

# War Journey

Mankulam camp

Manaluru Jungle

Captain Malaravan

Translated from Tamil





**War Journey**

**By**

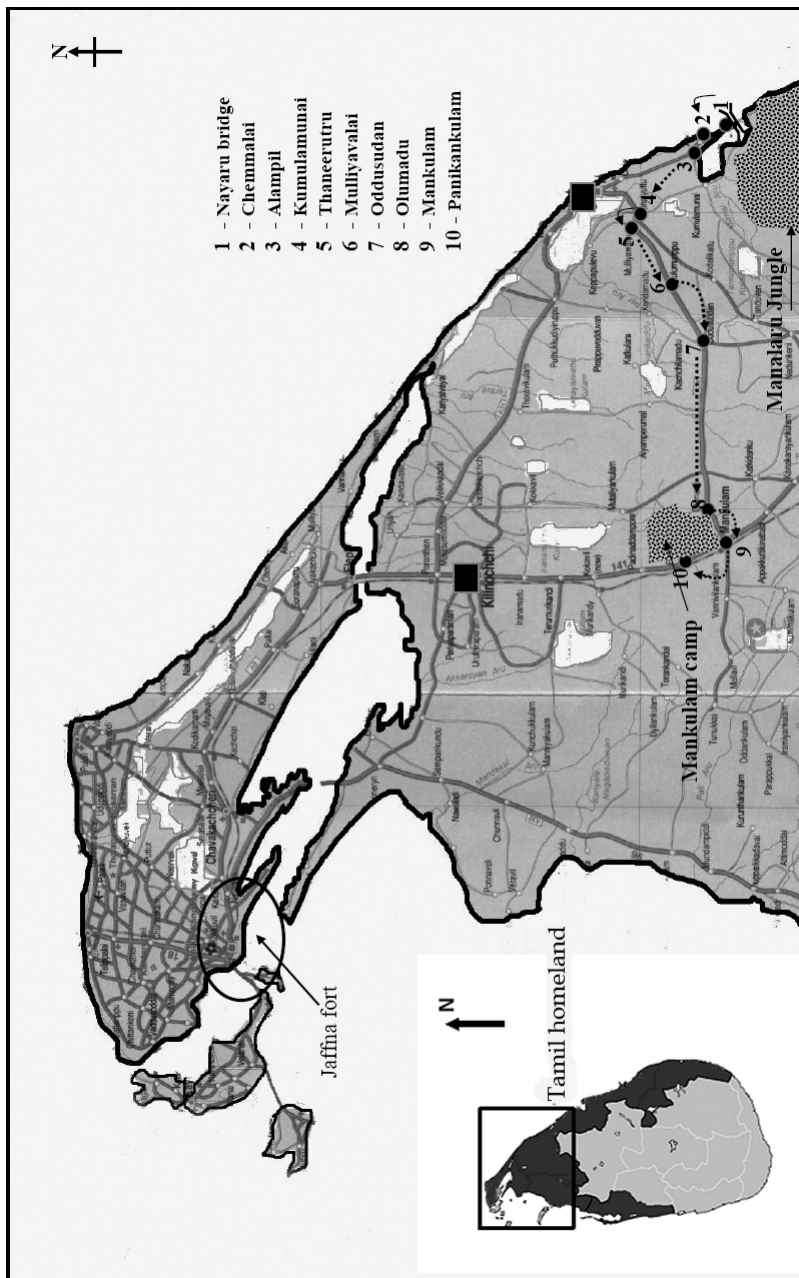
**Captain Malaravan**

**1990**

**Translated from Tamil**

**in 2007**







## **Background**

Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, became an independent country in 1948 after nearly 450 years of being ruled by western nations. Portuguese, Dutch, and British governments ruled this island for approximately 150 years each. The last of them, Britain, left the island with a unitary constitution that has been the cause of much turmoil ever since.

Since independence, the majority Sinhala population (75%) has attempted to dominate and suppress the Tamil community that had existed as an independent nation prior to, and even long after, the arrival of the western colonisers.

Discontent among Tamils increased after several communal riots directed against the Tamil community, denial of language rights by making Sinhala as the only official language, and discrimination in jobs and education. This eventually led to the armed struggle lead by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The armed conflict intensified in 1982. In 1987 India intervened militarily and brought in the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) which ended up fighting against the LTTE. IPKF left the island in 1990 and the fight between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE resumed.

This book is a translation from Tamil of a firsthand account written in 1990 by one Tamil fighter, Captain Malaravan (Leo), who was a member of the LTTE. He wrote this short book in the form of a diary about the journey of his team to the location of a particular battle, the battle of Mankulam in 1990, and the battle itself with the occupying Sri Lankan military. The manuscript for this book was found on his body after he was killed in a subsequent battle in which he was taking part.

Malaravan was twenty years old when he died and he was just nineteen years old when he wrote this book.

Through the diary Malaravan conveys the thought process of a LTTE member, the culture and characteristics of the different communities that form the larger Tamil community, something about the natural environment in which the Tamil community is living, as well as about a battle itself.

The book reveals a lot that has so far not been revealed in reports. The book speaks for itself about the conflict and will hopefully create an interest to learn more.

N Malathy  
Translator



## **Description of terms**

***Porali*** (plural – ***poralis***) is someone waging a struggle against injustice; commonly used in contemporary Tamil community in the island to refer to members of LTTE.

## **Names of poralis appearing frequently**

<b><i>Leo</i></b>	Author
<b><i>Vasanthan</i></b>	Leo's good friend
<b><i>Ithayan</i></b>	
<b><i>Salam</i></b>	Driver
<b><i>David</i></b>	A squadron leader
<b><i>Alahu</i></b>	
<b><i>Master</i></b>	
<b><i>Jeevan</i></b>	

## **Relationship terms in Tamil culture**

<b><i>Amma:</i></b>	Used in the same sense as the word “mum” in English. However in Tamil culture it is also used to refer to any woman who is old enough to be a mother.
<b><i>Appa:</i></b>	Used in the same sense as the word “dad”.
<b><i>Acca:</i></b>	Refers to older sister but is also used to refer to anyone who is old enough to be one's older sister.
<b><i>Anna (i):</i></b>	Refers to older brother but is also used to refer to anyone who is old enough to be one's older brother.
<b><i>Thambi:</i></b>	Refers to younger brother but is also used to refer to anyone who is young enough to be one's younger brother.
<b><i>Iya:</i></b>	Used in the similar sense as “sir”.

## **Other Tamil cultural and nature terms**

***Tanks/lakes:*** Natural rain water catchments that are improved to retain water for irrigation. These were used since ancient times and are a common form of irrigation system in this part of the world.

***Water filled canal:*** These are canals dug out along roads to carry the water from the tanks to the paddy fields. The water supply is controlled by sluice gates.

***Thula:*** This is another form of irrigating fields by drawing water from wells. The system eases the task of drawing water by using a long trunk of the *palmyrah* tree hinged at the middle. A human walks on the trunk to lower the bucket into the well and then walks in the opposite direction on the trunk to lift the bucket filled with water.

***Kanchi:*** Is a poor man's diet of rice water.

***Dowry:*** Dowry is money paid by the bride's family to the newly married couple.

***Thali:*** It is a thick chain commonly made of gold that is put on the bride's neck by the groom. It is removed from the wife when the husband dies.

***Alkaddi:*** Is a bird that nests on the ground and lets out a scream when animals or human threaten its eggs. Its scream usually gives away the movement of people and therefore useful during battles. The term literally means "giving away the whereabouts of people".

## **Sinhala cultural terms**

***Baila*** - a popular form of song and dance among Sinhalese.

## **Military terms**

***LMG:*** Light Machine Gun

***Pouch:*** A vest with pockets to hold ammunitions

***Carlcustov:*** More sophisticated RPG (Rocket Propelled Gun).

***Bren:*** Brand name for a type of machine gun.

***GPMG:*** General Purpose Machine Gun.

***L3:*** Double barrel machine gun.

***G3:*** Assault Rifle

***T81:*** Chinese assault rifle.



# 1. Adios jungle, adios friend

November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1990

The cold November air whistled past. Rushing clouds cut off the milky light of the moon. The moon, however, persisted in peeping out to smile. Dark clouds gathered at the far end of the eastern sky. Scattered stars twinkled. Occasionally night birds flew by. An *alkaddi* screamed eerily as it flew past.

“Our appa always says that an *alkaddi*’s scream is a bad omen. Once, when his father was leaving home an *alkaddi* screamed as it flew past. My grandmother tried to stop him but he was too drunk to listen to her. The next day, early in the morning, people from the neighbouring village brought back his body. Something apparently pulled him off his cart and had beaten him to death”, Vasanthan said very seriously.

“Your father has told you this tale, knowing well that you are a fool. If you tell this story to other people they will tease the hell out of you”, Ithayan began.

“Vasanthan is telling me this story. Why are you teasing him?” I butted in. Vasanthan, however, calmed down only after having a swipe at Ithayan with the stick he had picked up.

The tractor we were travelling in left the open road and started along a forest path. Everyone held their stomachs. “It will be like driving on a railway track from now on”, laughed Salam, the driver.

This fellow is a sadist. He deliberately drives recklessly to see us scream in pain”, Vasanthan said helplessly.

The forest roads were made with tree trunks placed lengthwise. To stop the trunks from being washed away by rain, wooden logs were placed across the road and the spaces in between were filled with soil and rammed in. Roads built like this must be renovated each year after the rainy season is over. This may sound easy but the work involved is back breaking. Clearing the forest for the road in itself is a big task. Then trees must be cut into pieces and carried to the road. Then soil must be cut in places where they have formed into a mound and carried in baskets. All the time we will be carrying our guns and our pouches.

All the poralis will be soaked in sweat. This kind of work under the burning sun is extremely tough. Our leader will encourage us by saying, “What to do? It is our road. We are the ones who must build it and repair it.” He will join in with the work too.

Even during such exhausting work, Ithayan will be clowning about. At times, others will give Ithayan a sand bath. When the sand sticks to his sweaty body he looks pretty pathetic.

The tractor shook. It was making a persistent “dong ..dong” sound.

“God, why the hell are you driving so rough? Why can’t you drive slower?” This is Vasanthan’s plea. Salam’s loud laughter came in reply.

“Judging by his laughter, it looks like he has decided to turn us inside out”, this is the irritated voice of Ithayan.

We could see the other tractors that were following us at a distance. The one driven by David annai had only one head light. It could be seen from afar.

I felt a pang of pain looking at the large *parlai* and *veera* trees. As they swayed in the wind, they appeared to be asking, “Why are you leaving us?”

This is such a big forest. It had protected us like a mother all this time. When will we come back to it? Unable hold myself back, I raised my hand and waved goodbye.

“What are you doing?” asked Vasanthan. He must have thought my brain had gone mushy with all the shaking in the tractor.

“Oh, nothing”, I said as I flicked the tears that were forming in my eyes. It fell on the red sand – the land soaked with our sweat.

Ithayan was dozing off, all the while holding up the light. I loosened my pouches and held up my T-58. Clouds were whizzing past over our heads.

The tractor stopped at the camp at the end of the forest. Salam spoke to the porali on guard at the sentry post and took off at high speed.

“Salam, stop the tractor. Vasanthan has fallen off. Idiot, what kind of driving are you doing?”

Ithayan, yelling at the driver, got off and ran to the front of the tractor. Salam looked very worried. Before Salam could ask

what had happened, Ithayan appeared at the front standing on the mudguard of the tractor.

“Start the tractor”, he shouted.

Salam realized in that second that Ithayan had fooled him. Defeated Salam laughed as he put his foot on the accelerator. The tractor took off like a jeep.

“These two idiots together are going to finish us off”, Vasanthan sizzled. He was also angry that his name was used in their skit.

Nayaru Bridge appeared at a distance like a large squatting animal.

“Buddy, when the Indians were here, we couldn’t come anywhere near this place. If we did, our skulls would be blown to smithereens”, remembered Vasanthan.

“However, we did give them a good beating here”, I reminded him.

“A lot of them were killed, weren’t they?” Vasanthan raised the fact as a question.

“Yes, twenty six army men died. We captured twenty one weapons. Carlcustav, Bren were all captured”, I remembered.

Just before climbing into a road, Salam drove the tractor through a flooded hole. The big tires splashed muddy water on Vasanthan and me. When Salam started to laugh, I really got angry.



“You mad man. See, the rifle has got wet”, I yelled at him.

“Sorry, I won’t do it again”, apologized Salam.

Vasanthan spit the muddy water out of his mouth.

A large black cloud hid the moon like a screen. The sky appeared empty.

“Look.” A shooting star shone bright and disappeared.

“What is it?” I tested Vasanthan.

“This is what people call a shooting star. One should not look at one of these and if you do, then as remedy, you should look at any kind of tree that oozes milky sap”, saying this Vasanthan looked for such tree to rest his eyes on.

But, there were no trees as far as the eyes could see. Vasanthan who grew up in a village is influenced by such superstitions.

“That is rubbish. It is called an asteroid”, explained Ithayan.

Vasanthan was not prepared to accept this reasoning. I managed to change the subject. Somehow the conversation drifted to home.

Salam’s speed reduced as the tractor climbed the Nayaru Bridge. The box like weapon we were sitting on is very heavy. It is hard to pull. The tractor was struggling under its weight. We could see David annai’s tractor turning the bend as ours climbed uphill.

Vasanthan had become my best friend. He confides everything in me. It is a kind of liberty assumed among fellow poralis.

Vasanthan began talking about his family.

“Appa, amma, grandpa, two younger brothers and three older sisters: that is my family. As way back as I can remember, appa used to drink. Although he will not drink everyday, once a week he will come with a large pot. He will be really excited about pouring the toddy into the holder made of *palmyrah* leaf and drinking off it.

He makes promises that he will not drink again but soon after the promise he will go to the toddy vendor. I cannot forget those days”, Vasanthan sighed. “I had all these thoughts bottled up in my mind and I felt like letting them out today”.

I was surprised to see the tears in Vasanthan’s eyes. “Why are you crying after talking about such a cosy family”, I asked truly confused.

“No, the troubles started after this. Grandpa got cancer. Appa was arrested by the army with the accusation that weapons were buried in his tobacco plot. After six or seven days we identified his body by the earring he was wearing. The army had burnt him using tires.” Vasanthan was looking far away now.

“I joined the movement after that. Amma is paralyzed below the waist after the Indian army shot her. My accas work at the vegetable plot for money to survive.”

One tractor wheel started to jump as it rotated.

“Boy, stop the tractor. Looks as if the tire has a problem”, I said.

The tractor stopped with a jerk.

The nuts holding the tire were broken. Only five of the eight nuts were in place.

“Let’s go slow.” Salam changed the gear.

The tractor started to crawl.

“A lot of Tamils lived in these parts. Everything was destroyed by bombs. How many boats and fishing nets they would have burnt. Most of the people have now displaced. Only a few are still here. They support us a great deal”, Vasanthan said.

At a distance, derelict huts, with palm leaf roofs, in a state of decay, could be seen. Some of the huts stood upside down. The odd stems of the decayed palm leaves moved in the wind. Under the moon light they appeared like some animals moving.

“Look there”, pointed Vasanthan. “This is the way to tiny water holes where rain water collects. People survive by fishing in them. What can people do, if they cannot go to sea to fish?”

Along the edge of the water hole big flames on sticks glowed in the dark. Suddenly one man threw a net. Another man was pulling the net he had cast earlier. As we sped past, people along the edge of the lake began to disappear. Their tormented faces stuck in my mind. Entire families were forced to come to this water hole to catch whatever they could. The level of poverty that has struck these people dawned on me.

“Salam, switch off the lights!” Vasanthan who was watching the sky suddenly shouted.

When Vasanthan shouted a second time, Salam switched off the lights.

