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OFFICERS**

OFFICERS

**MILITARY
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Army Medical Teams Distinguish Themselves in Afghanistan

Story by Marcus Ho / Photography by Wan Zhong Wei & contributed by Medical Team



Our medical team providing vital support to the people of Oruzgan

In today's highly inter-connected world, the security challenges we face are highly complex and transnational in nature. Instability in one part of the world has far-reaching consequences in other regions. As such, the peace we enjoy in Singapore is inextricably tied to global security, which in turn requires concerted multinational cooperation. The SAF contributes to global security through its expanded spectrum of operations that includes participating in international peace support operations.

One outstanding example of our contributions to global security is the deployment between November 2008 and May this year of two 20-man medical contingents to Oruzgan, Afghanistan. Each team, comprising medical and nursing officers, had served for three months in a Field Hospital (FH) situated in Camp Holland, where they provided in-theatre medical and surgical support to the International Security Assistance Force troops and the Afghan national security forces involved in the stabilisation and reconstruction efforts. The FH also provided emergency medical care to the local populace.

Invaluable Learning Experience

Besides providing invaluable field experience, the deployment had also enabled our servicemen to work closely with their counterparts from the Royal Netherlands Army (RNA). In the FH, composite teams comprising both SAF and RNA medical personnel were formed to handle emergency and trauma casualties brought in for treatment. For Team Leader LTC Kevin Chin, working with the Dutch had provided an enriching experience for him and his troops. "The collaboration went very well," he shared. "Not only did we learn about their culture, we also learnt about how they conducted their operations, how they prepare for them, and how they felt about fighting and coping with the deployment."

During their deployment, the personnel had many opportunities to put into practice their various knowledge and skills that they had been trained in. Team member, 1SG Brian Benitez explained, "As a medic, I've been training so hard and long for real situations, like treating trauma wounds. It's a really good experience to finally have the chance to do what I've been training for. It's an experience I wouldn't easily get in Singapore for sure."

Invaluable Operational Exposure

While honing their skills and learning from their foreign partners had been a major highlight of their deployment, our troops had also experienced the operational environment that will leave an indelible mark on their development as professional soldiers. The Oruzgan province is widely known for its insurgent threats

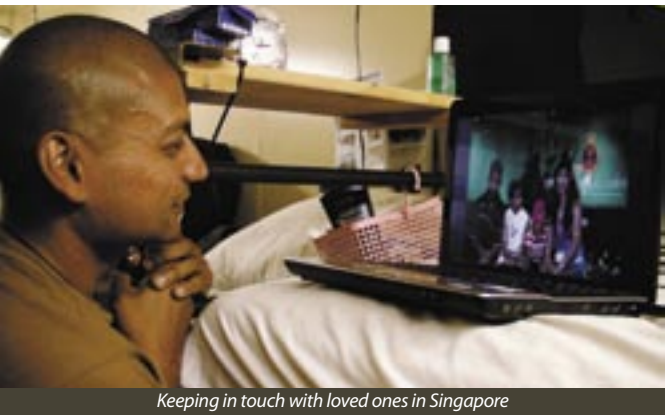
and harsh environment. To adequately prepare our troops for these challenges, rigorous pre-deployment trainings were conducted to equip them with the necessary skills to mitigate the risks and acclimatise to the arduous conditions.



SAF medics dressing the wounds of an Afghan casualty

And to enable the medical personnel to operate seamlessly with their Dutch counterparts, the pre-deployment trainings included additional medical skills preparation such as treating trauma patients at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Another team member, MAJ (Dr) Lo Hong Yee said, "The trainings we had were very good. Although the patients we treated did not suffer any gunshot wounds, the protocols we used were fairly similar. However, the deployment in Afghanistan was still a once in a lifetime experience. The frontline experience at the Field Hospital where we had actually witnessed casualties dying is an emotional one. This however had reinforced our determination to improve ourselves professionally as much as we can to raise the standard of our medical services."

Home Support



Keeping in touch with loved ones in Singapore

For the teams, being in faraway countries like Afghanistan inevitably meant that they would have missed the support and

comfort of their loved ones. To alleviate this, our Army made various provisions, including the use of email, satellite phones and video-conferencing so that team members could remain in touch with their families and friends.

In addition, family members could send welfare parcels with cards, photographs and even local food to the deployed members through a Family Liaison Officer.

It's All Worth It!

