve, including the CO, injured. An armed Air Observation Post helicopter piloted by Major Raman Sehgal and Major HS Kaura, was on a routine training sortie in the vicinity of this action. The pilots on noticing tell-tale signs of a firefight involving IPKF troops, changed course to fly low over the scene of action and engaged the LTTE militants deployed in the ambush. In retaliatory fire from the militants, both the pilots suffered serious gunshot wounds.

On being apprised of the impending arrival of the casualties, I rushed to the Vavuniya airfield. As the helicopter landed on the tarmac, I noticed Major Raman Sehgal was manoeuvring the joystick with his right hand while with his left hand he was holding onto the visibly wounded and semi-conscious co-pilot Major HS Kaura, to prevent him from slumping forward. On closer scrutiny I was concerned to see that Raman's right hand thumb was partially blown off. It was a miracle that he successfully landed the helicopter on the tarmac with a critically injured hand. Then my attention got drawn to the multiple injuries of Major Kaura. The right side of his face was shattered, and covered with blood and he was having trouble in breathing. To save his life I used a shaving blade to cut his windpipe and inserted the tracheostomy tube, on the airfield tarmac itself.

After evacuating the two casualties to the FSC, I operated upon them. Kaura had severe gunshot wounds on his face. A bullet had penetrated through the right cheek and exited below the left ear. The impact of the bullet had shattered a piece of the right mandible and the

urgently air evacuated to Chennai, but the patient breathed his last after a week. Post stabilisation, 47 IPKF soldier casualties were subsequently evacuated to Chennai, and all survived. The selfless bravery of the troops and God's guiding hands forced me to transition to a Karmayogi, as nothing else could have sustained me through those 72 hours when the life of all these brave men were in my hands to save. My nerves and my hands had to be rock steady all throughout, a near impossible effort without divine intervention.

07 June 1989

On 07 June 1989, 12 JAT was deinducting to Vavuniya, when part of the convoy was ambushed by the LTTE. Colonel Resham Singh, the CO led a daring counter ambush operation. In the

right zygoma. Another bullet was almost touching his cervical 2 spine, and his tongue was torn into multiple strips like the tongue of a snake. It was one of the most professionally challenging operation of my career. Within six months the patient had healed to the extent that when we met by chance in Pune, we sat together and ate a complete butter chicken.

I then focused on the right thumb injury of Raman, and with great patience was able to successfully reattach it. The surgery was successful and ensured that he continued to pilot helicopters.

By this time the twelve casualties from 12 JAT had also reached the FSC. While busy in triage, I heard one of the critically injured say “doctor, please look after my boys”. The casualty had a gunshot wound on his right leg and around 1 1/2 inch of bone was hanging out. Though seriously wounded, he refused to be shifted to OT till other casualties from his unit are operated. That person was Colonel Resham Singh, CO 12 JAT. Such selfless display of care and concern for subordinates, spurred our surgical team to give our best. The team gave sustenance medical aid, including blood infusion to Colonel Resham to ensure his survival, and worked hard to save everyone. By the time Colonel Resham was operated upon, his condition had deteriorated critically, but fortunately his fighting spirit saved him.

Another noteworthy casualty was Naik Dasrath Singh. He had a gunshot wound on his left chest, his lungs, diaphragm, and spleen had ruptured, and his omentum was hanging out through a large exit wound. I removed his damaged spleen, stopped internal bleeding and then repaired the lungs. Naik Dasrath Singh survived, but as a permanent medical category. What is more exceptional is that six months later he was back in action in

Vavuniya, having volunteered to return despite his permanent disability.

Accolades

The dedicated effort of the entire surgical team through the 20 months tenure at FSC Vavuniya achieved an enviable combat surgical mortality rate of under 0.06% as against the world average of 20%.

Two years later...

After deinduction from Sri Lanka in January 1990, I was posted to Military Hospital (MH) Namkum, Jharkhand, and was required to proceed every Wednesday to nearby MH Ramgarh, to provide specialist surgical cover to troops of Sikh Regimental Centre (SRC) and Punjab Regimental Centre (PRC) located at Ramgarh. One fine Wednesday at MH Ramgarh, in 1992, a South Indian clerk from 16 SIKH, with a permanent low medical category due to an abdominal gunshot injury was brought before me for medical review.

While inspecting the injury, I instantly recognised my own handiwork and asked the patient if he could recollect the name of the surgeon who had performed the surgery.

The patient responded that it was done by a Major Tyagi. The patient, then peered at my name tag and recognised me. After around half an hour, the Subedar Major of the SRC arrived to convey a request from his Commandant to come and meet him. The Subedar Major escorted me to the central parade ground, where a large gathering had been organised.

The Commandants of SRC and PRC were present to receive me, along with 23 of my erstwhile patients on whom I had performed emergency surgeries in Vavuniya, more than two years earlier. This spontaneous recognition of my professional and dedicated effort deeply moved and overwhelmed me, even more than the award of Yuddh Seva Medal (YSM) for my services in ‘Operation PAWAN’.



Colonel (Dr) Ashok Tyagi, YSM (Retd), commissioned into the Army in 1977, is a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS) and Post Graduate (General Surgery) from Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Pune and a qualified combat Sky Diver. He was deployed with 4 Infantry Division Field Ambulance in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka as part of IPKF. His reputation as a successful surgeon resulted in his figuring prominently on the kidnap list of LTTE, the dominant Tamil militant group in Sri Lanka, who were willing to ‘weigh him in gold’ to get him to treat their wounded cadres!