“What is the matter buddy, is it a helicopter? Look carefully”, said Salam.

I used the torch to send the signal and all five tractors behind us were darkened.

A helicopter passed the moon in the sky. He must have noticed the lights switching off. He suddenly turned back and started to circle. We all took our weapons and other stuff, crossed the road and ran. David annai ordered us to take our positions. I turned on the walkie-talkie and, with the porali with GPMG rifle, went behind a tree.

After a second circle, the helicopter began to dip. He started operating his 50 calibre machine gun and bullets roared past. Some hit the ground and exploded. David annai started to give his orders.

“If he comes down give him one hundred with the big one”, he ordered.

Something suddenly whirred with a “Bum...” noise.

“Buddy, Para has made a hit, all lie down. If he sees us, that will be the end. If you can then move forward”, said David annai.

Salam who was standing behind a sand mound ran for the tractor. The helicopter started to pump five inch artillery shells. Smoke rose from the loud bangs. Earth shook. Salam started the tractor and pressed the accelerator. The helicopter descended towards the tractor on the road. He seemed to be thinking that it would be easy to fire at the tractor from behind. I shouted orders and the GPMG rifle began to spit fire. The enemy did not expect this. The helicopter immediately rose up all the while firing 50 calibre shells.

“They got caught badly”, laughed Nesan.

The GPMG rifle barrel was red hot. He started to pick up the links used to hold the rifle bullets that have fallen off.

I remembered the words of our training master Selvarasa, “We are not a State military. We are poralis. We do not have a lot of resource. We must be very frugal. Every bullet we use must kill an occupying enemy soldier. We must avoid wasteful use of weapons”.

The tractor continued its journey. We were all scanning the skies in readiness. The helicopter could return or else they might try to place hurdles in some other way. A van came fast and stopped beside us. Salam pulled the tractor to a side to accommodate the van. Ramesh appa, our political head for the district, was seated in the passenger seat in front.

“How was the helicopter strafing?” I queried.

“One 5 inch shell killed one and injured two among those who were fishing at the water hole.” With that reply he sped off.

For a moment I thought of our district political heads and the senior politicians. I also remembered the family that was fishing at the water hole. A tear drop fell on the rifle magazine. I shook my mood off and observed the road.

Huge coconut estates were spread all over the fertile soil of Alampil. These coconut estates will give enough income for us. It was scary to see the coconut tree tops. They were spread like umbrellas and seemed to be struggling to carry the large bunch of coconuts. Here and there, canopies of other large trees looked as if they were hills hanging in the sky. Water filled the canals and rushed past. As the rushing water hit little rocks and jumped over, the moonlight reflected on the water droplets turning them into white pearls. The play of the rushing water tranquilized the mind. Water plants flourishing along the canals moved in the wind filling the senses.

At the Alampil junction the tractor tuned into Kumulamunai road.

“Buddy, drive carefully, the road is not that good, it can topple the vehicle”, said Vasanthan, as he turned behind and looked at the sky.

The moon has come out of the clouds and its light filled the entire space.

Along both sides of the Kumulamunai road, the paddy fields were full and overflowing with young green paddy shoots. Canals filled with water snaked through the fields. An *alkaddi* overtook us as it flew with its eerie scream.

“Does it never stop? My Grandpa used to tell me that a screaming *alkaddi* will not live for much longer. It screams for

its mate and will fall somewhere and die. I never asked Grandpa how all these *alkaddi*'s are still flying. I wish I did and put Grandpa on the spot”.

Six or seven *palmyrah* trees stood alone at a distance.

Time is 11.52 at night. It will take at least two days to reach the destination. Vasanthan stroked the T-8 deep in thought.

It is the bend on the straight Kumulamunai road. A *narval* tree leaned over the road with fat roots. Salam put both hands on the steering wheel and expertly turned. He turned cautiously. Those hands were practiced at this. His body turned with his hands. Surely it cannot be that much of turn for Salam to be working that hard to turn. Why is he turning so much? Signs of desperation were showing in Salam's body. He yelled, fear stricken, sweat running down his face.

“Jump all of you, jump from behind, the steering rod is broken.”

I was at the back. I jumped in a big leap. As I jumped I turned back to look. Vasanthan was dozing off, no, no; he was in a deep trance.

“Vasanthan, jump man, tractor is going to hit something”, gathering all the energy in the body I yelled.

It echoed on the trees in all direction. The trees shook once. The moon cried once. Birds on treetops flew shouting. Cows in the shed mooed. *Alkaddies* chased one another. A peacock screamed. Villagers woke up. A drop of blood splattered on me. As the tractor went over the roots of the *narval* tree, the heavy trailer, behind, toppled on to the roadside. I ran towards

it, yelling, “Vasanth, Vasanth” as before. Salam and Ithayan were struggling to rescue our buddy, our soul mate. Vasanth was struggling for breath. It was a frightening sight.

We struggled to pull him out. I then turned towards the villagers’ huts and shouted half crying.

“Won’t someone come and help to rescue my Vasanth.....”. My scream tore through the wind and the gates and woke up an amma, appa, acca and anna. “Please come, please come”, I kept yelling.

In that beautiful hut with thatched roof, Vasanthan was lying on the only mattress. He was half conscious. His right hand hung below the shoulder and his left hand, crushed, hung below the elbow. He breathed heavily. The two pillows under each arm, all the pillows in the hut, were soaked in blood. The amma took the tea cup from the acca’s hand and brought it to Vasanthan’s lips. The old appa went to the cow to get some milk for Vasanthan.

David annai changed the antenna on his walkie-talkie and called for another vehicle.

In the meantime a medical student in the village performed first aid on Vasanthan and gave him a Valium injection. This calmed him. My friend, who was always beside me and slept beside me, is now lying on the battleground. He started to talk to the acca sitting quietly. I wondered why he has started to talk all of a sudden.

“Acca, acca”, his voice dragged out.

“Yes, what is it thambi?”



“You look very much like my acca Viththi. What will my acca be doing now? She will be sleeping next to my little brother. They will be struggling with the daily work in the vegetable fields. All the trouble is due to the army, the Sinhalese..... Although my appa drinks, he is a good man. Aiyo....”, he moaned in pain.

The dog in the front yard slowly began to howl. Its howl pierced the soul. The tiny coconut oil lamp struggled to stay alive. An insect fell on the flame, briefly making it brighter. It fell into the oil and died.

A vehicle sound floated past. The vehicle picked up Vasanthan and started to move again at speed. I was supporting Vasanthan; he was weak due to heavy loss of blood. I stroked his rough cheeks and tried to say goodbye.

He cried, “Leo please, do not leave me”.

My heart followed the vehicle till it disappeared.

## 2. Kumulamunai people

10 November

We took off to Kumulamunai in the vehicle that had just arrived. Time was 5.35am. Such big forests. The seasonal rain water was flowing in big canals, made by nature.

“Rain water flows like this in these areas. Sometimes it flows over the roads. These floods can even topple big trees”. The driver appeared to have guessed that I am not from this area.

The driver stopped with a sudden break near a bridge. “Look, there is a crocodile lying on the log”, he pointed.

“Where?” I couldn’t see properly.

“On top of that big tree trunk”, he pointed.

A big crocodile was lying along the tree trunk, camouflaged.

“It will stay like this. When prey, a goat or a cow, comes near by, that is it. When I was small, one day our cows and calves were out grazing. They went to drink water in the midday sun. A crocodile took away one of the calves. When all the other cows came back to their shed these two, cow and calf, were missing. Appa sent anna and me to look for them. We looked everywhere but couldn’t find them. When we went near the water hole, we heard the cow’s mournful cry. We went there and found the cow.

Anna put the rope round its neck and pulled it. It refused to come. We went and told appa. He came with two more people and dragged it home”.

“What happened then?” I asked.

“What else. The cow refused to eat and after sometime it died”. Vasanthan’s mother came in my mind’s eye. Like the cow mother’s waiting for her offspring without eating. Will Vasanthan’s mother also ..... No, no. I consoled myself.

I suddenly realized that we had come a long way from that bridge.

The vehicle passed several villages and entered the Mulliyavalai village. The morning dew was still hanging in the air. Visibility was poor. The vehicle was forced to move slowly. Along the road the lanterns of the tea shops glowed. Their yellow light came intermittently through the mist.

We stopped at a tea shop in Mulliyavalai and had a hot cup of tea. The shop owner’s face reflected his dislike of seeing customers with blood stained shirts. I remembered the amma who gave tea to Vasanth and we got back into the vehicle.

The bund of the Murippu tank came into visibility at a distance. On this side were huge spreads of paddy fields, like green silk, wherever one looks.

The herons in the paddy fields rose up as the farmers’ plough neared them. Something suddenly gave me a fright. A sad howling noise; it is the *alkaddi*; it crossed the road and flew away. We got off the vehicle but the *alkaddi*’s voice was still ringing in my head.

“Buddy, I need a sleep. Wake me up at noon”, I told my friends and spread the sack under a *parlai* tree, used my bag of books for a pillow, and fell asleep.

I woke up with a fright at 12.30pm. To my surprise several school children had surrounded us. Ithayan and Salam were entertaining them. The children persisted with their characteristic non-stop questioning. One little girl dug at her brother.

“Anna, how do you shoot this? Our appa’s gun is long like a log, not like this one”.

“That is a different type girl. Appa’s is a shot gun. You can shoot only once with it. This can shoot all these bullets in one go”.

All the children looked at the boy who answered.

“Can we look at the bullets?”

“Look at it and give it back”. Ithayan removed the magazine, took one bullet and stretched it towards the children. The children looked at it eagerly.

“I want one like this”.

“Not now. You can have one when you are grown up”.

“How many army did you shoot?”

“Why do you shoot the army; poor army isn’t it?”

“Then why did the army shoot my uncle and grandpa?”

“Who told you that army shot them?”

“Army shot them when I was little and lying in my amma’s lap. Army came inside the house and shot them. Amma also got injured hands. My uncle used to take me to the shop and buy sweets. Once when I was sick, he went and brought the doctor at midnight. That is what amma told me”.

“Yes, I cry a lot. Amma used to tell me not to cry. Amma said when I am grown up I must shoot the army. Will the army take me too before I grow up?”

Tears swelled in my eyes. Ithayan embraced the child.

“Why are we here? We will certainly kill them”. Ithayan’s words were heated, the frightened child pulled back. Ithayan pulled the child and embraced her again. Salam yawned.

“Anna, when did you eat?”

I wondered if the tradition of asking “what did you eat?” has changed now to asking “when did you eat?”

“Didn’t eat since last night”, Salam said using sign language. Greedy man!

The children looked at our weapons for a long time and then said goodbye and left. We waved our hands till they disappeared like butterflies. We saw an amma carrying a pot of water on her hips accompanied by a little girl with a bag. Sun was hot and the pair was walking without foot wear.

“What are we going to do for food buddy?”

“Try calling on the walkie-talkie. I doubt there will be food. Probably will have to starve today. I know it is hard for you after eating three good meals a day in the forest”, Ithayan started to have a dig at Salam.

Salam, already hungry, threw a stick at Ithayan.

“That amma is coming towards us”.

The amma put the pot down exhausted and smiled fondly at us.

“Sons, all of you look tired. You all look as if you did not sleep last night. Wash your hands in the pot water and eat. It is not good for your health to go without sleep and food”, amma smiled as if she knew everything. The little girl put the bag down and went to look at our weapons.

“Careful little one, it will explode”.

“No it won’t”, the little one laughed.

“Have you eaten?”

“Not yet. You eat first, I will eat later”.

“No. Let us all eat together”.

Ithayan picked up the little one and put her on his lap. She had just got back from school and had only had a drink of water.

Amma mixed the food into small balls and placed it in our hands. We finished the food. Yoghurt and ghee, smell was heavenly.

“Excellent, wonderful.” This was Salam.

Once the stomach was satisfied, Salam became curious.

“What are amma’s children doing?”

“Eldest is with you all. This is the second one. That is all”, she said.

Five or six more ammas came to us with food. We struggled and begged them to stop.

Is this the food of love? I didn’t know. By 6.30pm half of Kumulamunai village waved us goodbye as our vehicle moved on, less Vasanthan.

Unwilling to sit in the trailer, I went and sat in front on the mudguard.

The vehicle shook and started to move, increasing in speed. I looked behind. I wondered if Vasanthan would have been taken to Jaffna. I was sure Vasanthan would be fighting in the upcoming battle in the frontline. Could he have died? No, no, I didn’t think so. All three of us were quiet as the wheels swallowed the distance. The sun started to disappear in the west. The sky looked as if it was painted red. But the painter was careless; his brush had touched the white clouds, giving the clouds a red tinge. Paint drops must have fallen into the water puddles among the fields because they too were slightly reddened.

A white heron flew in the reddened wind. Herds of cows were returning home. A calf kept at her mother's udder annoying her. I couldn't look. Something hurt inside.

"Buddy, stop next to that man with the gun".

The vehicle slowed and stopped. They looked like a father and son pair. The Iya looked 70. His son may have been 45. They were standing outside their home chatting to their family.

"What can we do for you boy?" the Iya asked.

"Oh nothing. Our water-can tipped. We stopped to check it", I replied.

"Bloody liar", Ithayan mumbled.

I fiddled with the tank and listened to what the family were saying.

"When will you come back?" the amma asked. She must be the wife of the Iya.

"Thankam, we have to leave now in a hurry. We can't be sure when we will be back. Have you got everything you need at home?"

"Yes, everything is here. Our grandson has been running a fever for two days. I am worried about him".

"If there is an emergency call the man next door, he will help. I will tell him about it before I leave".

The daughter-in-law came out from the house.



“What did you cook?” the son asked his wife.

“Puttu and fish curry. I cooked your favorite”.

He looked at his wife fondly.

“Our son’s fever is not going down. If you come back quickly, we can take him to the doctor at Mulliyavalai”.

“Amma, little one has vomited”, this is the eldest daughter of the old couple.

“Appa, wait a minute”, said the old man’s son and he ran inside and picked up his little son, his wife standing next to him. He gave a kiss to the child and gave the child to his wife.

“I will be back soon. But do not wait for me. Go quickly and get the medicine”.

“Appa, how many army will you shoot this time?” the child asked his father.

“We don’t keep count boy. I will shoot every army and thug that comes here as long as I have life in my body”.

“If there is no life in your body?” the child queried.

“Why do you think you are here? If I die, you must shoot them. If you don’t they will take or destroy all our things. You will then be living at the mercy of someone else.”

“Then why didn’t you teach me to shoot?”

“If you shoot, the gun will pull you with it. When you are bigger you can learn.” He turned to his wife. “We will be going. Take the boy and get the medicine”.

Father and son walked closer to us. We offered to give them a ride.

“Keep talking to the Iya. I will go and get some water”, I said walked towards the house.

“Amma, water”, I said and the older girl took our can inside and immediately came running back.

“Amma, the mother cow is not in the shed. All the others are there.”

Mother put the hands on the girl’s mouth and silenced her.

“Don’t shout when appa is just leaving; we will go and look, come”.

A white cow came along the road with its calf and passed me.

“Oh, they are here” The boy ran to them, put his hands around her neck and began kissing the cow. The cow licked the boy back. The calf brushed its body against the boy.

I took the can of water, thinking about this boy’s determination to protect his motherland for this love. I wondered about the people in this sacred land that connects the north and the east of the Tamil homeland.

I could hear the old man talking.

“We have been fighting the Sinhalese for the last 50 years. They came to Chemmalai and we beat them back. We rescued our people who were tied up. We burnt down the settler’s huts. When police came we hid in the jungles. They took four of our people and charged them in courts but they were released.” He paused, “Later, it was the army that tormented our people and chased them. Stop here, we will get off”.