While the medical teams have treasured the many meaningful contributions made during their deployment, they also brought home many bittersweet memories and valuable life lessons. "There was once when we received two severely injured Afghan children," MAJ (Dr) Lo recollected. "They found an object outside their house which looked like a ball and started to play with it. However, it turned out to be an Improvised Explosive Device that eventually exploded in front of them. One of them ended up with his bowels sticking out, while the other suffered severe shrapnel wounds to his chest. Both required major surgery, but this story has a happy ending. The kids were discharged after several weeks of intensive treatment, and they were able to walk out of the hospital alive. I'm really happy to have made a difference in their lives."

For the team members, the 3-month experience in Afghanistan was certainly something they would not hesitate to do again, if the call comes. LTC Chin said, "The deployment was something we signed up for. And personally if I had the chance, I'd do it again, without any hesitation!"

Recognising Stellar Performance

On 3 June, the sacrifices, professionalism and contributions of the servicemen deployed overseas were formally recognised when they were presented the SAF Overseas Service Medal (OSM). Of the 44 recipients, eight received the Bar to the SAF OSM as they had previously been awarded the OSM for another overseas mission. Another three, including LTC Kevin Chin, were awarded the Bar (Enhanced) to the SAF OSM for having completed more than 180 days of deployment and their outstanding performance.



SAF OSM recipients (from left to right) LTC Chin, MAJ (Dr) Koh, MAJ (Dr) Lo, 1SG Brian in a discussion with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean

One such individual who was awarded the Bar to the SAF OSM is 2WO Mazlan Mohammed Khahid, who was previously involved in overseas missions in Timor Leste and Indonesia. He said, "Going for such operations is a true validation of all of our training. All these missions allow us to practise what we learn in real situations in order to become more professional soldiers."

For LTC Alfred Fox, who served as a National Liaison Officer based in Kabul, Afghanistan for six months, the OSM is a solid reflection of the true value of the sacrifices made and lessons learnt. He commented, "I'm happy that I have earned the medal as it is a recognition of the contributions made in Afghanistan. However, besides the formality, I think the fact that I was sent there in the first place to participate and contribute to an overseas deployment is in itself a real recognition. The selection process for overseas deployment is particularly stringent, and to be given the opportunity is a measure of confidence in my abilities. I'm really thankful for that."

Army Operations Seminar 2009

Ready, Relevant, Responsible

Story by Ian Cheong / Photography by Jonathan Ong



COL Lim emphasised the need for our Army to be prepared for any security threat

"In today's security paradigm, our Army needs to be ready to respond to complex threats, possess the relevant skills and tools to deal with multi-faceted problems, and also play our role as a responsible member of the international community." This was exhorted by COL Benedict Lim, Assistant Chief of the General Staff (Operations), in his opening address at this year's Army Operations Seminar held at Leader's Hall in Pasir Laba Camp on 27 May. With its theme of "Ready, Relevant, Responsible", participants at this year's seminar were treated to a highly interesting and insightful sharing by various servicemen who had served in overseas missions. Chief of Army, MG Neo Kian Hong, and members of the Army Leadership Group were also present at the seminar.

After witnessing a capability demonstration of the Peace Support Operation drills by HQ Guards and listening to various presentations from people who have, in the words of Bilbo Baggins from the Lord of the Rings, "been there and back again", participants quickly understood the need for our Army to remain relevant to the changing security paradigms. MWO K. Chandran, an Operations Warrant Officer from HQ Guards, said, "Very rarely, do we get to hear about the experiences of people who have gone for overseas deployments. This sharing helps us stay relevant as we are able to build on their experiences and then apply it in our work." For MWO Chandran, who had



COL Siew Kum Wong getting a feel of some of the equipment used in such operations

the privilege of representing the SAF at Operation Flying Eagle, the sharing of the various lessons learnt from Afghanistan was most enlightening. He shared, "The common trend for both international operations, was that SAF personnel quickly adapted to the situation on the ground, learning as we went along. This gives me the confidence that our Army can indeed counter any potential security threats."

MWO Chandran's confidence was not just the only takeaway from the seminar. LTC (NS) Bernard Wong, the Brigade Second-in-Command of 29th Singapore Infantry Brigade, felt that the seminar was important in illuminating to our NSmen the myriad operations that our Army regularly undertakes. He commented, "This seminar gives us as NSmen, a broader understanding of what the active guys do, or rather, the other operations our Army does besides conventional military operations. What truly struck me is the fact that despite our size, we are still contributing to the larger international community in a meaningful way."

