

Dvora, Dvora: LTTE plans high-tech warfare. (1995, September 03).
The Sunday times.

Dvora, Dvora: LTTE plans high-tech warfare

The Indian Ocean waters off the coast of Mullaitivu has been the focal point of considerable security forces attention in the past weeks.

At least two shiploads of military hardware for the LTTE arrived in the international shipping lanes. They were unloaded into a flotilla of smaller boats, most of them fitted with more than one outboard motor to facilitate speedier runs.

The booty was unloaded in the coast, just a little distance away from the Sea Tiger Base at Chalai, some 30 kilometres north of Mullaitivu. The "Commander" of Sea Tigers, Soosai, "Brigadier Sornam", a one time bodyguard of Tiger leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran and now a Tiger "field commander", Shankar, another former bodyguard were among the guerrilla top rungers who had been at the coast overseeing the unloading operations.

They were "armed" with binoculars and communication sets. Soosai himself co-ordinated

ices to ply between Trincomalee and the islands off the Jaffna peninsula transporting civilians.

For those living in the islands including Delft, Nainativu, Eluvaitivu, Pungudutivu, Analaivivu and Kayts, which are under Government control, the only mode of transport to the outside world is via this passenger vessel to Trincomalee. A vast number of passengers who arrive in Trincomalee travel to Colombo by road for various requirements and are back to the same port for their return journey.

On that fateful August 28, 121 civilian passengers boarded "Iris Moana" for the 12 hour journey. There were seven crew members. Neither the passengers nor the crew were aware that they were embarking on a voyage that would end with their becoming hostages of the LTTE. That too amidst a bloody encounter in the high seas in which some of the sequence of events are still shrouded in mystery.

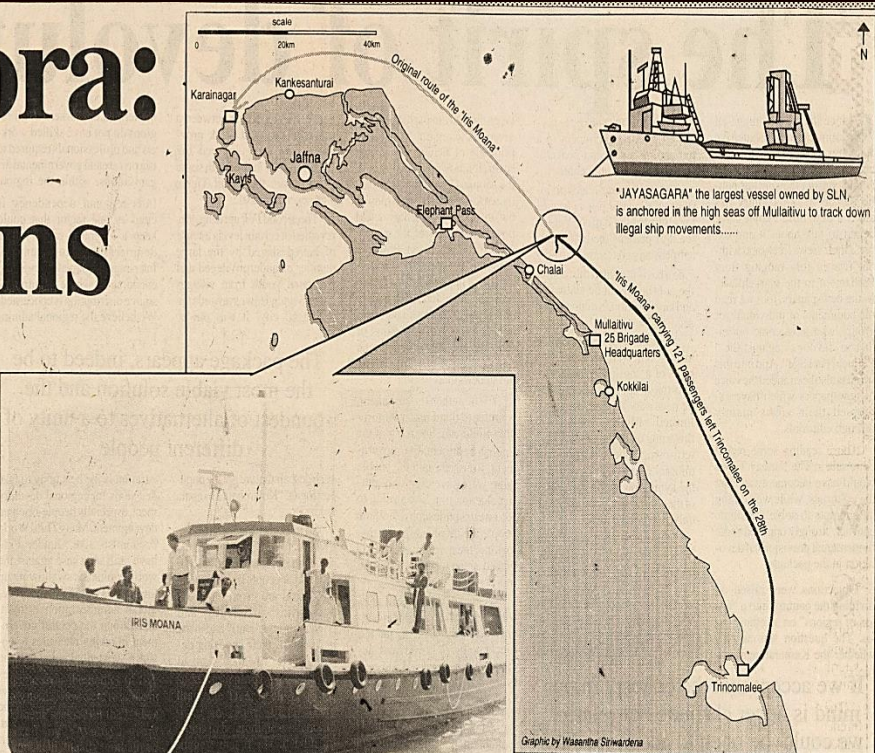
It was some three hours after

reported that Super Dvora 463 had been towed by Tiger cadres towards the shore where weapons and equipment on board had been ripped off.