Both the father and son started to walk through the paddy fields. I looked at Ithayan and we smiled. Before we joined our armed revolution, these older folk had been fighting the Sinhalese who tried to split the Tamil homeland into two pieces. Had our politicians of that time supported these brave men, it would have made a big difference. Had our politicians guided them along a revolutionary path, our land would be free.

Our journey continued with my thoughts and the vehicle speeding away.

### 3. My tortured home

10 November.

The moonlight had started to spread. Stars twinkled. Our journey continued through it all. The roads were in a very poor condition. Since ours was the vehicle that needed to be repaired the most, we sent all the other vehicles in front and we were going very slowly.

Vasanthan had taken over my thoughts. Salam drove quietly avoiding pot holes and water puddles. We passed Murippu and went over big bridges. We were now driving through the Poothan rice fields towards Thaneerutru.

“Buddy, this is the Katpahapillaiyar temple. I used to come here a lot in my young days. An old man used to conduct bajans here every Friday”, I said.

We went past the co-operative shop and the rice mill and our vehicle went over a big water canal. I pointed to a place.

“This is where we were living. It is exciting to see the place after so many years. That Neem tree hosts scores of monkeys. I used to be very scared when I was young. Appa and his friends used to sit in the front porch and chat”.

We passed the Mulliyavalai Vidhyananda College and continued. I thought of the Manalaru people. We must give a good beating on the Maveerar day. We must create a situation where the enemy cannot stay in our land anymore.

Ithayan and I complained that we were sleepy.

“Do you know what will happen if I fall asleep?” Salam said with a smile. He pointed to the big water canal next to the road which was full of water.

“Good grief, we can’t let this fellow fall asleep”, Ithayan said

“What is this buddy; they have put a banner here”, he continued.

“This is Oddusuddan police station, the army was here earlier”, I replied

“When were they beaten away?”

“In 1990”.

“Wasn’t this place beaten by our boys earlier as well?”

“Yes, in 1985. That too was a good beating. We captured a lot of rifles. Saba annai and Lawrence annai lead the attack”.

Signs of army occupation were still visible. Walls were damaged and in some parts walls were completely destroyed. A damaged board said “Military remand camp”.

“Slow down buddy, let us have a look”, I said

I began explaining the camp layout to my friends.

“I know this camp a little. In 1986, my brother was arrested and kept here. I was small then. I would come here with amma and cry. This is the main entrance. They would open this gate only for their big vehicles. See that big tree there? That is the first sentry post. Those days they used trees and bricks rather

than sand bags to build sentry posts. Sometimes they watch from trees.

The next sentry on the other side of the road will be posted at the Muthaiyankaddu junction. In between, the road will be deliberately dug out to make pot holes. At some places they will put drums to block the road. The big water tank turned upside down and sitting on the ground was one of tallest things that were around. They had sand bags on it and there will be an observation sentry there. You can see all around from there. If they see anyone, they will come at you like hunting dogs. Look at all these buildings.

One wouldn't know in which building the enemy will be hiding. There will be barbed wire fences around it. That will be surrounded again with rolls of barbed wire. After that there will be trenches".

Then remembering one incident of torture that I witnessed, I described to the others.

"It was the fourth day after the army took my brother. It was 6.00am. We came here on the early morning bus. It was cold. We were inquiring at the sentry, when we saw him. There was this bed made of barbed wire fixed six inches from ground on poles. A boy was made to lie on it face down and he was tied to it. The boy was very still. A little later, seven or eight people came. One of them in the middle was big. He put his boots on the back of the boy. The boy screamed. Buddy, even the elephant wouldn't scream so loud".

The big man stood on the boy's body and grabbed his hair and pulled it. The big man acted like he was riding a horse. I can't describe the way the boy screamed. He then let go of his hair

and got hold of his forehead and pulled the boy backwards. The boy's cry, "Amma" was half dead. His broken neck hung like that of rooster with broken neck. He didn't move after that. Blood started to drip underneath the barbed wire. Amma quickly dragged me away but I looked back. Two people removed him from the barbed wire and took him away. Blood was dripping from his body. His broken neck was hanging. That is when I saw another fifteen people within an area fenced off with barbed wire. They were all being beaten with logs. Amma dragged me and ran out. The sentry whistled and laughed as we ran out. How can I forget?"

I went near the barbed wire to look. I am not sure if it was blood but there were red dried bits on the barbed wire. I kicked the wire angrily and took Ithayan and walked away. Buildings were standing upside down. A name board of the LTTE smiled at us in the moon. We paid our respect to the Maveerar memorial at the junction.

We turned into a narrow lane. "Stop in the thick jungle, it will be day light soon", I said.

Salam started to look for a small entry into the thick jungle.

"Stop here".

Salam reversed and stopped in a perfect spot not visible to the road. We were all cold in the clothes that had got wet in the rain. We had not eaten since 6.00pm yesterday. It is 3.20am. We didn't even have a hot cup of tea. All three of us, Salam, Ithayan and me, were affected by it.

There was a strange noise coming from Ithayan.

“What the hell is the matter?” I asked.

We shone the torch light. A red ant nest has fallen and the ants had got disturbed. They spread over Ithayan’s body and were biting him, dying in the process.

“Come outside and take off your shorts”.

All three of us were brushing the ants off his body. Ithayan looked pathetic. All his friends back in his village will be asleep now. What does that say about Ithayan? Has life betrayed him? No. History showed him the way to live. He must live here so the future generation can breathe freely. Jungle is his protection. This is his joy.

“What are you thinking buddy? Let us sleep outside”.

Both of us lay down. Ithayan was in misery. He was moaning for a long time with the pain of ant bites. My sentry duty came up. I picked up the rifle, dropped the sleep and started the sentry. The cold pierced through the polythene coat.

The moonlight started to fade. Clouds hurried away. The sky slept. Mild noises indicated some activity now and then. A peacock called. I heard something familiar far away. My heart longed for something. Yes, it is the *alkaddi*. It must be searching for its mate.

I was suddenly taken aback by the noises nearby. The noise was getting nearer. A bad smell filled the air.

“Salam, buddy, something is coming. Looks like an elephant.”



About seventy five meters away, a black hill stood blocking the lane. The two eyes sparkled in the dark. I could hear the elephant's tail swaying to chase away the flies. It turned towards our side, and lifted its trunk.

“Buddy, we can't run away now, it is too close. Wake up Ithayan, then run to the tractor, start it and focus the light on its eyes”.

I loaded the T-81 and cocked it ready to shoot a single bullet. In the tractor light, the eyes sparkled even more. It started moving towards the light.

“It is dangerous now. You run with Ithayan, I will see to this”, I told Salam.

It came nearer and nearer. Killing wild animals will damage our natural resources. Our trainer in the forest had told us several times to be cautious about killing wild life. I ran fast behind Salam. But we weren't going to make it. Bang. A bullet went over the elephant's head. It paused and then trumpeted and started chasing us even faster. I had to now. Had to shoot. Ithayan had fallen over a log and he let out a scream and Salam helped to pull him back. The elephant was just forty five meters away. I aimed for its forehead. It fell down like a black hill. I sighed and felt sad. Salam started his sentry duty. As the morning arrived, and birds began singing, I fell asleep.

11 November

I was woken up at 9.30am. We contacted the nearby camp by walkie-talkie and food arrived. Bread was sticky and the curry tasted strange. Salam's face showed it all.

“You know annai; you are far away from our camp. Breakfast will arrive here only at 11.00am. This is last night’s dinner”, said the porali who brought the food.

I took a bite of the bread and poured the water from the can into the cup. I could see bits floating in the water.

“Do you have water problems?” I asked.

“Yes annai, the well is very deep and some how the green water fungus spreads in the well. This water is boiled, cooled and filtered; still get a few of them floaters though.”

“Ok, that is alright. Do you have contact with David annai?”

“Yes, he made contact at 8.10am in the morning. Finish your food and come, let us go. People won’t come here. There are sentries around. They won’t let anyone in”.

We hid the ‘big item’ under bushes where there will be no movement of people. We climbed into the truck brought by the porali and sped towards Mankulam.

Easan pointed to the tall stick like thing and laughed saying, “This is his tower”. As we got closer, we could see that it was held straight with several tight ropes stretched in all directions. The tractor turned slowly into a lane.

“Can we not go straight on the main road?”

“If you go there won’t even be small pieces of you left. Beyond that curve everything is his target. He will shoot even a dog that strays there.”

The lane was in bad shape. “Can’t we go along this?”

“We used to go that way. One day they fired at our jeep. Five people were injured. So now we have orders not to take vehicles. One can walk though.”

The truck stopped in front of a camp. Time was 2.30pm. We had lunch. Jeevan came and took us around the camp. Three of us were together and Ithayna’s face started to show happiness. It was hard to say if the pain of the ant bites had gone or he was just ignoring it. His wound after last night’s fall was covered in dried blood. His pants were ripped. We walked along the main road. The houses were all damaged by the shelling and bombing.

One hut was totally burnt down. The clay pots and pans were in pieces and burnt, lying scattered. A saree on the fence was badly faded and shredded. It depicted the haste with which its owners would have run away.

A mango tree was burnt and dead on one side. The other side of the tree was sprouting new shoots. It must have been an aerial bomb. On top of the ash heap in the front yard, new green grass shoots were coming out. How is that possible? I was surprised. After a rain, the birds must have dropped the seeds.

Next to the hut a bigger house with its roof destroyed looked bright with the day light shining through the roof. A coconut tree with its top chopped, hung onto its trunk.

An enemy’s camp can cause many problems. Militarily, these camps restrict our movement. The enemy then implements a strategy of harassment. They costs us lives and ammunition.

That is not all.

There are political effects too. The enemy is able to boast that he controls the economic life of the civilians because of this camp. These camps cause economic problems to our people. Displacement also causes economic losses. In their new places, the displaced are forced to start all over again. Their energies are wasted. So much of cultivable lands are unused because of these camps. The displaced languish without land. Due to multiple upheavals, people have been unable to develop their skills in agriculture. The camps also block transportation routes. This has an economic cost as longer routes are taken. These economic embargoes cannot be the foundations of Tamileelam. We cannot permit these to continue.

There are cultural impacts too. Many camps are built around temples. The temple walls provide cover.

“This is Mankulam Mahavidhyalayam.”

Jeevan pointed to the school. The big school stood without much damage. The grass on the playground had grown up to waist level. Soon this will become a jungle.

Oh! My dearest little brothers and sisters, where are you all? We know that the enemy does not like your young feet stepping into schools. He doesn't want to see you carrying books. The enemy is bent on destroying the backbone of the Tamil community; education.

I know you will be huddled somewhere in a little hut or a building to avoid the rain. But you will be drenched because the huts have only coconut palm leaf roofs which will be

thoroughly decayed. You will not be eating lunch. Your little stomachs will be in pain due to hunger.

Come here again in a few days. Wash your tiny feet in these water tanks. I will come like a big wave looking for you. Put your feet in this school. I will take your feet from the earth. I will embrace you like a breeze while you are studying.

We cautiously studied the enemy's setup. "Bang..bang". Bullets went over our heads.

"Buddy lie down. He has seen us. He is firing from the Tamarind tree over there. He will fire for a short time and then he will get down."

"Come let us go but keep low."

Jeevan ran in front and we followed. "BOOM". A shell fell on the spot where we were lying down.

Our man at the security post said laughingly, "He is angry because we cut off his supplies. For one week we fired 50 calibre shots preventing the supply helicopter from landing. He is angry".

We began identifying the targets through each security posts. Jeevan pointed to every enemy security post and gave us an explanation.

"The road coming past the 'temple security post' is the Mullaithivu road that comes up here. That thing in the corner is a shop. Next to it is the Buddhist Vihara. Beyond that is his old camp."

In front, a cement wall half eaten by bullets carried the sign, “Army Camp”.

One porali standing next to us laughed, “It is here my father and I were stopped and threatened as we were returning from Manankulam on our way to our home.”

Oh! The child you threatened once, the young shoot you stepped on, the Tamil you teased, is standing with a gun in front of you. His presence is taking you by surprise. How can you understand that it is the occupier who creates a porali. You once gave the blow. Now you are imprisoned. When a fox tries to eat the goat, the goat must turn into a tiger and leap. That is the commandment of the time.

Jeevan continued with his explanations.

“On the other side of the camp is a mango orchard. Inside are eight security posts. Some of them are dummy posts. But we fire at them as well so they don’t know that we know they are dummy posts. Over that way, towards the Laxabana, you can see the mountain security post. Since he is at a good height, he can cover all the open space. I think it could be a 50 calibre or L3”.

The camp certainly was strong. The enemy must have calculated that the large open space surrounding his camp meant that during land movement we would have to take heavy losses.

We have cut off the Thunukkai road just before the junction. Similarly, it looked as if the enemy has done the same in front of his camp. It could be his supply route or it could even be a fake. We had put screens at places where we could see the

enemy in direct view. We were watching through the Tamarind tree at the junction.

“Don’t look at the stretch. He will snipe you”, warned Jeevan.

“What you see at this end is the church. That is the nun’s hostel. Those are houses. All those security posts are protecting the camp on this side. This is what made it possible to land helicopters. The enemy captured this only after the 1990 battle.”

“These security posts appear to be rather close. Can’t they be attacked with RPGs and separated?” I asked.

“It may look like it is close, but they are all well fortified security posts. He has stacked huge quantities of sand bags. There are sandbags even behind the walls. The temple security post is stronger than the others.”

Places of worship stood before us like horrendous enemies. They stood silent, being used for an unjust purpose. *“It is better to be destroyed than to assist the oppressor”*, these words of an unknown philosopher came to my mind. We must capture these two camps at any cost. After that there is no question of helicopters landing. Earlier this camp was only a hundred by two hundred meters. Now it has expanded to a thousand by fifteen thousands meters. Over and above this, the enemy has sowed landmines in the open space.

Four of us walked towards the railway station security post.

“Careful, he fires when we walk past the railway gates. Those sandbags have holes. Bend down and walk.”

As if the enemy heard Jeevan, the machine gun started to spit. “Ah...”. There was no sound after that. We ran. Bullets whizzed past over our heads.

“Gosh..”, David laughed with a sigh and we joined him.

Salam held his leg laughing. “Are you hurt buddy?”

“No, no, it just brushed past.”

Below the knee, some flesh was missing. “Bring that field compressor.”

Jeevan bandaged Salam perfectly. I noticed only then that my rubber sandals were missing. One was lying on the railway road, broken. The other sandal was lying a bit further away. I bid them farewell.

“Be alert when you are looking, otherwise he will not let us sleep at night”, laughed the porali at the security post.

“That building on the main road on our side is the hospital. The building next to it is the hospital quarters. Next one is the bank. On that side of the road is the police station. Then comes the milk cooperative shop. Four or five buildings passed that are warehouses for paddy. The enemy is in all of these buildings, but they are not well fortified security posts.”

“He has many dummy posts. Off and on he will climb on trees and snipe. The one who sniped us a moment ago was from that post. The police station is on that side of the warehouse. From here, you cannot see it that well. Tomorrow we will come round and look from the Kanakarayan tank end.”



“Do they occupy all these houses?”

“Yes, they are in all these houses.”

“Is that an army man? Oh yes...he is hiding behind the bushes. Looks like he is urinating”

Jeevan turned around, “Buddy what type of rifle you have?”

He took the G3 that was brought to him. I asked him whether I should give support fire and Jeevan nodded his head. Salam counted, one, two, Bang...Two explosions sounded together and we pulled back our rifles. The he felled down.

“They will be coming to collect him and we can get them too”.

Two of them came running to pick up the fallen army. They suddenly stopped and said something to each other and then came forward fast.

“He is going to smash this place with an LMG as the other picks up the body. Come let us move to the other security post” I sped in the front.

