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**A reader sent the following information to add to this series on the life and times of Pirapaharan. We encourage all readers to send us their understanding of this history of us all.**

*It is no exaggeration Pirabakaran's life is also the history of the heroic Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.*

*Pirabakaran joined the Tamil Students Forum in 1970. When one of the Forum leaders, Ponnuthurai Sathiyaseelan, was arrested in 1973 the Forum was in disarray and many of the members went underground. Some of the members reached Tamil Nadu and Pirabakaran was one of them. Most of them were put on smugglers' boats by the former TULF leader, the late A. Amirthalingam, and arrived at Vetharanijam. They underwent severe hardships and some of them moved to Chennai. One of them went without food for more than 3 days and was rescued by Dr. Era Janarthanam.*

*It was in 1974 that Pirabakaran come under the influence of the late A. Rajaratnam, fondly remembered as the Tamil Eelam Nethaji. Rajaratnam invited the founder leader of the TULF, S. J. V. Chelvanayagam, to Tamil Nadu and introduced to the leaders there the Tamil Eelam problem. He was also on the run as he was implicated in the attempted assassination of the Sinhala stooge Minister Kumarasooriyar at the Pannai Bridge in 1973. Rajaratnam lost faith in a non-violent approach to Tamil problems after the 1961 Satyagraha attempt was disrupted by Sinhala sarong-clad, yellow-robed and khaki-wearing goondas (hoodlums). He was looking for ways and means to build a Tamil army.*

*After the Forum collapsed, Pirabakaran was initiated into the armed resistance from translations into Tamil from English materials on world freedom struggles and information on establishing a military by Rajaratnam. Clandestine meetings were held in the Indo Nippon Cultural Exchange in Chennai and subjects such as the Jewish Youth League were discussed.*

*The first martyr in the armed struggle against Sinhala racism, Sivakumaran, was a source of inspiration to other Tamil youth.*

*It was under these circumstances Pirabakaran decided to convert The New Tigers (TNT) into a more disciplined and effective movement that would help reach Tamil Eelam. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam believed in a well-disciplined movement and in the beginning quality was paramount over quantity for Pirabakaran. In the beginning supporters and Tiger cadres were personally interviewed and selected by Pirabakaran.*

*Several accolades confirm that the LTTE did not take to arms for obstinacy or as a pastime. A news item in the 'India Today' of 31st March 1984 in translation is as follows:*

*"The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is also commonly known as the Tigers. The most powerful and the oldest movement is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam under the leadership of 29 year old Velupillai Pirabakaran. Among the several freedom groups the LTTE is the best organized military wing. In a broader sense, they proudly claim to have international relationship.*

*Among the freedom movements the LTTE has the largest number of armed cadres.*

*The youthful revolutionary Pirabakaran started the The New Tigers with the acronym T.N.T. with the intention of directly involving in the war (gives rise to an enigma to the acronym T.N.T.) He started a small structure that grew into the LTTE and paved the way for other movements.*

*While most other organizations had their training camps in India, it is only the LTTE that is functioning with all seriousness in the Lankan soil."*

*N.B.: Most of the information given here was collected in the early part of 1980s at several talks with some of those directly involved in the various escapades.*

*by R. Shanmugalingam*

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## Pirapaharan, Chapter 21

by T. Sabaratnam

(Volume 2)

Sustained Guerrilla Campaign

**First Eelam War**

தமிழ்த் தேசிய ஆவணச் சுவடிகள்

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August 1984 is a turning point in the history of the Tamil freedom struggle. In the middle of that month, Pirapaharan announced in Chennai that the LTTE was switching its mode of struggle from "hit and run guerrilla warfare to a sustained guerrilla campaign" and called upon the "other liberation groups to join us as comrades-in-arms to fight our common enemy and defend our people" - *Voice of Tigers* (September 1984)."

With that declaration, Pirapaharan upgraded and intensified the freedom struggle and assumed its lead role. He had emerged *primus inter pares*, the first among equals. That announcement, in effect, was the declaration that the First Eelam War had begun.



