

## For This All that Blood was Shed

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April, 13 2009

In the closing days of March and the first week of this month, April, the SL Army outflanked, cut off, and destroyed the Charles Anthony Regiment of the LTTE, in one of the most decisive battles of the war. For almost a year, the SL Army, sweeping across the Wannai from west to east, had attempted to pin down the LTTE and cause it significantly large casualties. However, the ever elusive Tigers have always preferred to slip away when outflanked, rarely allowing themselves to be trapped in large numbers, sacrificing rearguard units so that the larger forces could escape. While the casualties came in trickles, the jugular sought by the military high command was not forthcoming. Thus, the encirclement and destruction of the Charles Anthony at Aanandapuram, east of Puthukkudiyiruppu, could be celebrated as a memorable victory for the SL Army.

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On March 30th, elements of the SL Army's 53rd and 58th divisions and Task Force 8 advanced out of Puthukkudiyiruppu in a pincer movement intended to outflank the Charles Anthony Regiment which held the eastward-running Puthukkudiyiruppu-Iranappaalai-Puthumaathalan road. A brigade of the 58th Division swung east and then south, while another from the 53rd, along with TF8, commanded by Col GV Ravipriya, attacked east and then north; both pincers meeting at Pachaipullumottai junction in the rear of the Charles Anthony. The Tigers fought fiercely to prevent the encirclement, but were overwhelmed. Lt Col Gopith, CO of the Charles Anthony and his 2/ic Amuthab were killed on the 31st, and demoralised and leaderless, the Tiger troops were encircled. Outnumbered nearly ten to one, over a thousand Tigers faced almost 10,000 troops of the 4th, 6th, 8th, 12th, 14th and 20th Gajabas, the 11th and 20th Light Infantry, the 5th Vijayabahu Infantry, and the 9th Gemunu Watch. Also in action was the SL Army's elite special operations forces &mdash; elements of the 2nd Commandos and the 1st Special Forces.

However, what the SL Army planners hadn't known when launching the operation was that Aanandapuram had been picked by the LTTE to host a ops session of their own to plan another counterattack to follow on the failed one of the previous week. Inside the Aanandapuram cauldron was Col Theepan &mdash; deputy military commander of the LTTE, Col Bhanu a &ldquo;special commander&rdquo; of the LTTE, Lt Col Vidhusa &mdash; CO of the Malathy Regt, and her 2/ic &mdash; Maj Kamalini, Lt Col Durga &mdash; CO of the Sothiya Regt, and her 2/ic &mdash; Maj Mohana, Lt Col Keerthi &mdash; CO of the Jeyanathan Infantry, and his 2/ic &mdash; Maj Nagesh, Col Gaddafi &mdash; head of the LTTE special forces training school, Lt Col Silambarasan &mdash; CO of the Radha Regt, the LTTE's special forces, and his 2/ic &mdash; Maj Anbu, Lt Col Asmi &mdash; CO of the Ponnammam mining unit, Lt Col Mannivannan &mdash; CO of the Kittu Artillery Regt, Lt Col Gopal &mdash; CO of the Kutti Sri mortar unit, S Thangan &mdash; the LTTE's deputy political commissar, Thamilini &mdash; the LTTE women's wing political commissar, and a multitude of other mid-level field commanders.

When the SL Army realized this windfall, all efforts were thrown into preventing the Tiger brass breaking out of the Aanandapuram pocket. It was hoped that LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran was in Aanandapuram, but he had reportedly left a week before the SL Army operation. Special Forces and Commandos fanned out into the coconut trees east of the pocket, cutting routes of reinforcement to the Charles Anthony trapped in Aanandapuram. SL Army sniper (Defence.lk)

A reinforced company of 120 Tigers under Col Lawrence was sent in a softskin convoy which attempted to reach the 2km-square pocket, but were ambushed and destroyed by special forces. The already injured Lawrence managed to escape with a few survivors. Another attempt at reinforcement saw a Sea Tiger unit leave Valainjarmadam that would see them land at Pattiaddy from where they would fight their way through to Aanandapuram. But this attempt too was foiled as the Sea Tigers were intercepted and beaten back by the SL Navy.

After this, Army sigint operators overheard Lt Col Vidusha the Malathy's commander pleading with Pottu Amman, the Tigers' intelligence chief, for reinforcements. The latter, almost incoherent with grief, replied that they couldn't penetrate the SL Army siege.