They had come close to the fourth post. They came closer. Bang. Before we could, his LMG began ripping the first post. They picked up the body. Our G3 and T81 spit fire. We lowered the guns, and our heads, and ran. We collected some of his weapons and celebrated the collection.

Bullets started to test the sandbags in our security posts. The noise got louder. We dropped ourselves into the trenches. Three shells fell close. One side of the security post was all smoke. As the smoke lifted, the security post stood steady.

Sand was pouring from some of the sandbags. All three bodies lay there. We waited till dusk and then started to move.

“Let’s look at the rest in the morning. We can now go along the road. He won’t fire at night”.

A peacock called in the distance. Stars twinkled. We entered the Mankulam railway station. Tickets were scattered everywhere. The walls soaked in the seasonal rain had many bullet holes. The nakedness of the sky was visible through the roof. Broken ceiling beams were hanging in the air.

“Last week a shell fell on this building. If you look you can see the Convent of the Church. He snipes from there in the daytime.”

Through the window, the walls were potted with bullet holes. Some of the window frames were broken. Each one of these bullets will love this land. They were sent to destroy our poralis. We are also sending the same copper bullets. But we send them to destroy the occupying outsider.

“Buddy, I smell something in here”.

Salam opened the door. God!! a dog killed by a shell was rotting. I was barely able to bear the smell but I forced myself to peak. Once this brown dog, with thick hair around its neck would have been the beloved pet of a family and a friend to its children. It would have walked with the mother of the family as she went to the fields taking food. It might have walked the children to and from school. It is lying dead with bloated stomach. I pulled my head through the door and shut the door.

## 4. The enemy camp

12 November.

“Wonder why there is so much smoke from their camp. May be they are cooking something good to eat before they die”. When Jeevan said this we all looked.

“Come let’s go forward and look. Remember to crawl flat on the ground. Sentry man will be smoking his cigarette and looking elsewhere. Such is their sense of duty”.

“Do not make noise. If he hears something he will make holes through you”.

We crawled behind the Nayuruvi bush and laid one with the soil.

Two bodies, one lying across the other, were burning. About ten feet away was a Sinhala soldier. He puffed at his cigarette with his AK-LMG slung over his shoulder. The camp looked ordinary. He was wearing long boots and his eyes were red. He walked away and then turned back.

Will he see us? For a minute the hairs on the back of our necks pricked. I was not sad to die. But there is so much to be done before I die. He leaned on the sandbags. The bushes on the side of the railway line moved. I straightened. He removed his AK-LMG and leaned it on the sandbags. Next minute “Ah...”. Next minute his rifle was going full tilt until all the bullets in the link were finished.

Shameful. This is not a military; these are undisciplined animals, rowdies. We turned and began crawling away.

The sentry at the road fired a few times to show that he was there. We started to walk along the road. The smell of burning corpses lingered. If this undisciplined army gets out of the camp it would bury barrels of bullets into the civilians. The thorns pricking our feet were painful; so were our hearts. Time was 9.00am. We must leave now in order to reach our location before lunchtime.

“If their camp was not there we would get there in five minutes”.

With Steiner binoculars hanging on his shoulder, Jeevan walked in the front.

“Where are the rest of your people?”

“They have gone to the other side”.

He understood the language. How many items? Again he understood the signs of the hands. We must start our other preparations quickly and Jeevan squinted to observe the camp far away.

“If we finish early and complete the camouflage then there will be no problem. Let’s go this way, rather than get fired at like yesterday”.

The military’s security posts looked like tiny pyramids at a distance. The aerial stood tall and shone in the sun rays. I gritted my teeth and told myself it is not too long.

We left the main road and walked over a bridge and stood in front of an open house. We crossed its fence and began walking along a footpath through the rice fields. Jam fruit bushes stood up to our waist and its cool green leaves helped to hide us. Would the enemy fire a 50mm calibre or would he shell? We jumped the rice fields and climbed on to Thunukkai road.

“Look here, can you see the burnt stuff?”

“Yes, yes, two or three months ago, army men were dropped off by helicopter and there was heavy fighting. This is where the dead bodies of the army were burnt after they were killed.”

“How did he drop the men without being seen?”

“We knew that if we blocked the helicopter from landing in this camp then he will drop the men somewhere behind the camp. One day, early in the morning, four helicopters dropped men exactly where we expected them to, in front of the Katkulam lake. There were only a few of our people there at that time. He started firing all around the forest, from the helicopter. There were about one hundred and fifty people. He immediately began breaking the defence. We sent out the standby group as well. Most of the army men made it to their camp. The eight dead bodies of the army were burnt here. It was only after this that he bombed all these areas and captured them.”

“Did he capture what we had?”

“Yes, yes. Since we did not have a strong camp and man power, he took the police station, eye hospital, community hall,

church, temple, bank, post office, milk board, paddy warehouses and all.”

Even Che Guevara advised withdrawal when strength is diminished. If we did not withdraw we would have sustained heavy losses. We walked round the Thunukkai road bend and climbed in a line onto the Katkulam lake bank. The army antenna was still looking at us. The lake was fairly broad. There were no lilies in the lake. In places in the lake, tall trees grew in clumps. They had dropped the leaves and were bare. The dried leaves had collected along the edge of the lake. Water crows sat on the trees and looked around. The sluice gate of the lake looked rusted.

Something jumped into the water from a log.

“Look, a crocodile jumped in” he pointed to the back of the crocodile.

There are no lakes without crocodiles, we all agreed and walked on. Lots of tiny fishes played in the water overflowing from the tank. A white heron spread its wing and landed softly near the overflowing water. Fishes gathered under the shadow to avoid the sun.

“Goodness, what a lot of uncultivated paddy fields ”

“People won’t come to cultivate. They are frightened.”

“Would we have walked two kilometers?”

Jeevan laughed, “Probably one kilometer.”

The next lake bank was almost vertical. In front lay the vast Samiyar lake. Trees with large canopies leaned sideways giving good shade. The water was covered with tiny lilies. We waited there for a while. Here too, the trees standing in water were rotting. These same trees would have longed for water in the dry summer months. Now the water is about to completely engulf them. Soon the water will swallow up the trees and jump for joy. I looked at the trees feeling sorry for them.

The soft grass was a welcome change to our sore feet after walking over stones. Why are you crying feet? It is only a little bit more to go. The mind was frustrated with the feet. We pushed the bushes and walked. We could see destroyed and burnt out huts in the distance. We were not happy to see them but we were happy to have arrived. We started walking along a foot path. This was a settlement next to the forest behind the police station. The people who lived in this settlement must have been land owning farmers. The houses were built either with mud walls or with bricks. The entire houses in the settlement were destroyed by shelling. We passed the wells and walked on a path belonging to one of the houses. Hibiscus was in full bloom on either side of the foot path. A jack fruit tree had broken. The walls on one side of the house were completely gone. It was in a bad state. There must have been children in the house. There were school books scattered everywhere. A Pillaiyar picture, with its frame broken, was on the ground.

We passed the hut and arrived at our post in front. On one side a trailer was standing with wooden planks. Poralis were carrying them from the trailer. I will never forget these moments. Time was 10.45am. Young poralis, without breakfast, were working hard carrying those heavy planks. I could observe that they were tired and hungry. In spite of this

there was determination on their faces. Sometimes they will put the planks on the ground and look at each other.

“This weighs as heavy as a dead body! It feels like it will break our arms” said one of them and sat on a thick root and pressed his bruised hands.

I later learnt that his name is Kannan.

“Prasanth, I am feeling giddy. Bring some water”.

He drank some water which put a smile on his face.

“We must finish this work today. Come on, quick. We must unload everything and send the tractor away. If helicopters come it will fire at it.”

The young porali who drank water walked past me carrying a wood plank together with Kannan. My hunger which I felt earlier left me now. We crept up quietly with our heads covered with Hessian sacks and observed the enemy camp.

“This security post of ours has not really been noticed yet. Be careful when you look. If he sees you then it will be hard to continue to work here” the young porali said as he gave us water.

“Not a problem boy” said Jeevan.

“What you see in front is the police station. There are four or five houses in front. There are several dummy posts too. That one made of wooden planks, he has hidden it with coconut palm leaves. There is a good post at the water tower. There are more people in this corner building”.



“What is that on the other side of the road?”

“That is the last post. It is on the road side. You know annai, at night in this building they will be singing Baila songs. They are not at all alert” the young porali said.

He placed the wooden planks down and brushed the dust and dirt off him.

“Right. This side is Ok. Must complete the rest of the work. Let’s go to that side to the road post” he said.

Passed the smaller houses stood a bigger house. It was over the railway line along the road. I noticed only then that there were female poralis there.

“Are there girls at this post?”

“Oh, it was changed only a week ago”.

“You will be shot if you go that way” one female porali warned us pointing towards the army camp.

We looked over the fence. The army security post on the hill looked strong. We ran to avoid detection as we reached our road security post. This is a very important post. If he is going to advance he will use this path. The bombers will also target this post. It stood strong across the road under the command of female poralis who stayed ready to meet any land attack. They looked confident with their RPG 30 Calibre rifles.

We looked at the other security posts and at 1.45pm we turned back towards our main camp.

“This evening we will go and look at the posts under Seraman and Sathyaraj. They are very close by.” said Jeevan.

After having breakfast at lunchtime, we started off to the temple security posts. We walked through a narrow lane. On both sides paddy fields and vegetable fields spread far. The uncultivated paddy fields were overgrown with weeds. In the vegetable plots there was an occasional pumpkin creeper and some rotten banana trees but everything else was overgrown with weeds. There were huge spreads of mango orchards. All kinds of mangoes were in fruit. We stepped into a mango orchard and picked some. Eating them we walked on. The sun was hot.

“We need to setup two posts on this side. Let us look for a good location” I said.

We left the narrow lane and walked through the yards of the houses. I managed to cope because I got hold of another pair of rubber sandals. We crossed a *palmyrah* estate and we could see our post on the other side. With the porali at the security post we started to view each of our posts.

“This is the post furthest from the army. It has a wide open space in front so we have pulled it back.” said Jeevan.

“Only from this post one can see the road side of the temple and the buildings on the Mullaithivu road” Jeevan was looking as said this.

“Yes, is it a Pillaiyar temple? Can see that clearly too. Looks like the posts are setup tighter on this side. Enemy has setup

posts on a long line. The supply trenches must be here too” I speculated.

“Yes this temple post is precious to the enemy. Therefore all the set ups will be here. From his post to here is open space. He would have laid mines all over it. The attack team that moves from this side will meet stiff resistance. Since there is the open space, his surveillance will be stronger on this side. One will have to face plenty of bullets. On top of that, landmines will be a big challenge. Over and above all this, the aerial attacks also will most like be entirely on this side. There is a high chance for heavy losses” said Jeevan.

Yet, if we are to capture the camp, we must destroy the two main enemy camps at the temple and the inn adjoining it. Only then we can stop his supply by air and put him in a state of siege. We must capture this place at any cost to porali lives. This, I thought, will be the deciding factor. I decided that the cannon must play an important role. The Laxapana electricity cable towers passed us and went through the enemy area and disappeared into tiny spots in the distance.

“The enemy is stationed for the length of seven or eight towers” Jeevan said.

We crossed, bending very low, to the security post across the road. He could snipe. See the piece of Hessian sack; how many holes; it now looked like a sieve. The temple post was very visible. Everyone stretched to look. After everyone else, I climbed up to look.

“Woing...”, a bullet whizzed past 20cms above my head. Like a tortoise pulling its head into its shell, I pulled my head and

climbed down. Without me realizing, my hand felt the top of my head.

“He could have given you a big bindi through your forehead. You just escaped” said Jeevan laughing.

We told the voice from the walkie talkie that we were fine. We ran on the straight road all the while bending low. About sixty men were filling sandbags and digging bunkers.

“Who are these people?”

“They come to help from different villages. Fifty of them come everyday. These men are from the village of Muththaiyankaddu”.

The men were busy working. I could hear the commands and questions.

“Markandu, hold the sack”.

“Put another bag; I can carry.”

“Is this width enough or should it be widened?”

“Bring the mammotty here”.

Enthusiastic voices continued to be heard. They were not paying attention to the firing noises. An old man just finished digging the trench, shook the dirt off his sarong and came and sat next to me on the road side.

“Iya, what are you doing in Muththaiyankaddu?” I asked him.

“Thambi, I am a retired school teacher. I was the Headmaster of Mullivaikal school. After I retired, I came to Muththaiyankaddu for the peace and quiet. It is a good place. Weather is good. Hospital is nearby. I bought the house five years ago. So I am Ok”.

I gave him the water can and he took two gulps of water and returned the can with a thank you. I was wondering how to start the conversation.

“Iya, how many children do you have?”

“I had two children. Eldest was studying Engineering at Moratuwa University. When he was studying his third year of the course he came for the holidays. They forced him to get off at Mathawatchi and chopped him to death. Bloody filthy crowd. My daughter is studying BSc at Jaffna University.”

“So you have seen the true nature of the enemy.”

“Is there any Tamil who has not? Theirs is a group born to destroy Tamils. Then the Indian army came and burnt down all we possessed. Just another set of rogues. We can’t live in peace as long as they are here” lamented the old man. Then he asked “What is going to happen in the coming Maveerar Day. Do you think they will try to disrupt it?”

I smiled saying “Even if he tries we are not going to let him.”

“I have not been to Colombo recently. You should see their arrogance during ‘83, ‘84 times. They treated Tamils like toys to do what ever they like with. They will force us, young and old, to get off the bus and walk, threaten us, and insult us. Sometimes they will spit on us. They will stop the bus in the

middle of the forest and leave us there. All the Sinhalese in the bus will be laughing at us. It was a disgusting life for the Tamils. Now they will know the capability of the Tamils”.

“Iya, I will take leave from you now”.

“If you come my way, drop in at my home”.

As I walked away I turned back to look and saw the old man picking up his mammotty and walking away. Perhaps there is no Tamil heart that is not crushed by the enemy. The moonlight had spread and I realized that the time was 8.15pm and the moon had begun to disappear.

Since all the targets surrounding the enemy camp had been well selected, we prepared to go several kilometers away from Mankulam the next morning. The vehicle sped tearing through the wind.

“This is the old Kokavil camp. We attacked it as soon as the present clashes began. About one hundred army men would have died here. Did you watch the video?” I asked.

“Parts of it are not clear” Salam said and kept turning to look at the camp till it disappeared.

“How many days did the attack last?”

“Only two days”.

“On the day the attack started, the army in the camp stopped a bus, stole from the passengers and beat them before they let them go. In the ‘84, ‘85 periods their unruly conduct was at its peak. They built the camp saying that it is to protect the TV

tower of the State Television. There, that is the junction. Bus drivers, truck drivers, everyone was frightened to pass through it. The army will climb up the trees and wait”.

It was only a few days since this piece of land was retaken from the occupier. The occupier’s destructive traces are still hot. The enemy camp was still burning. Now we can roam free. No one will ask why we are going at this time or that. Or who are we and so on. The breeze carried the names of the Maveerar giving us fresh confidence.

“You know when the enemy was here, he would force the passengers to get off and back on at Mullaithivu, Oddusuddan, Kokkavil, Kilinochchi, Elephant Pass, and Navatkuli. Passengers will be exhausted. We have started to clear away the army occupation little by little” I told Salam and Ithayan and we laughed.

## 5. Battle preparations

13 November

The vehicle had a flat tire after passing Kilinochchi. We changed our tyre and proceeded. After a long drive we stopped inside a mango orchard for a break. We proceeded from there on a tractor-trailer and continued our journey through a sandy lane. The lane was in a very bad state. Huge pot holes and water puddles churned us inside out. At one spot, a forty foot wide river rushed across the lane. The tractor sprayed mud and water over us. We hugged our rifles close, protecting it inside our shirt. After the tractor crossed the water rushing across the lane, we came across an open space to our left. It had a few *palmyrah* trees, and other trees as well as some other bushes. At the end of that open space people could be seen like little spots. We sped towards them after identifying ourselves to them.