The First Eelam War began on 4 August 1984 with a sea battle off the coast of Polikandy, near Valvettithurai. A Tiger boat, fitted with two outboard motors, stood cloistered near the Polikandy coast. A naval boat, on night patrol, spotted the Tiger craft on its radar and opened fire. Tigers fired back. In a brief, but intense firefight, the Tigers killed six naval ratings and wounded three. Nine others who were in the Chinese-built gunboat fled with the dead and the injured in the damaged boat. The four Sea Tigers escaped unhurt in their vessel.

The Sri Lanka Navy lost heavily in its very first sea battle with the Tigers. The Navy was upset. Athulathmudali was angry. The navy cordoned off the Valvettithurai coast in the morning, 5 August, and a joint police-army unit launched a combing operation.

A simultaneous navy and army onslaught was launched on Valvettithurai, the birthplace of Pirapaharan. The navy declared the coast off Valvettithurai a Surveillance Area. Its gunboats shelled fishermen's huts and naval personnel burnt their boats. Over 5,000 persons fled the area and took refuge in the nearby schools. Over a hundred civilians, young and old, were shot dead.

The police and the army, during their massive combing operation, ordered all able-bodied men to assemble in an open space. They arrested over 300 men. Groups of soldiers went round Valvettithurai and adjoining villages torching vehicles, burning buildings and shooting men, women and children.

State Secretary Douglas Liyanage's office in Colombo announced that several 'terrorists' were killed and over 300 'suspected terrorists' were arrested. The following was the opening paragraph of the *Daily News* report based on that information:

"Security forces arrested over 300 suspected terrorists in a combing out operation in the Valvettithurai area on Sunday, according to the information available in Colombo. Reports said several terrorists were killed ..."

Attacks on civilians and their property spread to the rest of the peninsula as the day wore on. In Jaffna town, the situation was tense in the evening when the army removed the bodies of the navy personnel killed in the sea battle to Palaly Airbase to be flown to Colombo. An armoured car opened fire at the buildings opposite the Jaffna Hospital. Then it moved towards the market. Tigers threw grenades and patrol bombs. The public joined. They threw stones and bricks. Soldiers fired their guns. A battle erupted that went on for more than half an hour. The armoured car was damaged and one soldier was killed. Jaffna city was rocked with explosions. Several civilians were killed and wounded. The ancient Tamil city, the cultural capital of Sri Lankan Tamils, witnessed the first battle of the First Eelam War.



Liyanage's office in Colombo released a press communiqué announcing the death of several persons in Jaffna city. It called the dead men 'terrorists.' It called the battle 'skirmishes' with the police and the army.

Around nightfall, the government declared a curfew in the Jaffna peninsula. Policemen and soldiers roamed the city and suburbs in groups. They burnt, pillaged and killed throughout the night. Most of the shops and some houses along the Jaffna-Palaly Road were burnt. Atchchuveli, a village near Palaly, was badly battered. Shops and houses were burnt there. The house of Mallakam Magistrate Balasingham was not spared. A group of soldiers chased away the policeman on guard and torched the house.

The Tigers retaliated. That night, 5 August, they ambushed joint police-army patrol

convoy at Nediyaikadu close to Valvettithurai. They also blasted that evening the Oddusuddan Police Station in the Mullaitivu district. The First Eelam war raged the whole of that night. It continued till July 1987, when the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord was signed.

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the police, whose duty was to protect them, angered and estranged the Tamil people. They were pushed into the fold of the militant boys. The people, in their fury, identified themselves with the boys and helped them willingly. The public support for militants swelled. The image that **"our boys are our protectors"** was firmly implanted in the public psyche. Police and the army became **"Sinhala police", "Sinhala army", "foreigners", "occupiers."**

At 9am of 6 August ten to twelve youths, armed with revolvers, rushed into the People's Bank, Jaffna with the customers as the door was opened for business. They ran out a little later shouting, "Run out. Run out. We have planted bombs." Customers and officers, including the manager, rushed out. In the ensuing melee, the militants plucked the shotguns and cartridges from the three guards and bolted.