Security forces are yet to establish what hit Super Dvora 463. There were various surmises. Some said Tiger guerrillas fired Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPGs) from aboard the "Iris Moana." Others said the fire came from the shore, possibly from the 105mm rifled gun of a Chinese built Type T-55 Main Battle Tank (MBT).

This MBT was captured by the LTTE in November, 1993, during the attack on the Pooneryn defence complex. Though this tank had been moved around in the Wannai area, there have been reports that it had developed engine and clutch problems.

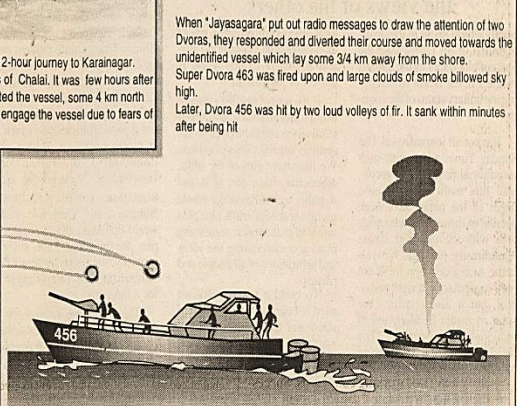
Yet others held the view that it was fired from a Recoilless Gun (RCL) which was seized by the LTTE from the Army some months ago. Other knowledgeable senior officers thought



On the evening of August 28, 121 passengers boarded "Iris Moana" for a 12-hour journey to Karainagar. After being hijacked by the LTTE "Iris Moana" remained close to the shores of Chalai. It was few hours after dawn broke on August 29, Army personnel of 25 Brigade in Mullaitivu spotted the vessel, some 4 km north east of the Base. SLAF fixed wing bombers were under strict orders not to engage the vessel due to fears of harming the civilian passengers and crew.

SITUATION REPORT

By Iqbal Athas



When "Jayasagara" put out radio messages to draw the attention of two Dvoras, they responded and diverted their course and moved towards the unidentified vessel which lay some 314 km away from the shore. Super Dvora 463 was fired upon and large clouds of smoke billowed sky high. Later, Dvora 456 was hit by two loud volleys of fir. It sank within minutes after being hit

operations involving some 40 LTTE cadres. One ship had followed the other in just a week.

As I said in these columns last week (Situation Report, August 27), the military hardware included Swiss made Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns, Stinger surface-to-air missiles, anti tank weapons, high explosives and automatic weapons. In addition, there has also been a stock of Romack surface-to-air missiles which have a range of 5,000 feet.

The news of the LTTE acquisition caused serious concern in the defence establishment. It came at a time when the Ministry of Defence received reports that LTTE representatives were scouting for purchase of more military hardware, particularly artillery pieces and anti aircraft weapons in Ukraine where there is a lucrative market for war-like items since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Hence, the National Security Council which examined the situation worked out a series of measures to thwart any further attempts by the LTTE to smuggle military hardware and other supplies.

The 25 Brigade in Mullaitivu was asked to step up coastal surveillance through their observation posts and closely monitor communications. Sri Lanka Navy's ocean patrol vessel (OPV) 'Jayasagara' skippered by Commander Tissa Gunatilleke, set out from the Navy base at Trincomalee, the headquarters of the Commander, Eastern Naval Area, on August 27.

'Jayasagara', built in Sri Lanka by the Colombo Dockyard Ltd., is currently the largest vessel owned by the Sri Lanka Navy. It is a sister ship of 'Sagarwardena' which was sunk by the LTTE off the shores of Mannar, last year.

It was on a special mission to reconnoitre the waters off Mullaitivu for any unauthorised maritime movements within Sri Lanka territorial waters. It was tasked to initiate immediate action including calling for air attacks if any suspicious vessel or vessels were sighted.

'Jayasagara' had spent the first day of its special mission with hardly anything noteworthy to report except for routine matters to headquarters in Trincomalee.