“Buddy, park the tractor under that tree where it cannot be seen from the air. Helicopters were flying, and if the enemy sees us, we will be asking for trouble”.

There were several people there including David annai, Darwin, and Cheran who had left us earlier.

“Look! Our uncle”. I ran and embraced him.

These are poralis who were with us during special training. We were together in the battle for Jaffna Fort. We then left for the Mullaithivu camp attack and we are on our way back. They had completed the Fort battle and had arrived here.



“What is this? You have made pouches in blue and have a rifle on your waist”. I teased one of the porali.

“Bhanu annai gave it to me when the battle for Fort was completed” said Ranjan.

“If you told me that you don’t have green material for pouches I would have sent you some” I joked.

“You don’t have to give me any”. Ranjan punched my back softly.

He had gained a little weight. He had also turned a little darker. Everyone’s hair looked like bird’s nest.

“We don’t have time”, this is Varman.

He grew up in Colombo and was working when he went back to Jaffna. He is short and lighter skinned. Usually he would wear his hair very short and neat. Now it is like a basket.

“Yelsin, you look sad” I teased the one who was half asleep.

“Nothing, I just feel very sleepy”.

This boy can sleep! He and Varman will compete with each for the title of the king sleeper. In the morning, after the wake up call, they will be sleeping. Warnings are issued at 7.00am, 8.00am, and 8.30am and then they will be given a bucket of cold water in bed before they eventually get up. Both will get the cold water at least twice a week.

I pointed to Victor, “How is Sir today?”

Victor approached us smiling. His curly sideburns had grown and turned into a beard. Glasses covered his eyes and overgrown hair covered his forehead. He too had put on some weight.

“Are you talking about me?”

“I was just asking if you still get a beating from Roy annai”

He gave me a punch in the stomach and I let out a fake cry of pain.

We talked about every porali mutually known to us in the group. There were many new faces too. I suddenly remembered the one we had nicknamed Number-40. He was thus nicknamed because once he had applied Number-40 engine oil to his hair and body thinking it was sesame oil. He was there too.

All the Poovarasu trees had grown bushy and green with the rain. Yet, the midday sun was making everything burning hot. On one side the poralis were checking the cannons. We were constantly communicating over the walkie-talkie.

By the time the testing was completed it was 5.30pm.

“Quickly, put up two posts here to use as target practice” Siraj annai told us. Two posts were setup with a hundred and twenty five sandbags by 6.00pm.

Siraj annai started giving orders, as the video cameras whizzed.

“Who is that standing in sarong? Get down NOW” he yelled.

Before he finished Varman joined. “Idiot get down” he called and pulled the man down.

As Varman raised his voice to scold the man, Siraj annai started to laugh. “Is that Varathan? He never listens”.

Varathan came down embarrassed, holding on to his sarong. Siraj annai smiled and everyone applauded, all the while the video cameras whizzing.

Our weapons were adjusted towards the fake security posts. They were blown to pieces. In the darkness the sounds of artillery boomed and looked like lightening flashes. The pieces flew for several hundred meters in all directions.

“Dangerous stuff. Look at all the holes it has dug”.

“The attack on the Jaffna Fort was like this. They dropped everything and ran when we started firing. They were really frightened. Later they stayed inside little caves wearing helmets and just cooked and ate”. Ranjan and Varman described the Fort attack together.

“Have you looked inside the Fort?”

“Oh yes, we looked two or three times”.

“So it is only us who have not seen it. If I survive this attack, I will definitely go there” I said.

It was very dark now. Because two of our vehicles were stuck in the mud, some of us had to spend the night in the open space. Food came at 8.30pm. Ranjan, Varman, Karate-master, Alahu, and I opened the parcels and shared the food.

“Master, there are five of us, but there are only two Hessian sacks to sleep on” someone complained.

There was a fake quarrel for the sacks. In the end all five of us lay down on the two sacks, straight, like logs without pillows.

The sky spread out above with a scattering of stars. A few night birds flew by. The night wind chilled the body. I rolled down my folded shirt sleeves and tried to sleep.

“Ou...My legs are numb with cold”. This was the Master.

“Yes, yes, it is cold, what can we do?” asked Alahu.

“Is the poor boy feeling cold? Take a shovel and dig a hole. I will bury you and leave your head above; that will keep you warm” said Master, attempting in his usual style to turn hardships into jokes.

“You know that if you belong to the movement you must endure hardships. You must put up with the cold, you must stand in water for hours on end and sometimes you must go hungry for two or three days. Did you think you could sleep on a mattress under a blanket and drink coffee in bed?”

I laughed and could see that Alahu felt embarrassed.

Master was talking about the sap from the creeper called Thillai. He was telling us that it could burn the skin. That was the last words I heard before I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

14 November.

When we woke up, the early morning dew had settled on all of us. The mist was thick and, beyond a few meters, you could barely see. We all got up shivering. Then the morning rays relieved the cold body and the dew soon began to disappear.

“No tooth paste, no tooth brush, all of you just come to the river bank to finish the morning chores” ordered Master.

We finished the morning chores in the river and warmed ourselves with black tea made from the same river water. By 10.30am we completed all the testing and started to leave the open space as a crowd. Ranjan, Varman, Ithayan, Alahu and the rest of us made a team of seven and we began our planning.

“You go and get Master’s rifle” we urged Alahu.

“Master, give me the rifle, I will hold it”.

Master looked at him suspiciously.

“You said your shoulders were aching. Why don’t you give it to me to keep?”

Alahu repeated our suggestion like a parrot. Master looked at Alahu, surprised, unable to believe that his student could care so much about him.

“I do not want to deny your wish. After all, is it not the very last wish?!! When you return, it is sure to be in a coffin. I will be the one announcing at the funeral parade”.

After saying this Master began humming a sorrowful tune and then began announcing, in the usual LTTE style, the death of Alahu in the battle of Mankulam.

“Master, come let us sit in the trailer” I said and winked at the others unnoticed by Master.

“Master, you look very hot” I said when we all sat in the trailer.

“It was all that sleeping last night, out under the cold dew”, said Master and continued to spin a yarn in his usual manner.

“Once upon a time there was a king. He wanted to go hunting. He asked his minister whether it will rain on that day. The minister said it is a good day to go hunting. On his way to the jungle the king met a man on the donkey. The man paid his homage to the king and then begged the king that he should not go hunting because it was going to rain. The king ignored him and proceeded”.

At this point Master bumped Alahu’s head and then said “Oh, it is you. I thought it is the man on the donkey”.

Alahu patiently promised to himself that Master’s turn is coming up soon. Master continued with his story.

“The king was soaked in rain. The king was outraged. He returned to the palace and even before he changed into dry clothes ordered his guards to bring the man on the donkey. When the king interrogated the man on the donkey, the man said that he did not know about the rain but it was the donkey that knew about the rain. The king then ordered his men - ”

At this point Master fell from the trailer into a pool of water on the street. He struggled for a second and then got up and began chasing the tractor. He slipped and fell three times.

We stopped the tractor a bit further away and queried, “Did you fall off the trailer Master?”

“This idiot pushed me! You too, I think!” He began casting suspicions on all of us.

I rejected the accusation outright saying he too is a member of our Special Task Force and gave him a hand to get back on the trailer.

We carried out several such “operations” that we have under our sleeves. This was our first “operation” after not being together for many months.

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Our units completed the training by 6.30pm and began moving towards Mankulam. The seven of us got into the same tractor-trailer. Ithayan had joined us now. This time Master was watchful.

“These fools push people off moving tractors and no doubt think it is funny when someone breaks a bone”.

“Will Alahu and Varathan put scorpions in our shirts?” Varman dragged the two into the conversation. The vehicle sped.

The night was just beginning; the moon was not visible yet. The stars have gathered in groups looking for the moon in their twinkling light. Clouds cut across frequently.

The destroyed Paranthan homes and school was still visible through the darkness. Once, people lived in this town in contentment. Today, only the occasional oil lamp lights come from tiny huts. The colourful city lights were all gone. The town was silent and sad. Why is this the fate for the cities in the Tamil homeland? We will create a sweet new life for them.

“Did you see the state of the town and the school? What harm did they do to him? He just wanted to destroy our places”

For the first time I saw the anger inside Master. I realized there was a volcano burning inside his heart. Poralis look happy and fun loving on the surface. But inside every porali is a burning volcano. *A porali is like a cool river with burning volcano underneath.*

When a porali is engaged in battle with the enemy, his love for his homeland bursts out like a volcano. Even the enemy is struck with admiration. One Indian military chief, who had to deal with us on a military matter, later commented, “We estimated the man power of the LTTE but we failed to estimate their mental and spiritual strength. For that failure we are now paying”. The entire world has now evaluated the Tigers along similar lines.

“Buddy, go slow near the Kilinochchi camp. We can take a look” I shouted to Salam.

“This is the old camp. They were chased out only two or three months ago. This tall building housed a police station. Army also occupied part of this building. There is a small lake behind it. This side of the lake was occupied by him.”

“Did he not destroy any of the buildings?” asked Master.



“You will soon see the buildings. He destroyed all the shops and stole all the stock.”

The buildings were in a very bad state. Many were blackened; the result of the buildings set alight.

“Over there was the hospital”. A huge building complex stood completely destroyed.

“This is the warehouse for paddy. The enemy used this building too. They used to bring the local boys here. Some of the boys have told me what they did to them. What they did is unspeakable. Many boys have died here. Many of the boys were only able to move by crawling because their limbs were broken. It is common to hear women screaming. Later, the bodies are dragged to the vehicle; taken to the forest; and burnt” I went on repeating what my friends, who were first hand witness, told me. “One day ...”

“Stop....I can’t listen to it anymore” A hand shook me forcing me to stop. I sensed the anger and the conviction in those hands.

“Buddy, two of my very close friends disappeared like this. Not even their ashes were given to their family. These are cowards who show their bravery by attacking innocent unarmed people”.

Two warm tear drops fell on my arms. I looked up at the sky. The moon had begun to climb. Master stared in the direction of an elephant trumpeting. The barrel of the AK-47 resting on the knee and held firmly in the hand could be seen moving with the

sway of the vehicle. This was a day in our life when we were all touched by strong emotions.

Some of our units stopped at Mankulam. Three units needed to move to the other side of the Mankulam camp. To reach a location just forty meters away we travelled nearly forty kilometres. Around 1.00am we woke up by a tea shop in Oddusuddan and had tea. Each of us drank large mugs of tea. Hunger and the cold made our journey hard.

After tea our journey continued towards Kanagarayankulam. We all started to doze off. Each of us leaned on the person next to us, all the while trying to sleep sitting up right. The regular shaking of the tractor frequently woke us and we yelled at Salam in unison. Salam just laughed as he continued his driving. He too dozed off sometimes, while driving but his driving did not allow us to sleep for five minutes undisturbed.

Thick forests ran on either side as we drove. The moon was above our heads now. We all woke up as the tractor came to a sudden stop.

“Buddy, look there. What a huge snake!”

We all looked. In the tractors’ headlight, a brown coloured thing was shining. It was at least fifteen centimetres in diameter and six meters long.

“Is it a python?” queried Master.

On the urging of everyone Salam drove the tractor wheel over the python’s head. Suddenly everyone in the trailer screamed. The six meter python has swung its tail and hit the trailer. The python continued to hit the trailer several times. We all peered

over the side of the tractor to look at the python. A bloodied, white rabbit came out of the python's mouth. A few baby rabbits scurried away, probably looking for their mother. The python set its teeth on the tire of the tractor and froze. The baby rabbits continued to search for their mother.

The struggle of life goes on everywhere. Loss too occurs everywhere. That day the cow's calf was taken by a crocodile. Mongoose kills a peacock. Peacock rips a snake. The *alkaddi*, that warns everyone, also loses its eggs to something in the fields. Mother rabbit is swallowed by python and baby rabbits search for their mother. This is the struggle for food among all living things.

Human are different. Of course he has to show that he is above all the other living things. Human kill their own kind, not for food, but to dominate. To wipe out those who kill to dominate is a far greater deed than to kill a crocodile or a python. The one who kills those who kill to dominate, and thus gives protection to the innocent, is an enlightened soul.

## 6. The battle is on

15 November

Around 5.10am, while the fog was still hanging, we hurriedly parked the tractor among the tall bushes and walked towards a hut to wash our faces. The darkness melted but the fog stayed on. On the left side of the road, set slightly further back, was another little hut.

“There is no point calling from outside the gate, let’s go inside” suggested Ranjan.

We removed the sticks blocking the gate’s entrance and began walking into the yard.

On both sides of the footpath, yellow and red flowers were in full bloom. The marigold flowers must have opened recently. The petals were moist and smooth. A large neem tree in the corner gave plenty of shade. A tiny shrine stood at the base of the tree.

“Amma, can we wash our faces in your well?”

“Yes, come this way”.

“Take some toothpaste and go and wash”, the amma said. Near the well the vegetable plot was lush and green. The vegetable plants struggled under the weight of their produce.

“How do you water these plants amma? Kerosene for the water pump is expensive, isn’t it?” I asked.

“Who needs kerosene? We can water with the thula. Our son will help with this. It takes may be two hours”.

Her son, standing near by, was only nine years old. I thought to myself that in Jaffna it is so very different. The children there would still be in bed or would have gone to tuition classes.

Today we depend so much on the food ships and trucks bringing foreign food to us. When will our own self sufficient economy that was destroyed by colonialism sprout again. Our economy will only grow when our people become aware of what has been done to us.

“Thambi, all of you, come and have tea”.

“No, no we will drink here”.

“No no, it is Ok, come in and have tea”.

The cups in which tea was given were modest, but the tea itself, with fresh cow milk, tasted superb. We were all energized.

We said goodbye and went to the road. We walked along the road and found a log to sit on. A monkey sat on a tree across the road and stared.

“Look at my grandpa” said Master and threw a stone at it and it jumped off.

We ate the bread and plantains brought to us by Mani annai and discussed our need for sleep.

“Where will you be at noon?” Mani annai asked.

“We will eat and sleep. We will not be going anywhere” we said.

“I am leaving now. There are buns and biscuits in the tin”.

“Ok annai, see you”.

As soon as Mani annai’s head disappeared everyone jumped for the bag.

“Leave it boys. I will distribute” said Master and he did.

The breeze was wonderful. We could sleep well. We tidied the ground, removing the leaves and spread sacks and lay down. In the afternoon we went for a walk through the paddy fields. We reached a mango orchard and a Lankan Government office with no soul to be seen anywhere. We picked a variety of mangoes and sat down by a water canal and started to eat. Two peacocks in the fields ran away when one among us stood up shouted.

We started off at night and arrived at the Mankulam camp early in the morning and stayed there quietly. From now on, it was of absolute importance that we maintain secrecy. Even if our own people saw us it was possible that military could be alerted and our plans would be destroyed. For this reason we strengthened the security lines around us. We stayed where we were until the next day then we walked towards the camp to do some preparatory work.

On 16<sup>th</sup> morning at 9.00am we arrived at our security posts. We sent off Varman to his post on the other side of the camp.

“Master look, let us stay in this house” I said.

We went inside the house which was the same house with the outer walls destroyed that I saw when I came here the first time.

“Master, it is your job to control the boys. They will not follow my orders” I said.

“Don’t try to trick me again”.

“I promise.” and I proceeded to put my hands on his head to gesture that the promise is real.

He stopped my hand saying, “Ok, Ok, go away. I will control the boys. The boys will not obey you for such is your ugly face”.