The militants spread the revolt to Vavuniya that morning. Police Superintendent Arthur J. Herath walked into his office around 8 a.m. and took his seat. A time bomb, placed under the table, exploded tearing his body into bits. The bomb was the work of PLOTE. Santhathiyar, who was then working with Gandhyam, was accused of masterminding that operation. PLOTE was angry with Herath for the role he played in arresting Gandhyam leaders and in chasing Indian Tamil settlers from Vavuniya. I met Herath at Mankulam Rest House two months before his death. I went there with Lalith Athulathmudali to cover his visit. That is another story. I will relate that in the next chapter.

The police and the army took revenge for Herath's killing. A group of about 25 policemen, who invaded Vavuniya town in police vehicles, smashed up all the Tamil shops and shot the Tamils. They entered Vel Café, the popular hotel (restaurant), and murdered its owner and six other people.

The Air Force that night took away four women travelling from Colombo to Jaffna in a private bus. They were raped and killed. Ten more bodies were found next morning, Tuesday 7 August, on the Vavuniya - Mannar road, three kilometers from Vavuniya town. Liyanage's office said they were killed in a clash between two rival militant groups. The police took revenge for the Oddusuddan police station attack by damaging the historic Thambalagamam Sivan Kovil and by taking the priest into custody.

And on 9 August, a Thursday, night the most chilling murder that outraged the entire Tamil community occurred. Chunnakam was the largest police station next to Jaffna and Tamil youths arrested on suspicion under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) were detained there. TELO attacked the police station, a two-storey building on the Jaffna - Kankesanthurai Road, on Wednesday night but was repulsed. The police learnt that the TELO would return on Thursday night to continue the attack. The police, inquiry later revealed, withdrew from the station and went to Jaffna.

The police locked up the PTA suspects in a room before they left. Their hands were tied behind their back, they were blindfolded and their mouths tightly plastered. The police wired a powerful bomb to the door so that it would explode when opened. Survivors told the inquiry that some of them managed to free their hands, removed the plaster and shouted for help. The crowd that gathered tried to force open the door. A massive explosion occurred, killing people and bringing the building down. Over 20 youths were killed.

Colombo media headlined the story: 'Police Repulse Terrorist Attack.' They spun colourful stories about the incident. The *Observer* said the police had successfully repulsed the attack and had called for reinforcements. Policemen from other stations had rushed to Chunnakam, fought with the terrorists and many died in that fierce encounter, according to this line.

Another blood-curdling incident took place the next night, 10 August. A family of 10 persons, six of them children, that was travelling from Kaithady to Jaffna in a private car to attend a wedding was stopped by soldiers near Navatkuli. They were taken to a lonely spot and killed.

The radio announcement about that incident further infuriated the Tamil people. The radio news said that the army had killed 10 terrorists in Kaithady.

### Restricting Army Movement

The militants, led by the LTTE, made use of the public anger to consolidate their position further. They intensified their attacks on the police and the armed forces. And they launched a landmine war to restrict the movement of the army and confine it to its barracks.

In Mannar, on the Mannar - Pooneryn road, a group of Tiger cadres led by Victor (Marcelin Fuselus), waited in ambush for the night patrol from the Thallady Camp. The convoy of two vehicles, a jeep and a truck, carrying a company of 13 soldiers, was blasted at 4.30 am on 11 August. Six soldiers were killed on the spot and another injured.

The army reacted in what had become its normal behaviour. Groups of soldiers dressed in civilian clothes trooped into Mannar town and torched shops and houses. They also attacked the people and their property in the village of Adampan. They meted out similar treatment to Tamils and Muslims. Six of the twenty civilians killed were Indians. One of them was about to travel to India in a few days.

Mannar's Roman Catholic Bishop complained to Jayewardene about the army attack. "It's like an army of occupation flattening everything on its path," he said.

Minister M. H. Mohammed visited Mannar to assess the damage. His report submitted to President Jayewardene said the



majority of the shops and houses destroyed and burnt belonged to Muslims. The victims told Mohammed that Israeli Mossad officers who were in the Thalladi Camp had instigated the soldiers to attack the Muslims because they had demonstrated against the opening of the Israeli Interests Section in Colombo in May.

Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam also visited Mannar to assess the situation. Amirthalingam made a statement at the All Party Conference then in session in Colombo. He said it was futile for them to talk about peace when the government was using the army to destroy the Tamil people. He said, "We cannot sit here as if nothing has happened when the Tamil-speaking people are being harassed, mutilated and murdered by the armed forces."

Amirthalingam also appealed to Indira Gandhi to "intervene and save millions of Tamils in the island from total annihilation."

Tamils in Chennai, mainly students, reacted angrily. They took out processions which called for Indian intervention. On 13 August, police baton-charged when a huge student procession marched towards the Sri Lankan Deputy High Commissioner's Office in Chennai. Sensing that the protests might grow, the Tamil Nadu Government ordered the closure of all colleges and schools for a week.

Indira Gandhi was annoyed with Colombo. G. K. Reddy, the New Delhi correspondent of *The Hindu*, mirrored New Delhi's mood when he said in his column: "The patience of Mrs. Gandhi is clearly running out in the face of this appalling governmental violence."

Indira Gandhi in her Independence Day Address to the nation from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort on 15 August warned Colombo. She said that India could not remain silent in the wake of the killings in Colombo.

Police and army violence did not subdue the militants. It activated the EPRLF and TELO. They decided to do something big to steel the thunder from the LTTE, which was concentrating on minor attacks aimed at forcing the police to close down smaller police stations and the army to restrict its movement. That strategy worked. Large areas were liberated and Pirapaharan set up the rudiments of the present administrative system during the last quarter of 1984. I will deal with that system in a future chapter.

The LTTE attacked two police stations and exploded landmines in two locations in the four days, Saturday, 11 August to Tuesday, 14 August. In the early hours of Saturday, a group of over 50 LTTE cadres dressed in army uniforms mounted an attack on Kayts Police Station. State Ministry spokesman told the Colombo media that the police and the militants fought a direct gun battle around 3.30 am. He said the attack had been successfully repulsed.

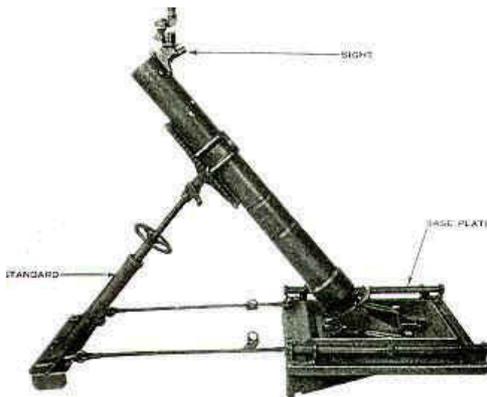
Lalith Allahakoon, then at the *Sun* and now editor of the *Daily Mirror*, reported the Kayts attack thus: "Kayts Police successfully repulsed an attack by a terrorist group on the police station and the post office.

"The direct confrontation between the police and the terrorists which began at 3.30 am yesterday lasted for about an hour after which the police repulsed the terrorist attack."

The LTTE attacked the Valvettiturai Police Station on Tuesday, 14 August, morning. Around 4.30 am, the attackers fired at the security light and the entire police station was plunged into darkness. The Tigers then flung grenades and petrol bombs from three sides leaving the front open. The Israeli-trained police commandos fired aimlessly in all directions. The attack lasted an hour. When the Tigers withdrew, some of the 50 policemen stationed there were dead and the building partially damaged. Colombo media claimed that the police had repulsed a terrorist attack.

On the same night, the EPRLF's military arm, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), launched its biggest and daring attack on the massive Karainagar Naval Complex. Douglas Devananda, the present leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) was then the commander of the PLA. He was in Chennai at that time. Suresh Premachandran, presently the leader of the EPRLF (Suresh Wing), and a member of the EPRLF Central Committee, was in Jaffna.