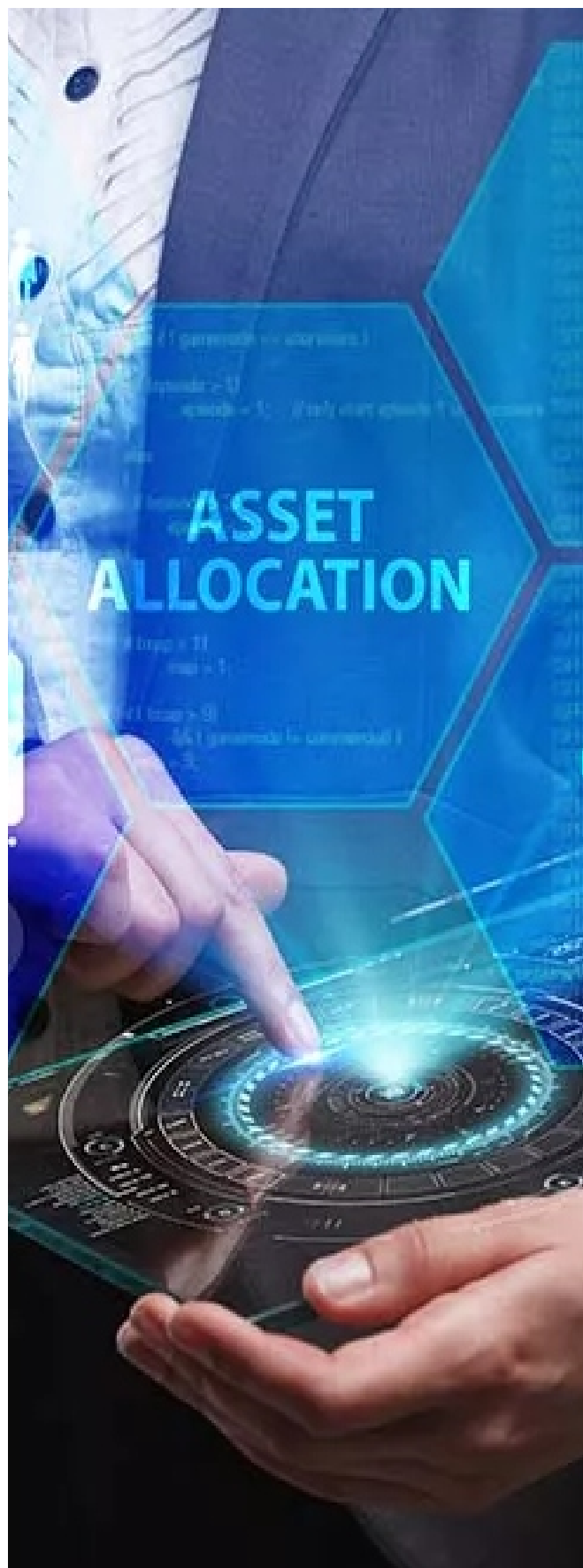
Colonel (Dr) Ashok Tyagi

ASSET ALLOCATION

Continuing with our series on financial advice, we discuss some of the intrinsic factors in investing monies in different asset classes, and the guiding principles for such decisions. Our financial wizard (Fin - Sherpa) expounds.

If someone asked me what the key aspect in the long term success of one's portfolio management is, I would easily point to the Asset Allocation Strategy as the most powerful concept that can help create sustainable long term wealth. It is one of those things that our grandmothers have been teaching us since time immemorial and yet is so powerful that even at the highest levels the fund managers to wealthy families swear by it.

Simply put Asset Allocation is the allocation of one's finances/wealth among different Asset classes. The different asset classes that one may consider could be Real Estate, Gold, Shares, Bonds & Cash. Each of these categories responds differently to varying trends in the market, so having a blend of them in your portfolio will help you minimize losses in a market downturn.



Real Estate could include: Residential apartment or house, Commercial real estate or just land in physical or through investments like REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts);

Gold would include: Physical Gold (in whatever form), as Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs), Sovereign Gold Bonds (issued by the Government of India);

Shares/Stocks would include: Shares held in demat accounts bought as an Initial Public Offer (IPO) or as a secondary market transaction or held in the form of Equity Mutual Funds;

Bonds would include: Debt investments held as Fixed Deposits in Private enterprises, Bonds & Debentures of PSU (Public Sector Undertakings) and Private Sector, including Debt Mutual Funds;

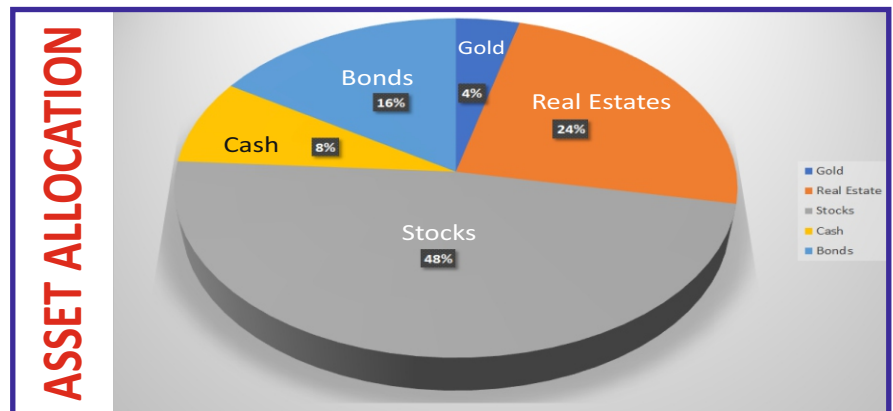
Cash would include amounts held in Banks Savings Accounts, Bank Deposits and other liquid funds which are available for short term liquidity purposes.

The proportion of how much one must invest into each of these assets is entirely dependent on the Risk Appetite, Return needs, liquidity needs and the temperament of each individual investor.