“Ok, I will go to my post”.

I jumped over the barrier. I sopped to chat to the other poralis at the security posts, and returned to the house. Master and Alahu were tidying the house.

“Alahu buddy, when did you come?”

“This prince arrived just now. The idiot got into the wrong tractor went off to the other side of the camp” Master laughed aloud. “Hey! It was you who pushed me into the water wasn’t it?”

I read the situation quickly and realized I will be given a cold shower if I went near him. I invited them into the house while

standing far away from them and then I went inside and sat on the verandah.

Master called “Alahu, can you go in and get the biscuits...”

Before he could finish, I rushed in to beat Alahu to the biscuits. As I opened the door, a bucket of water tied to the door tipped and drenched me.

Master’s and Alahu’s laughter was loud and could be heard as I walked towards the well with a defeated smile.

When we all lay down for a rest, Master asked me to tell him about another porali we knew, Kannan, and how he died.

Kannan was driving the tractor. He was too sleepy and was dozing off. I kept tapping him to wake him up. He yelled at me for constantly tapping him. After a while, the tractor’s course changed and it felt like we were going over a log. I couldn’t see Kannan in front. I stopped the tractor, got off and saw that the log was actually Kannan. The tractor had climbed over his chest.

I fell asleep thinking about Kannan. He was a good weapon maker. He joined the movement despite being the son of a big businessman and having the privilege that went with it.

22 November.

22<sup>nd</sup> arrived as we laughed, joked and worked. The morning was not that cold. Sun was up early too. Birds were busy singing and hopping about the trees. Peacocks came down from tree tops to the fields. They pecked the grains on the ground.



Parrots in big flocks landed on the densely grown fruit creepers. Monkeys sat on trees and watched us intently.

The gentle breeze embraced us all. Unwilling to leave the poralis the breeze banged its head on the walls of the security posts. The clouds rushed by after shedding some tears and wiping their eyes. That sweet morning was bidding farewell to the poralis. Birds sang mournfully and left. A cock could be heard far away. We sat together for a cup of tea and began our preparations.

Master came and sat by me.

“What is it Master? What is that look about?”

“I just wanted to have a good look at you before letting you go”.

“You bastard” I started to chase him.

We had lunch under the tree together.

The usual hot rays of the sun spread its calm heat on us. The Poovarasu trees that droop in the heat were standing upright. The breeze surrounded the poralis and brought down the flower petals from the Poovarasu. The hut was cool and cosy. Even the crows crowed more pleasantly inviting their kin.

“If the crow crows while flying a letter will arrive. If it crows while walking a visitor will arrive” said Master.

“What if it sits down and crows?” I asked.

“Artillery shells will arrive” he said.

We hurried to our meeting.

A large group of poralis were sitting in rows. Their hands were firmly holding various types of weapons. Their faces were bright, intent and showed conviction.

On one side female poralis stood. They are the burning lights sprouting from a male dominated society. They are the historic steps.

A lieutenant in the front expressed his view on the Mankulam camp thus.

“This camp was setup in 1971 to suppress the uprising among the Sinhala youth. It was again re-established in 1978 and it has remained a huge hurdle for our movement. It has been a source of disruption to normalcy in people’s lives. It is a cruel camp which is a threat to our environment. We have already attempted to attack this camp once but that was not a complete success. We must make up for the shortcomings in that attack.”

Our discussion continued on to many more topics and was completed at 4.30pm. We returned to our posts and immersed ourselves in getting to ready. Around 5.00pm two Y-12 planes flew from south.

“Buddy, do you think he is alerted?” asked Master, holding firmly to his weapons.

“Let us wait and see. They may be coming to drop off food” I consoled him.

The two planes separated and started flying in big circles.

“Master, get the boys to transfer the shells into the bunker” I said.

I could see him rushing off. Ithayan with walkie-talkie in hand could be seen nearby. Darwin was walking away with Master. Ranjan was squatting under a tree.

“Did he drop something?” Ranjan queried.

“Oh, he has dropped it”.

As all three of us watched, it came down with a hissing noise and hit the ground with a thud far away from the camp. Perhaps near the school.

“It is the thing. It is all going awry” Master stood aside near a tree and said.

The other plane cut in and made a smaller circle.

“It’s a bomb, look, it is coming down like a shuttlecock. All take cover!” As Ithayan said this we could see it going past us and we straightened.

Following the loud noise of the exploding bombs there was non-stop gun fire from the army camp.

“Do you think he has been alerted?” asked someone in a state of shock. As he said this one bullet hit a tree nearby.

“Is there a problem?” the leader asked through the walkie-talkie.

“No problem” said another voice in the walkie-talkie.

Another plane circled round and round and dropped four parcels. One fell behind me. The next one was dropped in front of us just opposite the previous one.

“Buddy, this one is near us, all take cover!” I shouted and everyone scrambled to take cover.

It came down with a loud hissing noise and exploded with frightening sound. The sand on the side of the bunker fell off for the shock.

We all came out brushing the sand from our heads. The small hut where we were staying had disappeared without a trace. Near where it was, there was a huge hole on the earth. The planes had disappeared at a distance. We could now hear a howl of pain. We all walked towards it. The dog that we fed for the last four days, less one leg and with a big wound, was lying on the ground.

“Master, look at our dog” said Alahu.

“The poor fool. Now, now, don’t start playing dog owner, go on and do your work”.

It looked at us pathetically.

“Ok, come and bring all the shells out”.

Time was 6.05pm. Sun was turning red on the western sky. The sky, the clouds, and everything else in the sky were brushed with patches of red. Perhaps they were mourning the blood that was about to flow. Birds were hurrying back to their nests. The

flapping of their wings conveyed sadness. Animals howled. Among all the sounds the howl of the dog gradually pervaded everywhere and everything and then eventually died down.

A lonely lost heron flew past. Flocks of bats flew in patches. My heart was shaken by the sad songs of two *alkaddi* that circled us, then the enemy camp, and then flew away. The sun was now buried into the earth. The clouds too had run away.

Time was 6.35pm.

“Buddy, is everything setup Ok? Come over here. The shells and rounds will soon be flying and you are standing there without any cover. Be careful”, I warned those standing around.

The mouth of the cannon, camouflaged behind tree branches was aimed at the police station.

Time was 6.56

“Who is coming?” I said sharply.

“It is me, Master” came the reply and he took a pair of pliers and ran back.

Time was 6.58pm.

“Ranjan, is everything Ok?” I wiped my face with the back of my hand. The walkie-talkie started and shone a red light.

Time was 7.00pm.

“Ok, go” the leader ordered and the firing noise of the projectiles shook the enemy camp before the guns there started to operate. The entire earth appeared to be shaking.

Noise from the camp was loud. It was the dying cry of the enemy. Enemy fire began to arrive everywhere. We faced the heaviest fire because we were very close to the enemy camp. The bullets hit the tree trunks and branches and exploded.

All types of bullets, some of them very powerful, were all coming our way. Some of them passed between our legs. Yet, in the life or death battle, we sent a constant barrage of bullets and the confused enemy fired in the wrong direction. Bullets went over the trees and even towards the sky.

“Look, from that post in the shop he is firing 30 calibre”.

Shells leaving that post in other directions could be seen. The shop had caught fire from our attack. The ammunitions inside the shop had started to explode.

Every second, we received commands through the walkie-talkie about the mode and location for our attack. We followed the orders. Gradually, the number of poralis began to diminish as they were wounded and removed from the battle ground. Those of us remaining continued with our attack. Suddenly there were bullets coming straight down and they hit the trees. Only then we saw the two helicopters. They started firing into our positions.

5” shells, RPG shells and many guns started firing towards us. We decided to take the plunge and attacked one target from three angles simultaneously. Our target, the police station, collapsed under our fire.

We would have faced many losses if we had not adopted this strategy. Suddenly there were two huge bangs and I felt my ear drums almost bursting. I felt the blood oozing from my leg. It was a minor injury. Only later I realized that it was an aerial bombing raid by the enemy.

We continued with our fast attack when another bomber came down. Our 50 calibres were aimed at it and started to spit shells. The bomber rose up and backed away. Amidst the noise of the 50 calibre fire we heard the cries of pain. There was a problem at Cheran's post. I ordered the others to continue the attack and I ran to Cheran's post. Four young poralis were lying in a pool of blood. Master also arrived from the next post.

"Take the boys away from there. He will hit again at that range".

Carrying the young poralis we moved back. Soon the boom was heard again.

"Is there a problem Master?"

"No, no it is just a bruised hand. Walk fast".

We had informed the medics via walkie talkie before we handed the four young poralis over. The medical poralis started first aid without delay. One of the four young poralis, injured in the stomach was lying in my arms. He grabbed my hand and tightened his grip. It felt as if he was using every bit of life left in him to tighten the grip. His voice too came out using all the energy left in him.

“Buddy, invade the camp, kill them all, and grab every bit of equipment that you can”.

His young life dissolved with the breeze and entered my heart and filled the space around.

His grip loosened. A star fell down leaving its silvery line. The last words of the young porali echoed in my ears among all the outside noises. We hurried back to the battle ground. The bushes and the forest trees were burning, hit by the shells and bombs. The shells and bombs continued to fall as we rushed back to our locations.

It was 10.15pm.

I briefed everyone about what had happened and readied the cannons. I started to monitor our target. Two shells from the enemy flew past us and exploded. Following the order from our leader we aimed and our shells flew in the direction of the enemy.

“Buddy, it missed. Before he comes out of the bunker we should fire again”.

Next time, our shell hit the target and we could see the building crashing down. We sent an occasional “light bomb” to identify our targets and continued with our attack.

The next shell from the enemy hit a tree and Darwin’s thighs began to bleed. I took out the cotton from the field compress in my pocket and applied a pressure bandage. The blood oozed through the bandage.

“It is ok buddy. Set up the next one” said Darwin.



“Are you mad? You have shrapnel inside your thigh. You can’t stay here with blood pouring out like this.” I got mad but he was adamant that he would stay on.

The war mongers who are occupying our land are mercenaries working for wages. During battles, if their life is threatened, they hide somewhere and indiscriminately open fire. They will back out of battle with the slightest injury. Our poralis are very different. They dedicate their life and body on the battle field. They value a free homeland more than their life. They never back away from a battle. They refuse to leave the battle ground even if they are badly injured. They leave only as lifeless bodies or they are removed by others when they lose the ability to function. This is the quality of our poralis. It is this quality that paves the way for victories against the arrogant confidence of the occupier.

We continued with our attack. We had damaged their long distance communication system and as a result one of their helicopters fired into their camp. We stayed where we were facing stiff attacks from the air and the enemy camp.

A plane began to circle overhead. We took cover immediately. A bomb fell just fifty meters away and a huge *parlai* tree was broken to pieces. The pieces from the tree hit us and bruised our skin. Our attack came to a completion when we took aim at the bank building.

Time 11.59pm. The cannons boomed for the final fire, shook the camp and went quiet.

23 November

12 midnight. Their hands firmly holding their weapons, our poralis started to crawl through the darkness. The night bid goodbye to them silently. Only the helicopters in the sky broke the darkness.

The grass gently stroked the crawling bodies. The grass bent over trying to make the path soft. There was no moonlight. The clouds hid the stars to keep the darkness as we crawled past the open paddy fields. With the enemy stunned by our fire we crawled forward to destroy the enemy completely and recover our land.

It was the enemy fire that started first, thus launching the face to face attacks. The fire from the enemy camp intensified as our poralis, sculptures of the future, crawled on with no cover. Finally our guns began to show the enemy the truth. Enemy fire began falling in the open plain like rain drops. Helicopters too, began their hunt for their prey in the paddy fields.

Helicopters were spitting 50 calibres non-stop. Our fire from ground chased them back up to the clouds. Our brave poralis began to float in river of blood. Tiger soldiers jumped over enemy bodies to meet more of them. The enemy camp fell apart from our RPG fire and the mercenary force started to run away.

I turned the walkie-talkie on and our leaders' orders came non-stop. Jegan annai and Vathanan annai were constantly being called over the walkie-talkie among the regular orders being issued. Soon Thileepan annai's and Gopu's names were also called on the walkie-talkie several times. Their connection was broken. They were moving forward to capture the camp at the nun's hostel. I thought something must be wrong. It is very

unusual for all the leaders of the four divisions moving towards a target to be cut off.

Yet, a little later, another voice said that they have captured some of the positions near that same hostel. Our leader congratulated them and promised to send reinforcements. I was able to workout that a battle was going on near the temple and our poralis were getting closer. Injured poralis began to arrive from the division that approached the police station. I went behind along the railway track. Bullets were shooting. I heard the groan of an injured porali. One porali injured in the stomach was lying unable to move. I supported him over my shoulders and brought him with me. I could see bullets hitting the track in a line.

I sent my hands around the porali's neck looking for his cyanide capsule. It is the practice in LTTE to remove the cyanide capsule from an injured porali's neck to prevent them from biting the capsule while suffering in pain. He grabbed my hand very tight.

"I am not going to die quickly without chasing away those bastards. If I can't today, I will come back tomorrow".

He said this gritting his teeth in anger. He did not appear to be someone crying for the pain in his body. His thoughts were entirely on the battle ground. He fainted while he continued to grip my hands.

"Leave the rifle on safety" he told me.

I changed the lever on the rifle and handed it to another porali and went in fast. Shells past me by very close as I crouched and ran towards the gunfire of our division.

“Buddy, there is no one to carry them, hurry and take them” ordered a porali.

I hung the rifle again on my shoulder and moved crouched towards the house that stationed the enemy. Two poralis lay there having lost a lot of blood. There was no bandaging material at hand. Where can one go looking for bandage when shells are constantly whizzing past. I took off my Tiger striped shirt and cut it with a knife. I tied a bandage around the wounded stomach of one porali. His breathing was slowing down. The other porali had an apple sized hole in his thigh. I wrapped that too.

I supported both poralis on both my shoulders and hiding behind any available cover I started moving back.

The one injured in the stomach kept trying to shout. “Give one buddy and keep on moving inside”

But his shouting came out soft in a pained voice. His hand folded over the rifle sling making it impossible to remove it from him. His voice slowly got softer. I could now see a figure coming towards us.

“Hand one over to me, it is hard to carry them both”.

“Master? I will carry them both. You go to the front and bring someone”.

“Leo. Take them to the medics in the bunker near the tree”.

I could see him running fast.

I handed over the two injured poralis to the medics for treatment. As I turned to go, I could see medical poralis in large numbers.

“No problem now. Bring any injured porali here immediately”, said one in the front as he ran and the others followed him.

I waited near the tree for Master. The battle was intense.

I could work out from the messages over the walkie-talkie that the enemy was being weakened and that our divisions were entering enemy posts.

“Master, come. If we go to the post at the road side, we can go down with the standby group. If not we can at least go to the supply group”.

Both of us moved fast. Shells were exploding near us.

“We can capture half the camp today. Guarding the captured area from aerial bombardments will be very difficult” Master said as he came towards me.

## 7. A Black Tiger attack

The camp surroundings were captured by our poralis around 4.00am after very heavy fighting. Despite their exhaustion and thirst they were all busy building security positions ready for the aerial attacks that would come with the dawn.

Everyone was fully occupied as they hurriedly dug trenches and put sand bags up. There was no compulsion from outside for them to work like this. They all worked of their own will. The enemy fire tried in vein to disrupt their work.

People of Tamileelam ought to reflect on this situation. When we request for assistance from our people to build bunkers or dug trenches many parents will not send their children. Following battles they will mull over the newspaper reports, express their opinion, and within minutes return to their own selfish lives.

They fail to empathize with the young poralis, the same age as their children, battling without food or water. They imagine that the weapons are fighting the battles on their own. They do not see that in the battle ground the hearts and minds of the poralis are also fighting. The attitude of some parents saddens and disappoints us and can even get to the point where it affects our resolve.