On April 3rd, Col Bhanu and a portion of the besieged Tigers managed to break through the Army's ring of steel

and escape. Col Theepan, already injured twice, refused to go with them. In a moment reminiscent of the Sinha Rifles's Lt SU Aldeniya at Kokavil, Army sigint intercepted Theepan's radio call sign, Tango Papa, telling Pottu Amman that he would come out of the pocket only when his fighters did.

With Bhanu's escape, the Charles Anthony and the Tiger brass in its midst were doomed. The Army moved in heavy support weapons, artillery and multiple-barrel rocket launchers. An estimated 30,000 shells were fired on April 4th alone, and in short breaks in the near continuous bombardment, Army psyops units used loudspeakers to call in Tamil to the LTTE to surrender; and throughout the three-day siege, 116 Tigers gave themselves up.

By the 5th, the battle was over. Col Theepan and at least 625 Tigers were dead. Around twenty injured Tigers were captured alive when Army infantry moved in, including Maj Anbu, 2/ic of the special operations Radha Regt, and Lt Col Asmi, CO of the Ponnammam mining unit. Many of the LTTE corpses were unidentifiable, blown to pieces by artillery or burnt beyond recognition by white phosphorous rounds.

Regardless of your standpoint, it is impossible to look at this battle without admiration. A courageous last stand by warriors battling overwhelming odds. It's been a long war, and the Tigers are often perceived to be brainwashed animals with nothing to exonerate them. It is easy for those removed from the battlefield to forget that there is no shortage of courage on either side. As a former soldier, I can say without reservation, that Aanandapuram will go down in the annals of this conflict alongside such heroic last stands as the holding of the Jaffna Fort in 1990, Lt SU Aldeniya's platoon at Kokavil, and the 6th Sinha Rifles at Elephant Pass.

However, any analysis of a force's bravery in battle is often tempered by its conduct; particularly a force as controversial as the LTTE. One of the most potent fighting forces of the Second World War was Germany's Waffen-SS; their heroic prowess, particularly in the defense of Germany is as legendary as is their infame for the atrocities they committed. And so it will be for the LTTE. We cannot admire Aanandapuram without being disgusted about the Dollar Farms or the Dehiwela train bombing. For instance, Gaddafi, killed at Aanandapuram, once Prabhakaran's bodyguard and commander of the Imran Pandiayan Regt was the very man reported to have brought down a domestic Lionair airliner filled with Tamil civilians in October 1998 as it flew from Palaly to Colombo. Sadly, like the Waffen-SS, the LTTE's fighting units are stained by the terrorism that they fought for. No historian will remember them for their courage, but for the terror that they unleashed on thousands of innocents.

They say it matters not how you live, but only how you die. But I'm not too sure about that. Even Saddam Hussein went to his death unbowed, as the Hammer of the Persians faced the gallows growling defiance at his taunting guards.

What makes this heroic last stand so tragic, however, is that it will achieve nothing. It signals the last breaths of the LTTE as a fighting force, and I cannot help but think what a waste of young lives. Journalist DBS Jeyaraj in his report on the battle says that they "chose to die on their feet instead of living on their knees", but I'd like to think that the Tamils of the northeast would have one day had more use for their lives than their deaths. In the dying days of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler refused to allow Berlin to be evacuated in the face of the approaching Soviets, stating that it was better for the Germanic people to perish rather than be diluted by lesser races. Looking at many of the comments by diaspora members on sites such as DBS Jeyaraj's one gets the feeling that they feel the same way, that all is lost, and a cause is dead.

But they forget that the LTTE is not the true cause, nor is it really Tamil Eelam. The cause is equality. Unfortunately, the LTTE became the cause it once took up, and in doing so has prevented that very cause from being achieved. It's time to look for other ways. There's nothing as tragic as dying for nothing.

So in closing, I will echo DBS Jeyaraj when he quoted Yeats's lines on the Easter Uprising in his rather touching eulogy to Theepan, and say that I personally cannot look at the fallen of Aanandapuram as anything but brave. LTTE corpse at Aanandapuram (TamilWin.com)

Was it for this the wild geese spread  
 The grey wing upon every tide;  
 For this that all that blood was shed,  
 For this Edward Fitzgerald died,  
 And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,  
 All that delirium of the brave:  
 Romantic Ireland's dead and gone  
 It's with O'Leary in the grave.

By David Blacker