As taught to us by our grandmothers, keep your EGGS in more than one basket, as a means of spreading risks. One of the best ways to mitigate RISKS in investing is to diversify one's portfolio as the risk in one particular asset does not significantly impact the individual. Thus, Portfolio diversification is a significant RISK reducer if done judiciously and with care.

Key aspects to be mindful of while diversifying the portfolio:

1. To ensure that there is low correlation among the various assets in the portfolio.



2. There is no asset concentration in the portfolio, although it is not expedient that portfolio must be evenly spread.
3. The portfolios are liquid enough to aid rebalancing at appropriate junctures.
4. They are dovetailed to your portfolio objective or Financial Plan in terms of maturity, liquidity etc.
5. Over-diversification can sometimes lead to inability to track, review and manage portfolio.

Asset Allocation and Your Goals

How much should you allocate to each asset? It depends on three factors:

1. *Your stage in life and your investment goals.* If you are young persons between 20 - 30 years and potentially have a longer time horizon for your retirement, you can take more risks by investing in Equity stocks or Equity Mutual Funds, if you are more in the middle ages with less than 10 years to retire, then more of your money needs to be in safer places like Fixed income assets yielding a moderate but safe returns. It also depends on what your goals are, are you planning for retirement, already retired, or saving for a down payment for a house?

2. *Time horizon.* How long will it be before you need the money? You may broadly divide this into three zones for ease of understanding: money that you may need anytime to less than say three years (Short term), money that you may need from 3 to 10 years (Medium term), money that you don't need within the next 10 years or even longer (Long term).

3. *Risk tolerance.* Every individual has a unique set of needs, desires and temperament based on various factors, right from genetics to their upbringing, including their past experiences. All these give rise to a unique temperament that sets each of us apart from the other. No two human beings are alike. Can you stand to watch your investments plummet at times, knowing that, in the long run, you'll probably receive a higher return? If the answer is yes, then you can take some risks, if the answer is no, then you must focus on safer investment avenues. Your goals, time horizon, and risk tolerance will determine the model you should use. If you can tolerate high risk to obtain a high return, you'll likely put more into stocks and mutual funds. Those with a low risk tolerance will favour bonds. Those with zero

risk tolerance, or those who will need their money within the next year, should retain more in Short term Investments.

Is Asset Allocation and Diversification the Same Thing?

No, although asset allocation is a critical part of creating a diverse portfolio, it's not quite the same concept as diversification. You can allocate your money across several types of assets without properly diversifying those investments. For example, if all your equity mutual funds are only into large cap funds, then you have not sufficiently diversified to get the benefits of Midcaps & Smallcap Equity portfolios.

Diversifying your portfolio means covering a lot of different risk and return levels with your various investments. Allocation is one way to do that, but you should always go a step further to diversify within each asset class too. For example, in debt investments, one can look at some investments in long term debt funds for better tax efficiency if one does not need regular cashflow, simultaneously one can also look at PSU bonds for part of the portfolio for safe and annual interest payouts.

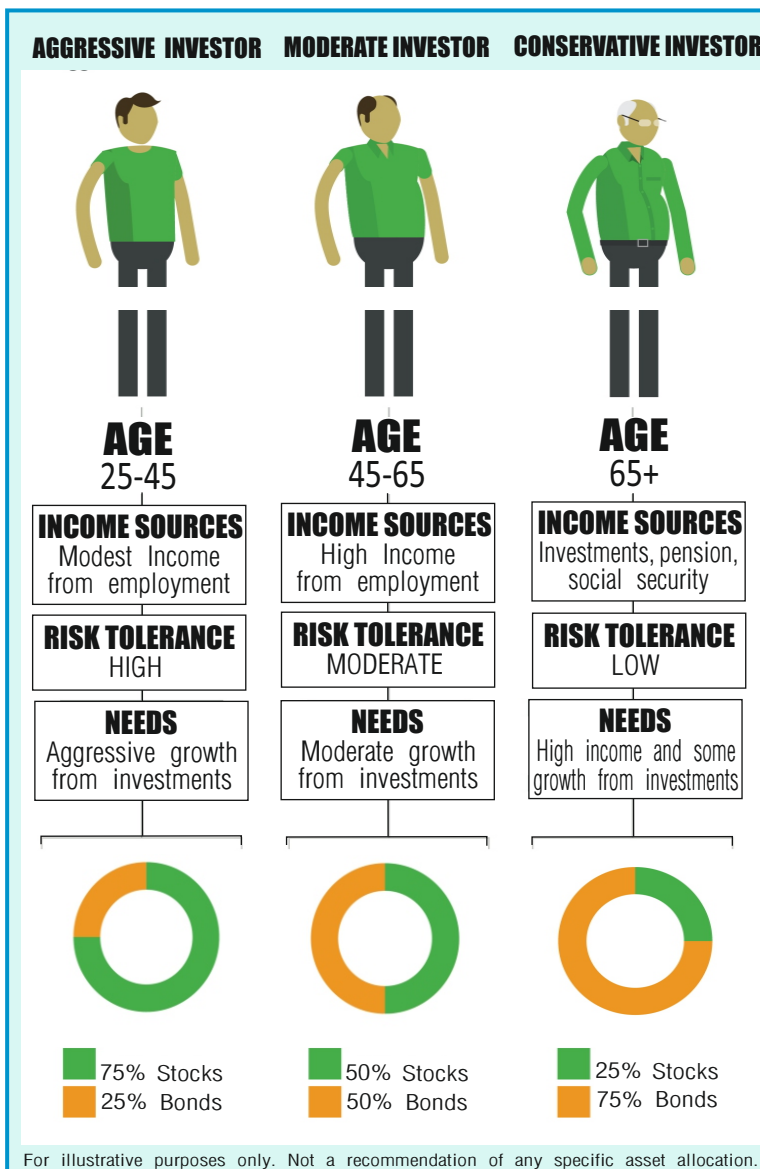
How much to diversify is also a question of each individual portfolio size and needs of the investor. Too much diversification will make it difficult to monitor and review. Too little will leave the portfolio exposed to concentration risk. One needs to be judicious in arriving at this mix.