The preparation for the Mankulam, and other, battles is exhausting and can take days. Most of the work must be done at night. We have to setup new machine-gun positions without the enemy noticing. The sandbags and wood must be carried staying low on the ground or even by crawling on our knees. It is hard work. Next day we will be so stiff we will have trouble

walking straight. Yet, we do it all again on the next day too. Our eyes will be heavy due to the lack of sleep, yet the enemy targets must be located during daylight. Hunger while awake at nights is not new even to the civilians. The cold frosty nights will soak us. Our throats will be dry and lips cracked and painful. It is no trivial thing to wage battles under such conditions and then start building security positions before dawn without even a drink of water.

Poralis increase their mental strength through these experiences. These hardships do not affect our conviction. But when we meet an unpatriotic civilian our hearts become heavy. On the other hand when we meet patriotic civilians, the strength of the porali's conviction surpasses iron will and the yearning for freedom burns within us even more intensely.

Morning 5.00am. Two planes and two helicopters began circling the camp. Poralis did not succeed in completing the bunkers in one hour although they tried hard. Water kept springing from the ground since it was after heavy rain. Sandbags were also soaked with water. Then the enemy started concurrent aerial and land attacks.

The nun's hostel and temple came under intense bombardment. We struggled to cope. We were forced to retreat when the attacks from land started. One of the positions we retreated from was the temple area.

They started to mend the security post that they had captured from us. This reconstruction activity foreboded danger to us. We realized that when the enemy re-launches attacks from the rebuilt positions we will have to lose many more of our poralis to recapture them. There was also the psychological boost the enemy would get by reconstructing his security posts that we

had destroyed. We therefore launched a very risky and daring operation that was unexpected by the enemy by moving forward through the open fields in broad daylight.

For a moment the enemy was disoriented by the unexpected sudden attack. He soon realized that he is facing the final blow to his station. He began firing at us moving through the open space. Bombers dropped bombs like rain.

One of the richest granaries of Tamileelam, the rice fields of Mankulam, rather than being covered by fresh green crops was covered by our fallen porali and their fresh blood. Even in their final moments the poralis enriched the land they loved. These young poralis who longed to breathe the free air and put down their own footprints on their homeland, now dissolved into the breeze over the fields. His friends who were with them, who were reborn in the same training camps, who laughed and played together, continued to move forward towards the enemy. These brave fallen heroes even in their death did not find a human hand to comfort them. They are the saints who gave up the joys of youth for the freedom they so dearly loved.

The enemy, unable to cope with the losses, began to give up the security posts one by one. We recaptured each one. In that sweet afternoon, at 4.00pm, we captured the post near the temple on the Electricity road. The unceasing poralis confidently consumed the gentle breeze as food. The enemy was now restricted to his main camp. We could see very clearly that he was now unsteady.

It is times like this that we request our people to give us dry food. If we are to move into the camps that we captured at night we can do so only in the morning. When our people happily give us dry food with the feeling that it is for “our



boys”, the food tastes delicious. It gives us a refreshing energy. When we eat we see the smiling faces of the mothers whom we have met during our struggle. It gives us a deep soul satisfaction.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> evening melted away, longing for something. The sun was boiling red. There were no sweet songs of the birds. Even though they are keeping away today, tomorrow they will sing welcoming morning melodies. It will gently stroke the headstones of the saintly souls. Today it disappeared past the forest. The night blanket fell over everything.

24 November

We left Kanagarayankulam at 6.00am to launch our attack, with fewer cannons than we used yesterday. People were waiting for us in large numbers at the junction. They stopped us and gave us snacks and wished us well. As our vehicle started to move, the porali at the back shouted something. We stopped the vehicle and looked behind. A grand old lady in pure white saree was walking hurriedly towards us. She was holding a homemade bag. We all got off and ran towards her.

“What is the matter grandma?”

“I was walking. When I saw you leaving I had to run. All of you come here”.

She took out the holy ash wrapped in a leaf from her bag and put on our foreheads and gave us all a kiss on our cheeks. Holy ash is a significant religious symbolism among Hindu Tamils. Although LTTE is a secular movement the people use their own rituals to show their love and respect to the poralis. Our tiredness after the battle, all feelings of ill health, and the

grief of losing fellow poralis all disappeared in that moment. Our heavy hearts melted at her touch.

“You must fight well and come back victorious. I will be waiting in that hut”.

The words came from a mother from Tamileelam in a voice that broke as she spoke. We all felt that we are blessed to have received these words.

“We will for sure kill them all and capture our land” a porali said with obvious emotion.

She took sweet rice from her bag and put some in each of our mouths. It gave us new energy.

This patriotic mother has given us a kind of joy that we would not get from great victories on the battle ground. She stood there watching us disappear. Tears slid down my cheek. We will not stop on our path as long as there are mothers like this. Master sitting next to me stared in her direction. I could notice the joy in his face too. He hummed a tune the words of which were, “we are going towards the enemy camp”.

We saw red dots passing us in a line.

“Buddy stop, the helicopters are firing”.

The vehicle lights were switched off and it was stopped under a tree. The helicopter went round and kept firing. Red bullets struck the tar road and re-bounded. We all got into the water canal running along the side of the road.

“He is only ploughing the road” someone said.

Again bullets hit the road in a line. We could work out from the noise that two bullets hit our tractor and the cannon.

There was an Sssss noise.

“All take cover. He has fired 5 inch calibers”.

Two shells exploded in the rice fields nearby.

Time was 7.35pm.

“We can’t wait anymore. Let him keep firing. Ithayan take the tractor”.

When the order was given, without hesitation, Ithayan ran towards the tractor. All the rest of us started running on both sides of the road. Helicopter chased us firing all the time.

“He is flying over our head. He could drop something big anytime. Watch out”.

As the words were completed shells started coming and exploded just a hundred meters behind us on the road. We kept running exploiting the explosion as cover. The helicopter came back over the centre of the road. In high alert we took cover and 50 calibre shells potted the road with big holes. We could see Ithayan turning towards the security post. We ran through the rice fields, bushes, open spaces and past the railway tracks. Helicopters continued to chase us. Suddenly a roaring noise came from a helicopter. Two rockets fired and hit a tree and exploded it to pieces. I heard a groan from Master but he kept running.

I could not ask Master what had happened, the shells kept coming. I reached Master and saw a piece lodged in his arm. I pulled it out and applied pressure bandage. We were now at our post.

Time was exactly 8.02pm. We began emptying our cannon. The enemy responded with his bullets. The intensity of the enemy's reaction was much diminished compared to the previous day. He used his ammunition sparingly. Helicopters and aerial bombers, however, gave us more trouble today than yesterday. Our main targets today were his main camp and the rice-warehouse camp. We escaped very narrowly today. One of his bombs fell just ten meters away from us but it failed to explode. The enemy was unlucky there. We removed the unexploded bomb and left it in a place where it would not be triggered by our own cannon fire and we built a secure post around it. As we did this, helicopters kept firing trying to finish us off.

On this day, two of our poralis were injured in the enemy RPG fire. We handed both of them to our medical poralis and hurried on with our attacks.

25 November

Time was 12.45am. We sent our final shell towards the main camp. Two bombers were still circling above us.

Time was 12.59am. Our leader ordered us to silence our cannons and take cover. A large truck making loud noises drove through the enemy security posts on the road.

“All of you jump away and watch the truck” I shouted and took cover.

There was an immense light for a second. The wind convulsed and then pushed everything. The noise, the indescribable noise, split the ear drums. The forest trees then shook once and slowly calmed down. Animals stood still in a state of shock. Sulphur smoke blocked our noses.

A hero, a Black Tiger, made history.

Bork annai!!

I remembered meeting Bork annai four days ago. He was lying on an easy-chair. He had just returned from a stay at his home with snacks for us. He was smiling.

“Do your shells make loud noises? I won’t come anywhere near them” he acted as if he was scared.

How would he have bid farewell to his mother. My heart choked as I remembered the lines from Tagore’s poem.

*“Mother, it is for you. The time has come for me to go.  
Farewell mother. When you stretch out your arms, in  
the quite darkness of dawn, thinking that your baby  
who slept next to you is there, I will no longer be there.  
When you are lying without sleep, I will be among the  
stars telling you to go to sleep. When the lightening  
flash passes through your open window, my laughter  
will come with it. I will come to your bedside with the  
moonlight and rest my head. I will come as gentle  
waves of wind and embrace you. I will enter through  
your eyelids as a dream and go to the depth of your  
sleep. When you wake up I will turn into a tiny light  
and disappear into the darkness. When neighbourhood*

*children are playing in our house, I will come with the music of the flute and fill your heart. When aunty next door comes and ask you for your baby, tell her that your baby is in your eyes and he fills your entire being."*

Would Bork have said all this to his mother?

## 8. Onward journey

The night was coming to an end.

Our divisions entered the enemy camps and launched attacks. We moved cautiously because there were no counter attacks. We saw the bodies of enemy soldiers scattered. Some of the buildings were on fire.

By 3.00am the enemy camps had been put through a thorough search. Weapons and bodies were scattered everywhere. We collected the weapons. It seemed that the enemy had abandoned the camp and withdrawn into the forest along the Luxapana electricity cable towers line. He had moved towards their other camp on the hill. We decided not to follow him immediately as it was still dark.

The next morning we learnt via our walkie-talkie that our poralis had intercepted the withdrawing enemy soldiers near Kanakarayankulam and were attacking them. We could see two helicopters circling that part of the forest.

At 6.15am we were on our way to the enemy camps to conduct recovery operations. We were moving along the main road on the Vavuniya side. We kept to the road because the enemy had planted landmines all along the side of the road. Once we moved past our own security post into the area that had been in the enemy's hands until now, we all sensed the excitement springing within us. The buildings, mango orchards, coconut estates, all of these were getting nearer to us. Until now we watched them by hiding behind trees and walls, and longed to possess them. Now they are ours. We could not resist running towards them.

Destroyed and burning enemy posts welcomed us. A large tree destroyed by our shells had fallen across the road and was blocking the road. The occasional fire was roaring. I peeped into one burnt down post. Bodies of three enemy soldiers had burnt completely down to their skeletons. The T-58 guns had also burnt leaving only the iron parts.

“You left me behind!” Master came running excitedly towards us.

“We called you but you have gone somewhere to eat”, said Alahu. Master let out a barrage of accusations at Alahu.

“Come here. This is the post we destroyed day before yesterday”. He came running to see.

“Look, the rifles have all burnt. Bring me a stick and let us see if we can recover any of them”.

“It is useless. The barrels are all bent from the heat” I said as I picked one and dropped it on the ground.

“Look there” Master pointed to the enemy’s possessions, his bags, hats, and the clothes drying on the line.

“It looks like quite a number was stationed here. Let’s go behind the shop and look at the well”.

“Buddy!!!”.

I saw the bodies of our poralis. Two bodies one dragging the other was there. Tears swelled in my eyes. Master was staring at the bodies.



“They must have died day before yesterday”.

“Yes, he has come right inside to rescue the other”.

We told the others over the walkie-talkie and went closer to look. Master also came.

The first porali had taken the blast on his chest and stomach. The one who had come to rescue him had a hole on the left side of his forehead.

“Buddy, do not move the bodies in a haste. They may have placed a release switch under the bodies”.

Bombs can be triggered by a release switch, placed under a heavy object which will trigger when the object is removed.

We carefully inspected the two bodies and then lifted them and placed them inside the shop. We observed several stab wounds on their bodies that were made with the knife on the gun.

“See what they have done to the bodies of our poralis. They have showed their brutality”. Master stared at the bodies. His anger was very visible.

The stomach of the porali with gun shot wound on his forehead has been ripped in a crisscross pattern. The body of the other porali had enormous number of holes all over his body.

Even if the clashes on battleground are intense no soldier will harm the dead body of the soldier from the enemy side. It is considered the duty of the battling sides to bury the bodies of

enemy soldiers with respect. This custom has existed throughout the ages and throughout the world.

Sinhala chauvinist do not practice this. They rip into the dead bodies of poralis when they are faced with losses or defeat. It is not hard to imagine the cruelty let lose by this same Sinhala chauvinists when they enter areas of civilian population. They are unable to release themselves from this mindset.

In this respect they are very different from the poralis. Poralis are created among the oppressed when the oppressor's tactics become too brutal. None of the oppressors learn this truth till the end. Even if they do they behave as if they do not know this truth. They still manage to get some satisfaction by ripping apart the dead bodies of poralis.

We covered the bodies of the poralis and went towards the well. The clothes on the line were scattered. Many of the clothes had blood splattered on them. We went to the well which was big in diameter. The side walls of the well were not high enough and it looked dangerous. We passed the well and entered the mango orchard. A huge amount of mangoes had fallen on the ground. Some of the mango trees were broken too.

“Leo, look at this machine”.

“Oh, they must have used it while withdrawing”. I pointed to the security wall made of railway line planks.

Since they were protecting the 50 calibre fire the bushes in front were brunt. This mark stretched all way to the enemy post on the hill.

“Look at these blood stained clothes”.

“Look, there is a lot there”.

“Quite a few have been injured or killed”

We collected the scattered bullets into a pile. Grenades, guns and shells too were to be found in large numbers. We put them all in one place. We placed those ammunitions that appeared unsafe under a tree and placed a warning near it.

The enemy does not really care much about his weapons. There were large numbers of many types of ammunition buried in the sand from places from which he had withdrawn. Poralis struggled to collect them. Still, they put a lot of effort to dig them out carefully. They moved huge broken pillars in order to reach the ammunition underneath. These are poralis who had not eaten since noon yesterday, who had been waging intense battles all night.

I would like tell our people something about this. The enemy is stronger than us in numbers and weaponry. Our strength is in our determination, belief in our goal, and our love for the land and our people. This is the protective armour we wear as we entered through open space without cover, into the enemy camps, camps that are well equipped with weaponry. Our people must keep this in mind. Also, all the ammunition and weapons we capture from the enemy we will use to attack him tomorrow. Think about it. Each bullet we collect will be used to reduce his numbers tomorrow. Think about the poralis who died trying to recover the enemy's weapons. This is why we work hard to collect the ammunition. Through it, we become stronger.

“Master, come let’s go to the big camp”.

As we walked along the road I was reminiscing about my younger days here and I said this to Master.

“What happened then?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing happened. During the ‘83, ‘84 time, we built a new home in Mannankulam. In those days, the Mullaithivu bus would stop at the junction. After getting off there none of the buses going past Mannankulam will pick us up because they are all long distance buses. So we had to walk home from the junction. Some times a lorry would pick us up. It is mostly my mother and me who will be walking. One day, two boys were coming towards us on a bicycle. Two army men came out. We were just ten meters away from them. The army men did not even ask the two boys to stop. They just kicked the boy who was doing the cycling and both boys fell down. They beat the boys brutally with their guns and then the boys were dragged into the camp. The two boys were screaming in pain. We ran away without looking behind”.

“What happened then?”

“We do not know. Someone said that their bodies were left in the hospital by the army saying they were killed by the elephants in the forest.”

“Military Camp – Mankulam”, the blood stained name board written in Sinhala stood on top of the cement wall. This is the place where those fanatics tortured the people. This is the same place where the people were unable to move around freely. Today the place is breathing the air of freedom. We stepped

into the main camp area and walked along the paved path into the building. Symbols of occupation were scattered all over.

In the front building there were a lot of tables and chairs, all broken. The next room had a big refrigerator with holes all through it. The roof tiles and sheets were in pieces. The next room had many spring beds and mattresses. They all had blood stains.

