

Inching forwards towards Jaffna. (1995, October 08). *The Sunday times.*

Operation Thunder Strike Inching forward towards Jaffna

SITUATION REPORT

By Iqbal Athas

There was a mood of exhilaration when the National Security Council met at Temple Trees on October 4.

If the good news was that "Operation Thunder Strike" had been successfully accomplished, there was jubilation that a counter-attack had been repulsed with more than 125 Tiger guerrillas being killed.

der Strike." Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Gerry de Silva followed. He also wanted his congratulations conveyed to all his men who successfully accomplished the mission.

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Minister of State for Defence, Colonel Anuruddha Ratwatte, reached out for the phone to speak to the Overall Operations Commander (OOC) Colonel Ratwatte said he wished to congratulate him and his men on behalf of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the government and his own self over the success of "Operation Thun-

Some two hours before dawn broke on October 1, an officer led men out of the defences of the Palaly Military Complex on "Operation Thunder Strike". Three Brigades were on a mission to re-capture territory held by the LTTE.

Prompting this offensive were a string of mortar attacks Tiger guerrillas launched on main installation in the Palaly defence complex. It was discovered that LTTE was directing artillery fire from the general area of Navakeri and Avarankal.

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The execution of "Operation Hand Shake" last month had led to the expansion of the Forward Defended Localities of the Palaly complex on its southern and south western flanks.

During Operation Shake Hand I, troops moved from Alaveddy to Madagal through Periyavilan and Pandaterippu. Similarly, during Operation Shake Hand 2, troops headed towards Punnalaitattuvan.

A most significant feature of these two operations was the fact that the security forces had re-captured 20 square kilometres of territory. Earlier, in June, when "Operation Leap Forward" was launched, troops secured control of an extent of 78 kilometres but were forced to give up most of the territory due to tactical withdrawals. And now, military planners realised that besides ensuring that the main defence complex including the runway is out

of enemy firing range, recapture of territory would lead to the new areas the security forces now hold.

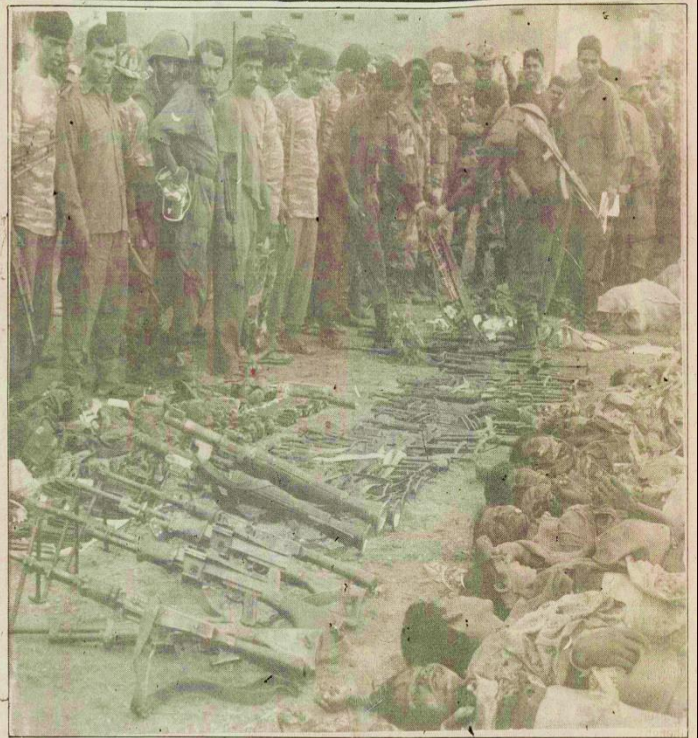
As expected, "Operation Thunder Strike" brought under security forces control an extent of 24 square kilometres. This meant that they are now holding 44 square kilometres.

Stage one of "Operation Thunder Strike" extended to the villages of Navakeri and Alchevely. Thereafter, during stage two, troops moved to Puttur west and Vallai.

The first kilometre of advance by troops during "Operation Thunder Strike" met with little or no resistance. Then came bitter fighting but troops pushed forward to form a six kilometre long defence line. By the end of day one, this had been accomplished.

On the night of October 2 troops who were conscious of the bad experience in Alaveddy (during "Operation Leap Forward") were ready for any counter attack. As expected, it came around 2.15 a.m. A group broke through the newly established defences and made their way in. Once that had happened, troops linked up trapping the group of LTTE guerrillas inside.

A bitter fire fight ensued. Troops went on firing at guerrillas who were by then attempting to withdraw, taking cover behind houses and parapet walls. It



The bodies and the booty: over 200 LTTE terrorists were killed in the Operation Thunder Strike

was almost dawn when the fire fight slowed down. Troops counted 118 bodies and handed them over to the ICRC later. But, the area was strewn with pieces of bodies - the result of suicide squad members who were part of the counter attack group blowing themselves up.

Senior military officials were buoyed by what they say is the success of "Operation Thunder Strike." One of them said, "we profited from the lessons of "Operation Leap Forward". This is the first time we made such a positive gain in the northern theatre of war."

But "Operation Thunder Strike" cost the lives of one officer and 52 other ranks.

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of them were killed during the conduct of the operation whilst 27 died in the counter

attack. That week also saw the deaths of 15 soldiers and four sailors when Sea Tigers attacked a landing craft of the Sri Lanka Navy off the north eastern shores. More than 170 soldiers have been injured, some of them sustaining minor wounds.

Troops were consolidating their positions in the newly captured areas yesterday amidst sporadic, showers, an indication that the onset of the monsoon was about to begin.

But amidst a censorship and paucity of a free flow of infor-

mation there was both anxiety and expectation in various quarters over the impending assault on the LTTE in Jaffna.

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