For 2LT Shaun Liu, a Platoon Commander in 7th Singapore Infantry Brigade, the seminar highlighted our Army's relevance today. He said, "This seminar really showcased the important lessons and rich experiences of our people who have gone for overseas deployments. What they do is not something we do everyday, and their experiences are valuable as we are able to tap on these lessons for any real-time operations we may face."

Strengthening Ties Among ASEAN Armies

Story by Marcus Ho / Photography by Wan Zhong Wei

ASEAN is a region that comprises countries with diverse cultural backgrounds and political systems. As such, it is crucial to maintain and continuously strengthen the multilateral ties amongst the neighbouring nations. To this end, initiatives such as the ASEAN Chiefs of Army Multilateral Meeting (ACAMM) and ASEAN Armies Rifle Meet (AARM) have been established to reinforce the strong bonds of friendship amongst the military leaders and members from the ASEAN armies.

To facilitate ACAMM and AARM scheduled in October, the ACAMM Working Group (AWG) meeting and Technical Committee Meeting (TCM) was held on 27 May at Swissôtel, where delegates from the respective ASEAN armies gathered to discuss pertinent issues. Assistant Chief of General Staff, (Intelligence) COL Yeo See Peng, who chaired the AWG meeting shared, "The atmosphere in the meeting was very good. The rela-

tionships amongst the 10 representatives have been very positive and constructive. We were all very keen and excited in following up from the last ACAMM and on some of the new initiatives which have been established."

The fruitful discussions from the AWG meeting also testified to the existing strong multilateral ties and professionalism of our Army. "I'm very happy to work with the Singapore Army," enthused the Deputy Director of Malaysian Army, HQ Secretariat, LTC Mohammad bin Ab Rahman. "Everything has been well-planned, professional and without a single hiccup. I've always enjoyed Singapore's hospitality!"



Delegates from TCM inspecting our firing ranges

Besides attending the meetings, the delegates were also treated to a tour to our firing ranges and the Army Museum of Singapore (ARMS). A Staff Officer of Intelligence & Security, HQ Royal Brunei Land Forces, MAJ Dayang Suriyati Binti Haji

Junaidi, who was also trained at the Officer Cadet School here shared some of her takeaways of her visit. She said, "The Army Museum certainly brings back a lot of fond memories for me. The place is very interesting because it shows the transition from the past to the present, and throws light on what is going on in the future as well."

Background of ACAMM and AWG

ACAMM was first initiated by GEN Surayud Chulanont, then Commander-in-Chief Royal Thai Army, during the Pacific Army Chiefs Conference-I (PACC-I) held in Singapore in September 1999. The forum enables ASEAN military leaders to better understand the regional issues, foster military-to-military cooperation, develop interpersonal relationships, and contribute to regional dialogue and stability. The first ACAMM was held in Thailand in November 2000, to coincide with the closing ceremony of AARM when all the Chiefs of Armies were present. Presently, all 10 ASEAN countries participate in ACAMM annually.

The AWG serves as the working arm of the ACAMM. Annually prior to each meeting, delegates would come together to finalise the guidelines as well as establish the initiatives to follow up for their respective Chiefs of Armies during the ACAMM proper. This has moved ASEAN Armies beyond dialogue to practical cooperation. The networks and rapport developed has enabled our Army to better prepare for the 10th ACAMM and afford us the opportunity to initiate future agendas and issues to be discussed at these meetings.

The Tracks of Training Transformation

Story by Chia Han Sheng / Photography by Jonathan Ong & Wan Zhong Wei



“While we transform our training systems, pedagogies and enhance our training facilities to raise 3rd Generation capabilities, we must continue to hone the Armour fundamental skills and nurture the spirit of Armour Warriors to be ready for operations”