Review and Rebalancing of Asset Allocation

It is not just important to have an asset allocation for every investor, but it is also important to ensure that the portfolio stays true to the asset allocation that the investor has chosen. This can be done annually or when some big economic event happens in the market place. The process of rebalancing is simple - it is similar to driving a car. Let us say we are driving the car in a highway and we are maintaining the car to driving on the first lane, however ever so often due to traffic or natural flow of the road, you will find that you would have moved to the second or the third lane. Just as we move back to the original lane, so too in the case of Rebalancing the Asset Allocation, one needs to bring the portfolio back to its original allocation.

A simple working of Portfolio Rebalancing is given on the next page with some assumptions for your simple understanding.

Assuming the balanced investor starts investing into Equity : Debt on a 50 : 50 allocation, at the end of one year, debt has given a stable but low return, while equity has generated a much higher return. Therefore at this stage the rebalancing will mean that the portfolios need to be brought back to 50 : 50, which means some profits need to be booked from equity



| Sample of Simple Fixed Asset Allocation | Asset Class | | Portfolio Value |
|--|-------------|--------|-----------------|
| | Debt | Equity | |
| Assumed Balanced Investor Profile | 50% | 50% | |
| Initial Investment of the Investor Rs 100 | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| End of year 1, Debt has given 6% , Equity has generated 20% return | 53 | 60 | 113 |
| REBALANCING : Increase Debt investments by 3.50, by reducing Equity by 3.50 | 56.5 | 56.5 | 113 |
| End of year 2, Debt has given 6% , Equity has generated -10% return | 59.89 | 50.85 | 110.74 |
| REBALANCING : Decrease Debt investments by 4.52 & use the money to increase Equity allocation by 4.52 | 55.37 | 55.37 | 110.74 |

to the tune of 3.50 and moved to debt. Similarly at the end of year 2, when equity markets have generated a negative 10% return, it is time to move from debt to equity to rebalance the portfolio as to the original allocation. This form of rebalancing of Assets is called a Fixed Asset Allocation.

In Dynamic asset allocation, one can also vary the allocation towards Debt & Equity each year depending on the macro economic situation and keep the asset allocation itself dynamic. However, while Fixed is simple, Dynamic is more data driven and the person must be an expert for changing Asset allocations dynamically ever so often. We recommend that investors should continue to stick to Fixed Asset Allocation as shown in the table above.

Why Proper Allocation Is Important

Allocating assets based on an individual investment strategy is what almost every investor would consider good practice. Even billionaires and

institutional investors lose money on certain bets, but since they are properly hedged, it ensures that they will not be significantly harmed by a single bad investment. A balance among equities, fixed income, and cash instruments are also important, because it is a strategy that allows for macroeconomic movements beyond an investor's horizon. Allocating properly allows for fluctuations in currencies and larger geopolitical moves, giving the investor a safety net against large-scale declines.

Thus following a sound asset allocation strategy is a great process by which investors can mitigate risks as well as generate superior long term returns as per their need and suited to their temperament.



Babu Krishnamoorthy has spent the past 25 years as a financial adviser and entrepreneur, and is the Chief Sherpa at Finsherpa Investments Pvt Ltd. A money coach, he helps people dream big and achieve life goals. He helps them plan and execute their financial plans in a manner that is predictable. He loves meeting people and spends his spare time reading non fiction & is an amateur runner (with over 15 half marathons and one full marathon completed). He has authored many books including "Unlock Secrets to A Wealthy Life". He is available at Babu.k@finsherpa.com (www.finsherpa.com)



Babu Krishnamoorthy



EAT PRAY LOVE

No, this isn't just the title of Elizabeth Gilbert's memoirs, or the subsequent Julia Robert-starrer! This is how the last three months of the year play out for most of us, given the plethora of festivals that await! Dr Renuka David on how to stay healthy amidst the revelry.

Finally! It's the last quarter of 2022, and the one that promises the most fun. Along with our vibrant and diverse religious offerings, there is no dearth of feasting as well. On the downside, you might find yourself getting derailed from your healthy eating and fitness regime. Do late night parties leave you too groggy to head to the gym in the morning? Are you unable to resist the fried treats of Diwali and sugary bakes of Christmas?

We are not for a moment suggesting that you shouldn't enjoy yourself, but there are ways to ensure you don't compromise on your health and wellness while doing so. After all, it takes the joy out of festivals if

you're feeling too over stuffed and bloated to enjoy them. Or if that outfit you've been saving for New Year's Eve doesn't fit you anymore. Here are some pointers to help you get started on celebrating in moderation!

When in doubt, eat protein

If you're at a party and are trying to make sense of what to eat, close your eyes and pick the protein. It keeps you filled up for longer, and prevents binge-eating. Eggs, meat and seafood are great, but some of your gatherings might be vegetarian. In such cases, opt for mixed nuts, cheeses, paneer, and assorted Indian lentils. If there is a salad counter, you might want to add some fresh vegetables or fruit to your plate as well. Lastly, a bowl of yogurt is not just protein-rich, it is also rich in probiotics and will aid in digestion after a heavy meal.

Start your day with a good breakfast

"Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a pauper," goes the adage. While you may not be able to strictly eat like a pauper at an evening get-together, having a good breakfast will ensure you don't dig into the wrong things throughout the day. Boiled eggs, rolled oats, fresh or frozen berries are safe and filling options. If you prefer Indian breakfasts, avoid paranthas, or fried pooris – instead have a bowlful of poha or upma loaded with veggies. And if you still love your paranthas, have it for breakfast, eating just enough to keep one fourth of your tummy empty. You could avoid feeling sluggish, bloated and guilty that way.