We entered a huge room. The room was filled with food items. Cheese tins, tin milk, canned fish, milk powder, flour, rice, tea and many other kinds of food filled the room. I couldn't help but compare the frugal life of the poralis and the life of comfort of the military soldier. There is indeed no comparison between a young Tiger walking over stones and thorns in the forest and the military soldier enjoying a life of comfort.

Mounds of cigarettes packets and butts were seen in many places. They were soaked in the rain and gave out an offensive smell. Pornographic posters covered the walls. This is the camp of the Sri Lankan army. How can one expect discipline amongst them? It appears that they actually prefer indiscipline.

The kitchen walls were blackened with smoke. Rice, lentils and soy meat in three huge pots were sitting on the fireplace. It must have been cooked yesterday. It had started to go bad and was giving a bad smell. Master stirred the pots with the big wooden spoon and followed us.

Through the banana plantation the temple walls and the inn could be seen. We quickly studied the police station buildings and the other buildings and went into the nun's hostel. The walls were further protected on the inside with stacks of sandbags. A lot of clothing soaked in blood lay all over.

“Come, let’s go and see where the Black Tiger exploded”.

Both of us went. In the ground, past the entrance to the main camp, close to the centre of the camp, was a massive hole.

The hole told a story about Bork annai who made history in the blink of the eyes. We stood silently for a moment.

Our motherland must rejoice for giving birth to souls who were ready to turn their lives into weapons to free her. The Tamil youth, those of Bork annai’s age, must reflect on the nature of his love for the freedom of his homeland. Only when they reflect on this will, his dream be carried forward and fulfilled.

We again walked along the main road and arrived at Mankulam junction. We stood there and looked around.

“Master, look from here at the camp. How beautiful those big trees look. All this time this land was occupied and now it is ours”.

“How many more places are there like this? Look at the damage done by the bombers”.

As Master pointed we saw the only remaining two storey building. The shops near were completely destroyed and it looked like graveyard. The railway station, too, looked distressing with the roof broken.

“Come on, let’s look at the temple and the inn before we leave”.

We walked fast along the Mullaithivu road. On one side we saw the shops all destroyed. On the other side were military posts and small houses. Then one side opened into vast paddy fields. On the other side were the same symbols of occupation, the sandbags; all ripped apart.

The roadside had blood spots here and there. They must be from our poralis. These poralis entered the open space using only their bodies as cover.

As we looked at the open paddy fields, our hearts filled with sorrow. Our poralis moved forward through this field. Oh, our Thileepan annai, Pirapa annai and Gopu and others would have lost their lives in this field.

“They are great souls” said Master, his voice breaking with emotion.

“They gave us victory. Yet, it is not easy to bear their loss”.

I changed the subject. “Look at the temple and inn. It is completely destroyed.”

We walked past the inn and entered the temple. As I looked at the desecrated temple I had a strange feeling. When I was a child, this temple was the site of frequent caste clashes, between people that wanted to stop some castes from entering the temple. These people insisted that allowing all castes to come will desecrate the temple environs. Now this same temple stood desecrated in the worst possible manner. None of the devotees who wanted to prevent other castes from entering the temple raised their voices against the worst form of desecration. Only the poralis acted against it.

News that the enemy had withdrawn into the forest spread like wildfire among the people. They gathered around in groups discussing it. Many civilians carrying their guns were out in the forest. We went and stayed in a village called Puthuvilankulam. We stayed in five homes in smaller groups.

Master, Ithayan, Alahu, me and six others stayed in the home of an old man.

We ate the lunch given to us with much love and slept well. We woke up only at 7.30 at night. We drank the tea that was given to us and gathered at the front porch and sat with the old man as we waited for dinner. We have always enjoyed discussing issues with the older people and listening to their stories. I started the conversation.

“Have you been living here for long?”

“My father and mother started living here soon after they were married. They lived near the Nagathambiran temple in Puthur. I was born there. When I was about 20 years old, I got forest land from the State and cleared it and then received my deed of ownership for the land. When I married I lived here and my children were born here”.

“So how old are you now?”

“Maybe 75. I was born in 1914, so you can work it out”.

“How many children do you have?”

“My eldest is a girl. She is living with her family in Kanagarayankulam. Next is a boy. He was in some movement called PLOTE and he was shot and killed during the Indian



Army time. Next is my youngest boy. He has gone to the fields to spray the plants. He will be here any minute now”.

“Do you own a lot of land?” inquired Master.

“No, no. I have twenty five acres. The paddy field and vegetable plots are all part of it. This house is also part of it. These low caste fellows have ruined it all. I have now given it all up. Once a year I will give a big feast to the people; that is all.

Now all castes are earning money going overseas. Why should they respect people like me without much money?”

“All are humans. Why divide them by caste?” I said interested to hear his reply.

“The status of caste cannot be earned otherwise” he replied. I realized that it was pointless continuing with this topic with him.

“Iya, are you not going to send your youngest son overseas? They can earn a lot overseas” Master asked him.

“Humph. Do you call that earning? There is so much fertile land in our homeland. There is plenty of water in the tanks. Why should you leave all this and go somewhere else? Neither I nor my son has considered it, even in our dreams. We can just eat Kanchi and watch this forest, land and the temple and die here. I will never leave my land because of fear”.

One thing came out clearly in the discussion with the old man. He would support our armed freedom struggle in anyway he could. He finds the idea of leaving the land and wasting its

resources repulsive. He stands firm on this. Yet, he is not able to give up some of his traditional views on society. This is where the younger generation needs to change. The younger generation today has the responsibility to guide their parents. Even if a few are unable to change, the young ones must change in readiness for our new nation.

Look at the community in China. If one million students demonstrated in Tianamen Square demanding democratic rights, they certainly did not do so with the permission of their parents. If these students can organize such a massive protest, why cannot the younger generation, with the help of poralis, take up progressive actions to change society? When the entire Tamil nation, under a single leadership, steps out with one goal, that day of freedom will be commemorated as our fallen heroes' day. Before we reach that point, let us destroy the backward ideas in the society and develop our human and natural resources to improve our economic status.

“Iya, tell us about your fields and horticulture”.

“Talking about it is the same as talking about my life”.

“Good, we can learn about both at the same time” I encouraged him.

“Wait thambi. This boy has misplaced my tobacco leaves” he said and entered the room in his humble mud cottage.

A young man walked in from outside, gave us a friendly smile and entered the cottage, calling out “Appa”.

“Where did you put my tobacco leaves boy?”

A little later the old man came out and sat down with a home rolled cigar in his mouth.

“Like the cigar?” said Master.

“Oh! do you really?” said the old man in a warning tone because poralis are not permitted to smoke. The old man was happy to have two sets of ears willing to listen to his old stories.

“When I was about twenty or twenty five, a white man came and expanded and renovated this tank. It used to hold a lot of water then. They said that if anyone is willing to clear the forest and cultivate it for five years they will give the ownership deed for the land. None of our people were willing”.

“Why not? It is fertile land isn’t it?”

“You can say that now. Then it was elephant’s domain. There were very few people around here. Even the white man would not come without his gun”.

“Then how could you ...?”

“Wait” said the old man as he puffed on his cigar.

“My mother and father were adamant that I should not do it. But I was keen. I went to the white man and somehow managed to get hold of a gun. My father was hopping mad when he found out. He shouted saying I have no right to bring a gun inside the house. I was persistent. I found a piece of forest land that would receive plenty of water and cleared the forest. Every year the crop would do well but when it is nearly ready the animals would come and destroy it all”.

“Did you not get fed up?”

“No, I persisted. I cultivated the land every year and slowly started to save some money. Then I got married” he puffed his cigar. “It was only later that other people came. They were all emboldened by my presence”.

We were all enjoying the self flattering tales of the old man.

“One night- my hut was then located on that raised bit of land there- Velan, my neighbour, came running and screaming. He said four or five elephants had come into his fields and they were refusing to move despite his gun fire. He pleaded with me to come.

“I cursed for the bother but I went. There were several elephants. I was slightly drunk. I could not see well. One elephant blew hard and the gush of wind threw me back. I landed on my hand and dislocated it. When I turned to look five or six pairs of eyes were staring at me. I was not steady enough to run. I fired with one hand, all the while lying on the ground. All the elephants started running. Next day people said that they saw one dead elephant lying in the forest. White men and Sinhalese came and shook my hand. Those were the days”.

“So you are a great hunter?”

“Of course, if I shoot, I never miss. I was a great hunter. Later there were children and now I live like this”.

As the old man puffed at his cigar we suddenly heard continuous gun fire. We quickly readied ourselves, put some of the poralis on guard around the cannon and left with fifteen

poralis on a tractor. We made contact through the walkie-talkie and parked the tractor one kilometre from the location of the fire and started to run in formation.

When we told the others that we are coming, we learnt that the clashes were taking place under the command of Mathavan annai.

We were about to proceed in the dark from Puthuvilankulam into the forest, in the wrong direction, when a voice from behind stopped us.

“Wait, I will also come with you. Where do you want to go, tell me?”

Only when he came very close I realized that he was the youngest son of the old man. He was holding a hunting gun.

“Oh, it is you” he said. “You were all at the teacher’s house. You all left suddenly without telling me. I came running with the gun and ten cartridges without even putting on a shirt. Where should we go?”

We told him the spot and the direction in which we are to attack. He led us saying he will show us the way. As I followed him, others came behind us in a formation. We were struggling to keep up with him. He was walking very fast at the same time making way by breaking tree branches and bushes. We were compelled to run to keep up with him. He stopped for a moment and pulled something from his foot and continued walking.

“Annai, did you come without even wearing jandals?” I asked.

“Oh, we are used to it” he said.

He kept his gun above his head while walking and moved it constantly to keep it away from the bushes and branches. When we reached the spot, I told the poralis to take position and then asked Mathavan on the walkie-talkie for a run down of the situation. He described the strengths and weakness of the enemy’s situation at that moment. I gave orders to the poralis and we advanced through the darkness.

Suddenly dark clouds gathered and within a few seconds, there was strong wind and heavy rain. The noise prevented us from accurately gauging the situation. Even though we were now walking along the railway track, we had trouble seeing anything.

Despite the setback caused by the heavy rain, we walked fast and continued through to Kanagarayankulam junction. As we reached the junction the rain had eased somewhat. People had gathered outside in large numbers. News and rumours about the military escaping into the forest was spreading quickly among the people.

Majority of the men among them were carrying hunting guns and shot guns. Suddenly there was some excitement. People were gathering around two men who had just arrived on a bicycle. The two men were talking loudly. People were firing questions at the two men. One man started reciting the story.

“You know the surroundings of the Kanagarayankulam fields, the open space. One girl who stepped outside her home was shot by three army men who were hiding there”.

“Is she dead?”

“No, no, the bullet hit her leg. We all chased the army fellows when we heard the gunfire. They tried to hide in the bushes. We rounded up the area and shot into the area twice. They came out with raised hands saying in Sinhalese that they are surrendering. Arasu annai spoke to them. But our people were careless. They were not alert and the three ran away after pushing over the two people who were watching them”.

“Oh no. You should have been more careful” said one man.

Most of the people listening to the story were very disappointed. They were also discussing another story of a woman who captured two army men hiding under a bridge.

We walked along with a smile on our face.

“Master, what do you think of our people?” I asked.

“Looks as if they will beat the hell out of them if they get the chance” laughed Master.

“What else do you expect? What do we know about what these people were put through by the army for years?” I said.

An old man with a cigar in his mouth and a shotgun over his shoulder cycled passed.

“Now the people come out and talk excitedly after we chased the army from the camp. Why don’t they come out sooner and join us in the battle?” I asked

“Only now people have the determination to get rid of the Mankulam camp. Times are changing. If this attitude stays on, it will be great” replied Master.

Time was 6.15pm. We have forgotten about the lunch. A man coming towards us fast on a bicycle suddenly applied brakes and stopped a few meters past us.

“Thambi, thambi” he called urgently and we ran to him.

“There is a shop at the turn there. I saw a man there running into the house near it. I heard a woman screaming and also someone talking in Sinhalese. It must be the army. People are saying that some army men were seen around here in the afternoon”.

“We must get at least one of them, run fast” Master shouted at the top of his voice.

As we neared the house we broke up into two groups. We made one group surround the area in a wide circle to stop anyone trying to escape. The other group moved forward towards the house. When we neared the house and took position we heard talking. We could hear some Sinhala conversation in between. Once we surrounded the house I hid behind a flowering bush and listened carefully.

“Our father gave you all the dowry you deserved. How dare you come now to our father’s funeral and demand the thali around our mother’s neck” shouted a male voice.

Another male voice spoke in broken Tamil with a Sinhala accent. “She was wrong to ask for it brother-in-law. Please do not be angry”.



“Who are you to touch me you Sinhala bastard. Let go of me” the first man shouted in a drunken voice.

A woman’s voice shouted now cursing.

I gave the signal to the rest and we withdrew quietly from the scene.

Master with his gun in ready position queried, “What happened? Couldn’t you catch anyone?”

We gathered everyone hiding in readiness behind bushes and told them what was going on in the house. We all had a good laugh. But they were all mildly annoyed that their time was wasted like this.

We continued with our move. It was getting dark and we moved cautiously. Monkeys and other animals suddenly jumped in front of us, delaying our journey.

When we reached Puthuvilankulam time was 9.45pm. We had not eaten anything since morning. People gave us Idiyappam and meat curry. We rested after the meal.

26 November

At 9.00am in the morning we stationed one group to keep watch and the rest went to the lake for a bath.

As we had already planned, we divided into two groups and entered the lake. We spent more time having water fights than bathing and made a huge racket. We got out and dried ourselves. I had just finished putting my dry, clean clothes

when I suddenly found myself in the lake again. Master and Alahu, standing with their hands on their hips, were laughing.

After lunch we went to the forest and picked some wood apples and made a spicy mixture with coconut and chillies. We had a competition to see who could eat the most.

We chatted with the people. They all seemed very excited. One man said, “Tomorrow Balraj annai is going to raise the Tiger flag in Mankulam camp. Today you can all sleep happily”.

We all slept well.

27 November

We started early the next morning, on two tractors, towards the Mankulam camp. This camp, that flew the flag of occupation and from which untold brutalities were committed, today appeared totally destroyed.

Oh, the Maveerar! You stood with us shoulder to shoulder and shared our burdens. You entered the minds and bodies and indeed every cell of the enemy and petrified them. You bravely entered the open fields to destroy the enemy hiding in his camp. Knowing well that your life will end in a few seconds you turned your bodies into weapons as Black Tigers.

You move in grand procession in the breeze that embraces Mankulam. They meet at the gentle running waters. They smile in the soft noises made by the forest trees. They come down as rain drops and kiss this land. They come with the soft rays of the moon to embrace us. They enter our hearts through the dancing peacocks and the songs of the Mina.

This land soaked in their blood will be enriched.

They are the guards of our borders. They will be born again and again through Mother Tamil. The sun will no longer burn us. In the movement of their lips, in the words they speak, in their eyes, the poralis will keep Maveerar living. For the freedom that will come, they will train the new generation. They are the suns that never set.

The villages, paddy fields and lanes in which they played will never forget them.

They are the life behind all of nature's actions.

As we drove away, we watched the destroyed camp for a final moment as it disappeared behind us.

As our tractors with the cannons moved towards Jaffna town we turned backed and waved. Our eyes watered. The white clouds on the blue sky moved in the opposite direction.

The buildings of Kokkavil started to appear in the distance. A soft voice sang in my ears.

*The clouds in the sky will sing.  
It will utter the names of the Maveerar.  
River of tears will flow from our eyes.*

Here ends my memories of the Mankulam attack. My heart is already starting to fill with the memories of the Silavaththai attack.

(Before he could start writing about his experience in the Silavaththai attack, Captain Malaravan became a Maveerar on 23 November 1992 during the attack on the Palaly camp East.)