The next day, August 28, around 5 p.m., the 'Iris Moana' set sail from Trincomalee. Its destination was the Naval port of Karaimagar. The passenger vessel chattered by the Commissioner General of Essential Ser-

vice in the vicinity. Repeated attempts to establish radio contact failed thus heightening suspicion. There was a flurry of radio communication between 'Jayasagara' and the headquarters of the Eastern Naval Area.

Earlier that day (Tuesday, August 29), two Israeli built Dvoras - had left the Trincomalee Harbour. One of them, a Super Dvora bore the serial number 463 while the other, a Dvora had the number 456. The two gun boats were escorting a vessel carrying logistics supplies to the Sri Lanka Army and were headed for the northern port of Kankesanthurai.

The word Dvora in Hebrew refers to a female hornet, known for its fatal sting. The Super Dvoras are much lighter, longer and faster than the ordinary Dvoras. They have a cruising speed of 40 knots as against the ordinary counterparts which average 30 knots.

When 'Jayasagara' put out radio messages to draw the attention of the two Gun Boats which were in the general area, Dvora 456 had already gone ahead. The Super Dvora 463 under the command of Lieutenant W.A.N.K. Wijesinghe responded to the call. He was directed to divert course and check out the unidentified vessel which lay some three quarters of a kilometre away from the shore.

Details of the events that followed are shrouded in mystery. The Super Dvora 463 was fired upon. Large clouds of smoke billowed sky high. Troops at 25 Brigade in Mullaitivu observed the thick black clouds and later

the LTTE issued a heavy acquired surface to surface missile.

Both officers at the Mullaitivu Army Camp as well as those on board 'Jayasagara' made contact with Sri Lanka Air Force. Navy Commander, Vice Admiral Motlan Samarasekera, who was at his headquarters reached out to his Air Force counterpart, Air Marshal Oliver Ranasinghe, on the hot line to request immediate air strikes.

SLAF fixed wing bombers and helicopters took off from China Bay Air Base and headed towards the seas off Mullaitivu. They were under orders not to engage 'Iris Moana' for fear of harming the civilian passengers and crew. Pilots reported observing smoke trails - an indication that the Tigers were firing surface to air missiles.

Government's intelligence channels have confirmed that the LTTE has acquired the first generation hand held Stinger missiles. The American built weapons has an infra red guidance system so the firer does not have to guide the missile. An advantage with the Stinger, according to weapons experts, is that it does not require the firer to be highly trained in its use. The Stinger has been widely used by the Mujahideen in Afghanistan.

Although the US Defence Department launched a Stinger offering programme by offering attractive cash hand outs to those turning in their missiles, it is known that a sizeable quantity has been sold in Afghanistan to arms procurers by cash strapped Mujahideen cadres.

Navy headquarters has declared other crew members missing in action. From the Super Dvora 463, the crew members are: Sub Lieutenant M. P. H. W. Kumaratunga, Leading Seaman M.G.K. Dharmawardena, Communicator S.P. Gamage, Able Seaman L. A. P. K. Perera and Able Seaman H. N. L. Bandara.

From the Dvora 456, those declared Missing in Action were: Lieutenant M. A. J. H. Wijewardena, Lt. T. L. Herath, Leading Seaman U. J. K. Hemantha, O/D T. G. Kandasagame, O/D H. W. R. P. Kumara, Communicator P. V. K. Karunaratne, Mechanical Engineer A. A. Chandana, Leading Mechanical Engineer S. K. K. S. Nishantha.

Throughout Thursday (August 31) 'Iris Moana' remained close to the shores of Chalai with no news of the fate of civilian passengers. But on Friday morning, SLAF reconnaissance flights spotted a trawler lying alongside

The time was around 5.20 p.m. (August 29) when the four gun boats approached the area followed a distance away by 'Jayasagara'.

Before long, Dvora 456 was hit by two twin volleys of fire. It sank and the remaining three gun boats were immediately ordered to make a tactical withdrawal. Dvora 456 sank within minutes after being fired at.