Hydrate

Drink at least 3-3.5 litres of water every day. Not only does this flush out any unwanted toxins and improve your metabolism, it keeps that dull and bloated feeling away. If you're having alcohol at a party, always keep sipping water in between your drinks to avoid getting dehydrated.

Exercise, but don't overdo it!

The best thing you can do for yourself, is to ensure you don't miss your daily workout. You may even up the ante just by a few extra minutes or reps if you feel your body needs it. What you shouldn't do, is suddenly start working out like crazy just to compensate for those extra calories. There have been instances of people falling prey to cardiac arrest, or other complications when they have overdone the exercise bit. Just stay on track with your usual daily workout and you should be fine.

Remember, COVID-19 is still around

While it might be tempting to host or attend a huge community gathering, do so mindfully and after assessing how much at risk you and your family members are. If you have aged people at home, or someone who has health complications, or little children, try and stay away as much as possible and celebrate amidst a smaller cluster of family and friends. Always wear a double mask whenever you're out. Gargle with saline water twice a day, in the morning and at night to keep your throat clear.

Beware of smog

If you're celebrating Diwali in an urban city, where the pollution levels are already high, chances are that crackers will only add to these levels. Bursting crackers is an integral part of the celebration, but mask up and do so to minimize inhalation of harmful fumes. Invest in an air purifier for your home as well, to keep the smog out. This is especially important if you've already had COVID-19 or are at risk of the virus. It safeguards your lungs and keeps them stronger. Do a few breathing exercises indoors in the mornings to further build lung immunity.

Serve it right

Make healthy choices for your guests at home, as well as those you gift to. For gifting, fruit baskets, assorted herbal teas and tisanes, seeds, potted herbs and spa products are all becoming increasingly appropriate as festival offerings – even if they may seem unconventional. You could even choose to give your loved ones home-made sweets and savouries for Diwali or Christmas made with healthy ingredients, instead of store-bought ones. At home, serve snacks like roasted makhanas, dhokla, vegetable or buckwheat cutlets,

sprouts salads, which are all delicious and guilt-free at the same time.

Intermittent fasting

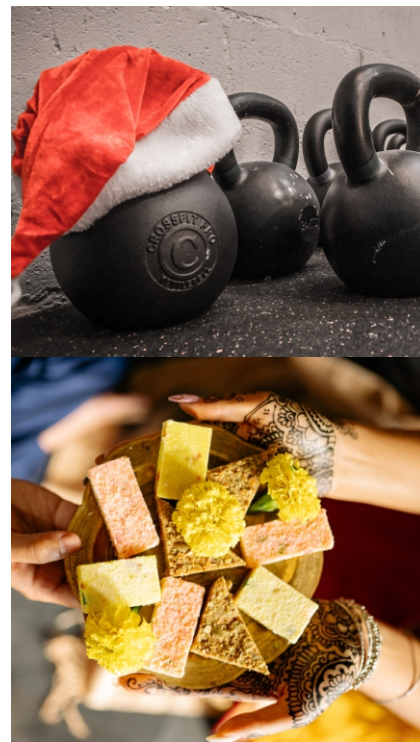
If you have back to back a couple of dinner commitments, try the 16 hour intermittent fasting. It will allow enough time for your body to assimilate and digest all those extra calories you shouldn't be consuming. Intermittent fasting also brings discipline and control over your eating, as the window to eat is only 8 hours.

Include green / white tea or black coffee

Feeling too uncomfortable after a heavy meal? Try having some green/white tea or black coffee. Not only will the uneasiness subside, these would boost your metabolic rate to hasten the digestion. Also during your meal, substitute cold beverages with lukewarm water. This would prevent fatty food sticking to the wall of your stomach, which is the main cause of indigestion and flatulence. Sipping warm water during your meal could slow the process of overeating too.

Spread the love

Spend time with family and friends as much as possible. The pandemic has



robbed us of two precious years of full-fledged celebrations. While things are yet to get back to pre-pandemic status, we have still reached some semblance of normalcy now. Let these special occasions be opportunities to connect with the people who matter the most to you.

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Dr.Renuka David

UNITS AND TROOPS READINESS

- THE MANTRA

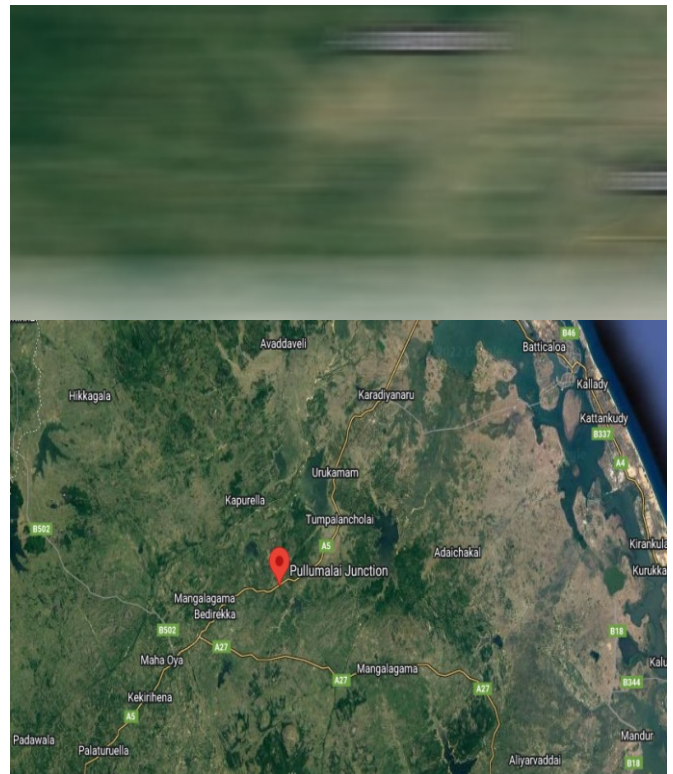
Live situation training is a part of the development of readiness for operations for Special Forces personnel. Likewise, units involved in counter insurgency operations also develop better operational capabilities, an aspect which was perceived in Operation PAWAN. The author reflects on how such a background helped in his unit operations in Batticaloa.