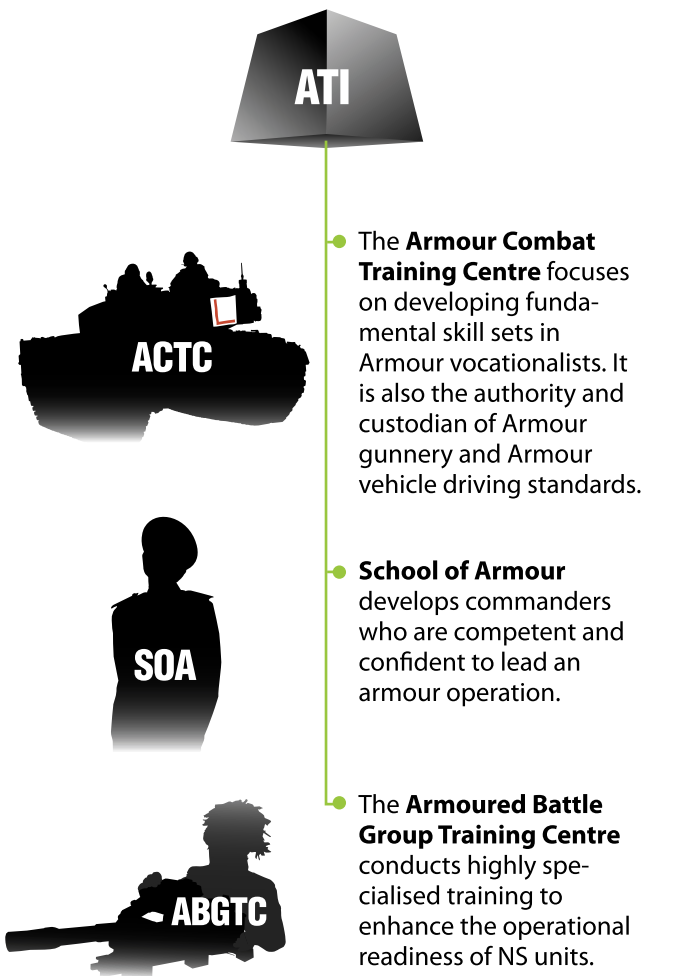
LTC Lam Pei Sien,
COMD Armour Training Institute (ATI)

Devastating fire-power, precise manoeuvres and a networked force - these are traits which we associate with the 3rd Generation Armour. While our armoured vehicles vividly convey images of sheer strength, it is easy to forget that before our soldiers can operate these massive beasts, they must first undergo a comprehensive training programme spearheaded by Armour Training Institute (ATI). With the introduction of new capabilities and operational concepts, it is imperative that ATI maintains relevance and transforms training for the 3rd Generation Armour Force. Hop on board as Army News takes you through Armour's training transformation.

Through-Train Programme

Operating an Armour platform requires highly specialised skills. For this reason, ATI operates a Through-Train programme which trains soldiers after their BMT up till they enter MINDEF Reserves. To do this, ATI is organised into three training centres as shown in the diagram below.

Inculcating an Operational Culture



In order to meet the modern demands of high-tempo warfare, Armour Warriors must be ready to rapidly transfer what they

have learnt during training into the battlefield. “Think and train operational” is therefore the maxim which underlies much of ATI's training culture today.



The School of Armour (SOA) plays a key role in inculcating this operational culture in future leaders, ensuring that the culture has strong command emphasis. The Armour Live-Firing System (ALFS) is one of SOA's latest training methods to drive operations-oriented behaviour. Previously, before trainees conducted live-firing exercises, a dry run with blanks would be conducted on the actual live-firing ground. The newly adopted ALFS however, aims to make armour units more operational by removing the need for a dry run on the actual ground, as this cannot be done during operations.



Sounds intimidating? Not to the Officers and Specialist Cadet trainees who under went the challenging exercise. The ALFS has a rigorous qualification process to ensure that trainees are ready for the challenge. This process requires trainees to complete tests on their technical proficiency, equipment readiness and tactical competency. 2LT Marcus Ng who underwent the ALFS reflected, “Initially there was nervousness, but after the practice and evaluations, we felt confident to do it. Firing live rounds on the move without a dry run has certainly given us training which is very close to real operations.”

This confidence is what the instructors hoped to achieve. Officer Training Wing (OTW) Instructor 1WO Arumugam shared, “The preparation process firstly ensures that trainees meet the required standards and secondly boosts their confidence in executing the live-firing. We must start with inculcating this operational culture within the commanders.” Besides training new commanders, SOA is also embarking on the next step of assisting units in the implementation of the ALFS.

Enhancing Operational Readiness



When NSmen come back for In-Camp-Training (ICT), they hope to receive meaningful and efficient training. This, is exactly what they get from the Armoured Battle Group Training Centre (ABGTC) which organises component level training before the NS units are assigned to participate in realistic mission-based exercises. Here, NSmen train according to their functional roles and skill levels. For example, while Battalion Commanders attend unit-level tactical training, gunners and drivers will undergo technical familiarisation training at the same time.

In the past, NSmen had to wait for each functional group to complete their training before the instructors could attend to a new group. However, with greater use of simulation technology and a reworking of training structure, concurrent training at multiple levels can be conducted.