What hit Dvora 456 is not yet clear. But men on board the other gun boat spoke of balls of flames skimming the surface of the sea at lightning speed towards Dvora 456.

Sri Lanka Air Force air cover was sought again but soon the area was engulfed in darkness. It was night.

By Wednesday (August 30) morning, LTTE had informed the security forces through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that it was handing over the bodies of five Navy men. They were to come in polythene sacks. But the bodies arrived in Vavuniya from Kilinochchi, neatly embalmed and in wooden coffins. They were flown to Colombo the same day.

Four of the bodies, all crew members of the Super Dvora 463 have been identified. They are: Lt. W. A. N. K. Wijesinghe, Leading Mechanical Engineer U.K.D. Senaka, Able Seaman H.W.K. Nissanka and Mechanical Engineer P.N.D. Jayaratne. There was only one body from Dvora 456 that was identified. It was that of Able Seaman P. Vihana.

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'Iris Moana'.

Where the trawler came from or why it has been lying together with 'Iris Moana' remains a mystery. Senior Navy officials were to join a later SLAF reconnaissance mission to make a study by themselves.

Reports reaching the government yesterday said that both passengers and crew disembarked and taken to Kilinochchi. ICRC delegates had made a request to the LTTE to see the passengers and crew and were awaiting permission.

The attack on the two gun boats has prompted Navy headquarters to seek some security safeguards from the Sri Lanka Army. This is to enable the Navy to continue to move logistic and other material on behalf of the Army.

Clearly, the 'Iris Moana' episode was a ploy by the LTTE to draw the Dvoras closer to the shore and attack them. There seems to be credible evidence to suggest that if not in both instances, at least in the case of Dvora 456, the attack came from land. The aim of this attack appears to be to forestall the impending security forces offensive in the north. It is a known fact that the Sri Lanka Army has to depend both on the Sri Lanka Navy and the Sri Lanka Air Force to secure its logistics in place in the north.

Whilst acquiring more military hardware and having them smuggled into Sri Lanka, the LTTE has also been busy in the past week making other preparations to pre-empt the offensive.

Significant among them has been the expanding of LTTE's anti-aircraft wing. Cadres from this wing are being positioned in small groups in many locations in the Wanni, and in the east to attack SLAF aircraft using surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft guns.

Tiger cadres are also being massed in uncontrolled areas in Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts to attack unidentified targets. The LTTE has set up at least four field hospitals in the east thus baring its intentions to go for a major strike in the area.

Besides trying to scuttle an offensive in the north where the LTTE will find it difficult to contend with the sheer strength of security forces - the Tigers, as often mentioned in these columns are bent on causing diversionary attacks in the east. That

is not to say, the LTTE will abandon the Jaffna peninsula where it is running a virtual civil administration. Preparations within the peninsula, as reported in these columns last week, are as much a part of the counter measures as the diversions in the east area.

In a surprise move, the LTTE has also banned civilian traffic to Vavuniya through Thandakulam from last Thursday. Civilian boat movements through the Kilali passage in the Jaffna lagoon have also come to a halt.

While security forces do not rule out the likelihood of an attack on a target in the Vavuniya sector, they strongly believe to prevent any information reaching government authorities.

In another unrelated development, security forces on Wednesday (August 30) seized a precious piece of equipment which was on its way to the LTTE in Jaffna.

In a press release on August 31, the Operational Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence, said at Irattaperykulam, just a few kilometres before Vavuniya, 'troops at the roadblock arrested the driver and the cleaner of a lorry while attempting to smuggle the following items:

- Powerful scanning equipment.
- Global position system (an equipment with which the user could locate any position electronically within 300 mile radius).
- Tuner (all types of antennae can be tuned electronically).

The Global Position System is the Operational Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence chose to call it was much more significant and important. Army Commander Lt. Gen. Gerry de Silva, produced the piece of equipment - National Security Council, its brand named 'MAGELLAN'.

The Magellan 4000 Global Positioning System is developed in the United States. The GPS was used operationally for the first time during the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq. Among its users are Britain's elite Special Air Services Regiment (SAS).