A unit's exemplary performance in Counter Insurgency (CI) operations is at times attributable to a great mix of exemplary leadership, strict adherence to drills and procedures, training and experience and a high state of mental alertness of troops. 13 MAHAR, my unit, moved from Manipur and the lessons we learnt in Manipur helped us while fighting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka.

What can be better for a unit to go into a high conflict zone in a foreign land, perform to the best of its abilities and return to the mainland unscathed and without a single casualty, yet with tremendous achievements under its belt? This is the story of a well-trained team which took on the LTTE challenge with great fortitude, vigour and leadership from the Commanding Officer (CO) down to the section commander and the 'stop' commander levels. That said, it would be unfair if we do not attribute our success to another factor - the X factor, the hand of God.

Moving to Sri Lanka

13 MAHAR was deployed for CI operations in Ukhrul District, notorious for harbouring and rearing some of the top rung 'who's who' in the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) ranks. Our performance in Manipur was a mixed bag of successes and reverses but each event left a lesson or two which was incorporated into the unit Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and drills. We were almost at the end of our



Pullumalai in Batticaloa area - The Karma bhoomi of the unit during Operation PAWAN



LTTE Flag and other arms and ammunition recovered from a raid by 13 MAHAR.

tenure and bracing for a peace station tenure. There was talk about the unit being selected for an *"amphibious role"* as part of a South based brigade. Whereas that never came about, the nearest we got to the *"amphibious role"* was that of being transhipped across the Palk Straits to Sri Lanka, where a conflict was raging between the LTTE and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The nature of operations remained quite the same but it took a while to come to terms with the 'settings' in a foreign land where the terrain, the people, the culture and lingua franca was far removed from Hindi and Marathi – the language of our troops.

Much to our surprise, the special train was already formed and lined up as soon as we reached Dimapur railway station by road. *'White Hot Priority'* is what the railway staff told us about the status of our special train and we refused to believe that the railways would suddenly become super-efficient. But it did. We reached Madras Port at a pace unknown to military specials and were quickly loaded in vehicles to undertake the next journey by sea in Merchant Vessel (MV) Akbar. Again there was no delay in loading and boarding MV Akbar for the final leg of our journey by sea to Trincomalee. The rank and file were excited about this journey by sea. For the time being the *destination* did not matter. The officers and men were allotted cabins and bunks respectively and we settled down equipped with adequate canned beer to see through the journey.

The 'Prophecy'

MV Akbar set sail and we were hardly an hour into the sea when the unit Head Clerk Subedar Kurup knocked at my cabin. I noticed that he was carrying some heavy volumes of Military Law books and the Defence Services Regulations. His intention was noble when he told me that

as Adjutant of the battalion I ought to be aware about procedures and ceremonies associated with dealing with casualties (and hence the reference books). However that did not go down well with me. Enraged at even the thought of a single boy getting injured, I blew my top and ordered him to return with whatever he was carrying, with a stern *"We will not need those volumes; there will be no casualties in 13 MAHLAR."*

Today, thirty five years later, I sit back and wonder what prompted me to blurt out that 'prophecy'. I tend to believe that behind that spontaneous quip lay the confidence that we were well trained to meet the challenge provided 'luck' or something equivalent was on our side. As it turned out, luck **was** on our side.

As MV Akbar closed in to the destination many hours later, the entire unit stood on the deck to observe the rough and dark skyline of Trincomalee. The excitement of sea travel disappeared and so did the effects of beer as we were ferried into the famous Trincomalee Port. With a prayer on our lips we disembarked not knowing what this tenure held for us.

There prevailed, however, a sense of resolve and confidence. The new opponents were unknown, but the 'game' was **known and herein is a lesson that the IPKF learnt rather bitterly, that the first or at least the second division to get into Sri Lanka should have been a counter insurgency trained force and not one from South or Central India, regardless of what the initial mandate was.**

Our journey by road from Trincomalee to Batticaloa in our own first line and some second line vehicles was eventful. At one stage, a young 2nd Lieutenant from the Sri Lankan Army led our convoy in a sparkling new Toyota Jeep with bright blinkers. As he was about to break off after his assignment, he acknowledged my gratitude for navigating us but also remarked *"Sir, are you going to fight the LTTE with this vintage stuff?"* His remark was spontaneous because he had to only look at our fleet – old Shaktiman 3 tons, Nissan one tons and sputtering Jeeps, some with damaged or torn



57 Mountain Division Commander surveys a huge cache of arms and ammunition recovered by 13 MAHLAR.



Major General T P Singh, 57 Mountain Division Commander during a visit to 13 MAHAR.

canvas covers and our personal weapons – the vintage 7.62 mm Self Loading Rifles (SLRs), Light Machine Guns and 9 mm Carbines. A stark reminder of images of Second World War movies.

The Acquired Lessons

The unit's tryst in Sri Lanka can hardly be described in a few pages. However, the essence of our performance can best be explained from the lessons that we learnt in Manipur and those that emerged at every stage of our Operation PAWAN tenure.

Outstanding Leadership. Under Lieutenant Colonel Sahu, VSM, the CO, the unit was confident that he would steer us through thick and thin with the immense experience that he already had. The company commanders were a seasoned lot having served their complete tenure in Manipur. The men reposed confidence upon their officers.