The decision to launch the attack on the Karainagar Naval Complex was taken by Suresh Premachandran and the PLA's Jaffna Commander. Subathiran. known as Robert. They took the decision on the strength of two of their innovations. The first was the mortar shell and mortar launcher developed by Sinnavan, the Lebanon-trained cadre from Trincomalee, who was in charge of the Kumbakonam training camp. Sinnavan developed the mortar from the sketches and information found in a military journal. The second was the improvised armoured vehicle developed by another cadre, Suthan.



The plan was to launch a mortar attack followed by the armoured vehicle's penetration into the camp through the front gate. Both plans failed. Most of the mortars failed to explode and the armoured vehicle got struck near the entrance. The naval personnel, who initially withdrew to the rear of the camp, advanced towards the entrance, firing fiercely. The PLA cadres withdrew carrying the dead and the injured. They lost their first woman fighter, Sobha, who joined the PLA women's wing at the age of 15 years.

#### Landmine War

The escalation of militant attacks upset the government immensely. The Defence Ministry issued a statement about the "increased terrorist activity" in the northeast. It also warned civilians traveling to the Jaffna peninsula to exercise great care. The statement said the

driver and cleaner of a lorry that carried coconuts and vegetables to Jaffna was blown up by the militants.

Landmines had emerged a major threat to the army by the latter part of August. The army countered the landmine threat by importing personnel carriers that can withstand the impact of the blast from South Africa and by resorting to road clearance. This turned out to be a battle of wits between the army and the militants. Two incidents that occurred on 24 August were illustrative of the situation during that period.

The first incident was at Kalluvam Mandan in Karaveddi West. The army received information, presumably from the LTTE itself, that landmines have been buried on the main road. The army bomb disposal unit went to the spot and conducted a search. Soldiers who provided guard followed the bomb disposal experts in a South African personnel carrier. The militants exploded the landmine when the personnel carrier went over it. It overturned and eight soldiers died on the spot.

At Neerveli, on the same day, a road clearance patrol was searching the road when the Tigers exploded a landmine, killing three of them.

In September, the Tigers demonstrated their strength in the landmine war. On the first of that month, they exploded a landmine at Thikkam, a coastal village five kilometers west of Point Pedro, killing five police commandos. Police reacted by torching shops and houses in Point Pedro. They also killed pedestrians.



Two days later, 3 September, a Navy patrol shot and killed eight fishermen on a fishing boat east of Point Pedro.

Seven days later, on 10 September the Tigers took the landmine war to Mullaitivu district, where Lalith Athulathmudali was vigorously implementing an Israeli-prompted plan to confine Tamil militancy to the northern province. He told a Trade Ministry press conference on 11 September, which I covered, that effective action was being taken to prevent the spread of terrorism to the east. "We are plugging the routes to the east," he said. When asked to explain, he said, "We are establishing a network of Sinhala villages on the border between the north and the east."

The Tigers shifted their focus to Mullaitivu to deal with Athulathmudali's militarized Sinhala settlements in that district. These settlements, modeled on the Israeli Jewish border settlements, were established along the Trincomalee - Mullaitivu coast and in the area between Padaviya and Nedunkerni. They were set up as extensions to the existing Sinhala fishing villages of Kokillai and Nayaru and the agricultural settlements of Padavia. The settlers were given arms training.

A group of 16 Tiger cadres, headed by Mahattaya, mined the Mullaitivu - Kokillai main road near Semmalai, a village 10 km from Mullaitivu, and laid an ambush. A convoy of three vehicles, a jeep and two trucks approached the scene at 10.15 am. Those in ambush allowed the jeep to pass and blasted the truck that came in the middle. The second truck screeched to a halt and the soldiers in it started firing. The firefight was brief and the Tigers fled the area.

Nine soldiers died and three were injured in the attack. The reinforcement that arrived from Mullaitivu Camp conducted a clearing operation. The military announced that they killed four terrorists, but the LTTE denied it. It said that their forces had withdrawn before the reinforcements arrived.

The Kokillai landmine attack created panic among the Sinhala settlers. Some of them returned to their villages. But the government continued with its settlement scheme.

[Index to previous chapters](#)

**Next**

**Chapter 22. JR's Third Track**

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