

Boy, 15, swims for his life after seeing friends shot . (1988, December 8). *The globe and mail.*

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# Boy, 15, swims for his life after seeing friends shot

BY BRYAN JOHNSON  
Globe and Mail Correspondent

AMPITIYA, Sri Lanka

## *Unknown men strike Sri Lankan village and pick four teenage boys for death*

When he came out to meet the foreign reporter, little Ranasinge Gunadasa was shaking uncontrollably. Perhaps yesterday morning, no one in the world had more right to be terrified.

Half a kilometre up the road, his 15-year-old friend Nihal Gamage lay dead, a bullet-hole six centimetres above his left eye. The bloody corpses of two other young friends were stiffening in the sun of a tropical dawn.

They had been four boys, yanked from their homes after Tuesday night's curfew.

Four boys forced to strip and line up in a pond outside this small southern hamlet. Four boys blasted at close range by a dozen unknown men in military fatigues.

Ranasinge Gunadasa was the one who — miraculously — survived.

"I took a dive into the water and swam away from the bullets," he said; between lips he could not keep from quivering. "I swam about 15 yards. When I came up for air, the soldiers were flashing their torches in the water and still shooting.

"But they were not looking for me anymore. They thought I was already dead."

During the night, 26 people died similar deaths on the paradise island of Sri Lanka. Some were killed by terrorists of the People's Liberation Front (JVP). Some died at the hands of embittered military men, who often settle scores after dark. Still others fell prey to a pro-government vigilante squad called the Green Tigers.

No one in tiny Ampitiya village, six kilometres inland from the southern coastal

town of Tangalle, knows who killed the teenagers Tuesday night.

The entire village ran indoors when the men with guns arrived at 9 p.m. And everyone stayed inside, cringing as each shot and scream rang out from the pond only 50 metres away.

"We could do nothing," said one villager, as he rigged a rough canvas shelter to shield the three bodies. "We couldn't even come out later to see what had happened. We had to wait until sunrise, when the curfew lifted."

The villagers insist that none of the boys — the oldest of whom was 17 — belonged to

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