Strict Adherence to Unit SOPs and Drills. Manipur was a learning ground no doubt for formulating our SOPs in dealing

with every conceivable situation. The unit SOPs were not left to the confines of the folders in the office. They were conceived, rehearsed and put into practice with great diligence. It was important that every individual of the team was well versed with his task.

Alertness. The LTTE cadres, possibly the best insurgents in the world, wove a web of informers around our posts. It was imperative that we break our routine *and be as unpredictable as them*. For the company commanders, it was a tough task to keep the boys alert. Sometimes long periods of quiet would lull our boys into despair and a *laissez faire* attitude but it was entirely up

to the post commanders to keep the troops motivated and alert. It required an innovative mind to do so. Sometimes, even providence has its way - at Trincomalee Port, after disembarking from the ship and loading into vehicles the boys were tired and to keep them alert for the journey ahead to Batticaloa was a task in itself. The sudden burst of a Shaktiman tyre which was mistaken for an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast shook the boys out of their stupor and kept them awake and alert right through the journey.

Occupation of Posts. We were inducted into a virgin rural area within Batticaloa district which was part of the famous Beirut Base of the LTTE. Except for two posts all others were actually in the possession of the LTTE. We had to resort to a 'fighting break in'. We were greeted with automatic fire at these posts. Wrestling the initiative from LTTE in their stronghold and thereafter reshaping and redesigning the posts as part of our unit CI grid was not easy. During this exchange of fire, the post commanders displayed great balance and maturity. We took our time and managed to push out the LTTE from their occupied areas without any losses.

Intelligence Acquisition. In actual fact 'intelligence' acquisition was a far cry. Even 'information' acquisition was a tough task with language being a big barrier. A few interpreters from a Madras Battalion were given to us but without any local informers whatsoever, they too couldn't do much. However this is where 'experience' stepped in. The post commanders would visit neighbouring villages, all 'black' with complete allegiance to the Eelam cause and somehow, essentially through sign language, gather bits and pieces of information and act

upon it. *Every post commander believed that offence was the best form of defence.* Our tenure in Manipur taught us that **a post is as vulnerable to insurgent attacks as is the level of inactivity of the post.**

Operation SWORDFISH. The windfall however came about when we managed to befriend a LTTE cadre onto our side. Murugan (name changed) was trained in India. He could strip an SLR in a flash, fill a magazine in a jiffy, crawl a hundred metres or more on his elbows and pick up tell-tale marks quicker than a tracker dog. He was ready to help provided he was placed under only one handler which, as it turned out, was yours truly since I could manage a few words of the local language which was adequate to exchange essential notes. A fine, bare footed and lithe figured fighter, Murugan led us to many a success. Our moment of glory came when, in a flush out operation codenamed Operation SWORDFISH, Murugan led us to a massive LTTE camp in the region of Barons Cap, a dreaded LTTE hideout deep in the interiors of the jungles of Batticaloa. The unit's reputation touched the sky with the success of that operation. Unfortunately, a month after we de-inducted, Murugan was killed by the LTTE. The relieving unit failed to understand **the importance of 'security and safety of a source'**. They took him for the proverbial goose that laid golden eggs.

Civic Action and Interaction with Locals. Operation Sadbhavna and such names and terms were non-existent those days. There were no Military Intelligence funds available for intelligence acquisition in units and yet, as the days went by, the post commanders had developed enough information to undertake search operations and raids frequently. **The so**

called 'Winning the Hearts and Minds' was irrelevant in an Operation PAWAN environment because the hearts and minds of the Tamil populace was focused upon their Eelam and the IPKF was in no position to alter that. But there were scoundrels within the LTTE ranks who attracted the angst of the locals. There was nothing to offer the locals, yet information was forthcoming because they noticed that a professional force was at work. **Not a single case of misbehaviour of any kind by the rank and file against the locals ever occurred which was appreciated by them.** The level of trust reached a stage where the villagers around some posts vowed to alert the post commander should there be an intended raid by the LTTE.

Monitoring. It goes without saying that CI operations become boring and monotonous especially when there are long periods of inactivity. The post commanders were wary of this and they

frequently moved out of their posts with their quick reaction teams to monitor routine activities like road opening, area domination, etc thereby bringing to fore yet another important lesson – **a post is as active and alert (or otherwise) as a post commander.**

CI Training. This was our forte which we had learnt the hard way. It is not a wonder therefore that the unit which relieved us without any formal training, suffered huge losses immediately on arrival. Even before we touched the shores of Madras on our return journey, we were informed that the relieving unit had already lost some of their braves. This, in no way is to compare two units but to highlight the fact that troops inducted from regions of the country without any experience or formal CI training suffered in Sri Lanka due to **an organizational flaw.** As already stated, in the larger context, our CI trained division should have been, if not the first then at least the second formation to be inducted into Sri Lanka.



Apprehended LTTE cadres by 13 MAHAR - highly motivated, skilled and tough fighters.



13 MAHAR troops yell the victory cry before returning to India.

Whose War is it Anyway? On arrival of the unit in Batticaloa, the civilians were loath to the fact that we, the IPKF, were deployed against their brethren, the LTTE, at the behest of the Sinhala Government. Eventually, even though the tide turned, they began to wonder “*whose war is it anyway*” and gathered that the IPKF were not bereft of good intentions and were willy-nilly drawn into the conflict. The initial misgivings against the unit were replaced by deep respect, a sobriquet well earned by the unit in hostile land.

‘We Fought With What We Had’

I have earlier mentioned the remarks of a Sri Lankan Army officer about our vintage equipment. Coming from a youngster of a small island army was hurtful, to say the least. Ironically, about a dozen years later, General VP Malik, the then Chief stated, in the middle of the Kargil conflict, “*We will fight with what we have!*” Today we have modernized to some extent but not enough, especially our infantry. There are still miles to go.