Peter Damman, a one-time SAS soldier, in his book 'Weapons and Equipment of the SAS' described the 'MAGELLAN' Global Positioning System (GPS) as follows:

'GPS consists of a number of satellites positioned above the earth - each one orbits the globe twice a day - which transmit pre-

cision time and position (latitude, longitude and altitude) information on a 24-hour basis. Using a GPS receiver user can determine their location anywhere on earth. There are 21 satellites and three spares orbiting the earth providing 24-hour two and three dimensional positioning to any user anywhere on earth.

How does it work? The whole system is based on precise time and position information. Each satellite, using atomic clocks (accurate within one second every 300,000 years) and location data, continuously broadcasts the time and its position. A GPS receiver, listening to three or more satellites at once, picks up these signals to determine the user's position on earth. The receiver, by measuring the time interval between the transmission and the reception of a satellite signal, calculates the distance between the user and each satellite. It then calculates the position of the user by utilizing the distance measurements of at least three satellites - four in the case of a three-dimensional positioning - in an algorithm computation. The position information on a receiver can be displayed in various ways according to user requirements. For example, military users can have the information shown as Military Grid coordinates.

Each satellite continuously broadcasts two signals: a commercial Standard Positioning Service (SPS) signal for civilian users, and a Precise Positioning Service (PPS) signal for military use. The Magellan GPS, NAV 1000M (Note: an earlier generation Magellan 4000, which was seized in the latest) military receiver was the system used by United Nations forces during Operation 'Desert Storm' (though only 14 satellites were operational at the time). It is a Small Lightweight GPS Receiver (SLGR) that weighs 0.83kg with batteries and measures 210mm x 90mm x 50mm. Constructed of high-impact, thermal-formed plastic and high-impact-absorbing thermal plastic rubber, it is waterproof, can withstand extremes of temperatures, and its liquid crystal display can run continuously for up to seven hours.

'Its application in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq quickly became apparent. In a poorly mapped terrain characterised by featureless landscape where sandstorms could reduce visibility to zero, hand-held GPS receivers gave troops constant read-outs of their exact location.

'For small-sized teams operating behind enemy lines, such as the SAS, GPS receivers enabled them to move quickly and accurately through the barren terrain at night if need be. GPS units were also used for other tasks: search and rescue deployment of troops, intelligence gathering, fire direction, ground troop navigation, obtaining fixes on enemy troop positions, and precise targeting for 'smart' weapons.

A total of 400 GPS receivers were issued to British troops during the course of the war and many of them were used by SAS troopers. One of their great advantages was that they could be used to set up a rendezvous point in the desert to enable SAS teams to re-arm and refuel.

'Thus a unit could request re-supply, select a waypoint along its route and arrive at the location to find the supplies waiting to be picked up. In addition, each receiver can store position coordinates so that unit can make a return trip if necessary.

'When the enemy was located, the receiver's targeting calculation function allowed immediate identification and marking of these locations by determining their position grid coordinates. These functions made the SAS's task of intelligence gathering much easier and more accurate.

The Gulf War proved that GPS receivers could withstand adverse weather conditions, were easy to use and were reliable, aided night movement, and worked well with laser designators. Accurate to within 25m, the next generations GPS receivers - the Precise Lightweight GPS Receivers (PLGR) - promises to be accurate to within 16m.

How did the LTTE acquire this sophisticated hi-tech equipment, smuggle it to Colombo and tried to smuggle it to Jaffna? Army authorities have already begun an inquiry.

Meanwhile, the security forces have been successful in procuring a sizeable volume of their procurements. For security reasons, the details must remain a secret. However, one known bit of good news doing the rounds in the security establishment is the further acquisition by the Sri Lanka Air Force of anti-missile capability. It is to obtain infrared devices.

If all goes well, the SLAF will also become the proud owner of Israeli built Kfir jet fighters. A team from the SLAF which was in Tel Aviv discussed the matter but finally is yet to be reached.