The metaphor “*Man Behind the Gun*” ceases to sound good when the gun itself is vintage. Let us hope that in our next

significant foray, we embark into battle with world class weaponry.

In Conclusion

13 MAHAR rode in with about 600, fought gallantly and rode out with that many without leaving a single body behind living or dead and yet with some fantastic achievements. Our success was attributable to our tenure in Manipur, larger than life leadership and a firm resolve to adhere to drills and procedures.

In a foreign land, fighting for a cause which had very little bearing upon the integrity and sanctity of our nation,

without a murmur the Indian Army performed its task with great fervour and dedication. Strangely today, our tryst in Sri Lanka codenamed Operation PAWAN is not recognized with national pride, though we lost over 1200 men. Units cremated their fallen colleagues or left their braves behind in graves adjacent to areas where they fought since there was no provision to bring the mortal remains back.

The Sri Lankan Government has constructed a grand memorial in Colombo to honour the IPKF bravehearts. The least we can do as a country is to recognise, laud and honour the efforts of our warriors for laying down their lives in a foreign land.



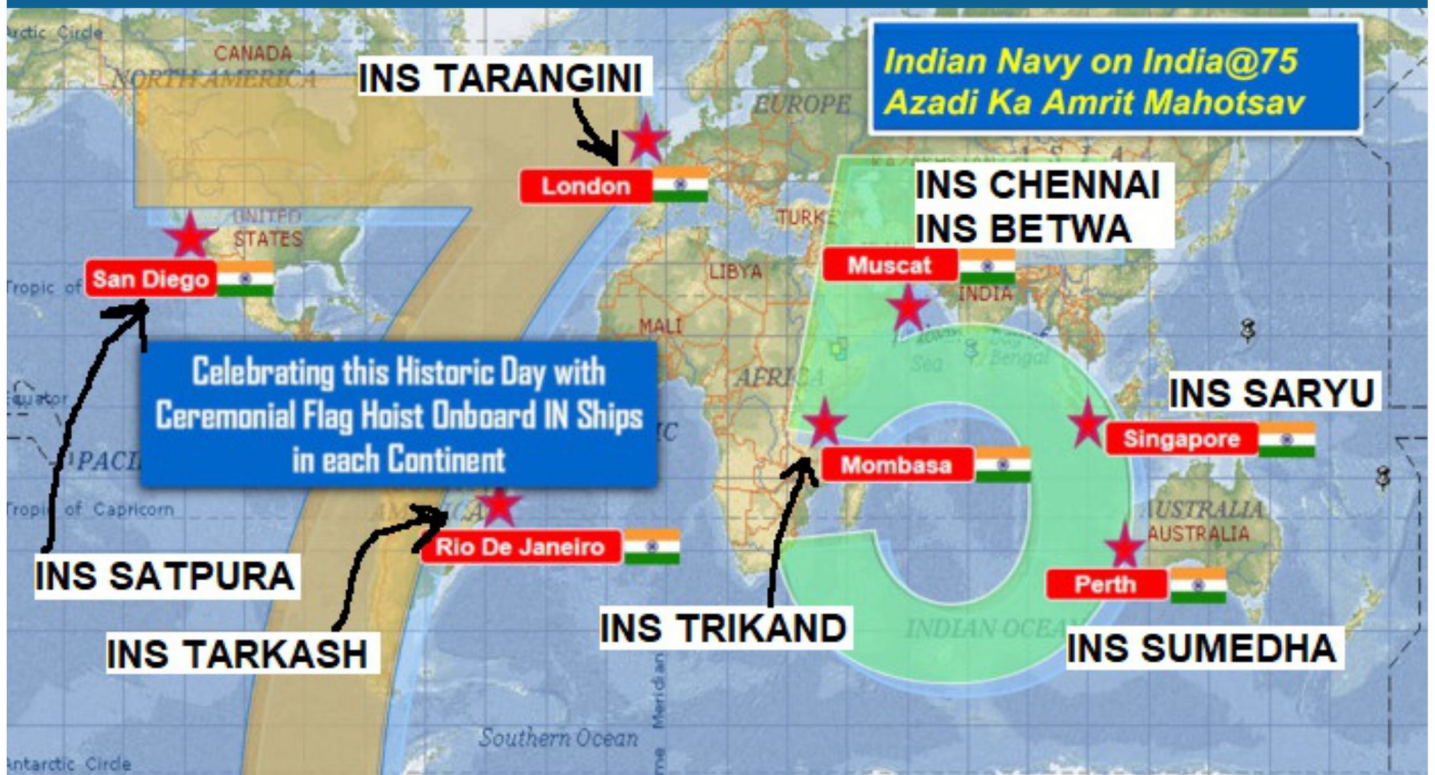
Major General Binoy Poonnen, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned in 1978 into 13 MAHAR as a second generation Army officer, and went on to command his battalion from 1997 to 2000. During his illustrious service, he attended many professional courses to include Defence Services Staff College, Higher Command and National Defence College courses. After commanding a mountain brigade in an operational area, he went on to command a Mountain Division in a Counter Insurgency role in Manipur. He has served in Sri Lanka as a part of IPKF, and has also done stints in Bhutan and Lebanon. He has handled defence cooperation and defence diplomacy aspects with foreign countries during his tenure in Army HQ. After 37 years of dedicated service in the Indian Army, he has settled in Mbon, Madhya Pradesh.



Maj Gen Binoy Poonnen

THREE OCEANS, SIX CONTINENTS

– The Indian Navy Marks its Presence



The Indian Navy celebrated 75 years of India's Independence by marking its presence across the globe. On 15 August 2022, the warships of the Navy touched three oceans and six continents falling in six different time zones and hoisted the Indian tri-colour.

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