For training to be effective, the performance of each soldier has to be tracked and reviewed. 2SG (NS) Ramesh Muthusamy from 451st Singapore Armour Regiment (451 SAR) shared, “With this tracking and focused training, we get immediate feedback on our performance. The tracking gives me clear targets to hit and once I meet each standard, I'll move to the next one.” CPT (NS) Daniel Lee, OC, 464 SAR reiterated, “The consultative training with the Battalion HQ and the dedicated trainers from ATI make our training very effective.”

In the near future, ABGTC will be established as a centre of excellence for all Armour Battle Group and below tactics, techniques and procedures. It aims to become a knowledge generator and repository for even more realistic training to reinforce positive battlefield behaviour. Reflecting on ABGTC's progress, LTA (NS) Chan Boon Hwee from 430 SAR said, “It heartens me to see that the Army leadership puts great emphasis on making NS training effective. Nothing boosts morale better than seeing our objectives attained within the allocated time.”

Building the Fundamentals

Even as ATI gears commanders and NSmen towards more operational training, the need to keep Armour fundamentals sharp remains ever present. Armour Combat Training Centre (ACTC) is responsible for developing these basic skills which include Driving, Gunnery and Command and Control skills. ACTC is also responsible for ensuring the consistency in testing and certification of all Armour vehicle drivers and gunners.



In June 2008, a new obstacle course designed by ACTC was completed. The course features the innovative Urban Alley, a narrow urban maze which challenges driver's technique. The maze's PVC walls are mounted on wheels and allow trainers to easily re-configure the maze. OCT Ho Rey who drove through the Urban Alley for the first time shared, “I learnt that the driver's angle of vision is greatly reduced in urban areas. The close teamwork with my vehicle commander was keenly exercised. Such training hones my skills to manoeuvre through narrow lanes and tight corners in an urban area.”

As ACTC continues to keep basic training relevant to the evolving urban landscape, simulation technology will play an ever larger role in honing Armour fundamentals. Commanding Officer ACTC LTC Boo Chin Tuan explained, “We are looking into developing the next generation of simulators that will mark a quantum leap of technology and enable us to sharpen our gunnery and tactical capabilities further.”

Realising the “Man Machine Spirit”

As our Armour Formation charges through its 3rd Generation Transformation, a major success factor will be the effective integration of advanced platform capabilities with well trained Armour Warriors. In this respect, ATI will continue to play a critical role in forging “Man Machine Spirit” to realise the full operational capabilities of Armour.

The Trailblazer A Class of its Own

Story by Marcus Ho / Photography by Wan Zhong Wei & Jonathan Ong

The world's first Counter-Mine Vehicle (CMV) of the Military Load Class 30 (classification for military vehicles not exceeding 30 tonnes) was officially unveiled at its commissioning ceremony on 28 April at Sungei Gedong Camp. Aptly named the Trailblazer, this unique CMV not only can clear minefields effectively but also concurrently, mark its cleared lanes using a modern lane marking system for other vehicles to travel through safely.



How It All Began

One major characteristic of our 3rd Generation fighting force is

its ability to advance with great speed. Minefields and contaminated areas with booby traps must be cleared quickly in order to fully exploit the capabilities of our fast-moving fighting platforms, such as the Bionix II. Previously, it would take up to four hours for a platoon of Combat Engineers to clear the areas, not forgetting the perils in such tasks.

“Developing the Trailblazer was quite a challenging task,” revealed COL Ng Kin Yi, Chief Engineering Officer. “On one hand, we needed a CMV that would be able to move fast with the other vehicles through a wide range of terrain. Hence, it had to be compact and compatible with the Bionix platforms. At the same time, we wanted a CMV with a flailing system. A lot of



people told us that it wasn't possible, since flailing requires a lot of power, which would sacrifice vehicular speed. Therefore, a separate engine is needed to power the flailing mechanism so that speed is preserved.”

However, fitting two engines in one

Mobilising Our Civil Resources for Total Defence

Story by Ian Cheong / Photography by Wan Zhong Wei

It was a surprisingly quiet Saturday on 16 May at the Singapore Expo. Its exhibition halls were empty, and human traffic was minimal. The Expo's vast premises for once, did not host a major exhibition. But for such a quiet day, anyone present would probably be confounded by the sheer number of lorries, low loaders and heavy vehicles streaming into the vicinity of Exhibition Hall 1. If there was no exhibition held that day, why were so many vehicles flocking to the Expo? This puzzling development was easily explained when it became evident that 9th Singapore Division/Infantry (9 DIV/INF) was conducting a civil resource mobilisation exercises. Such exercises allow our Army and civil resource owners alike to hone the processes for swift activation should the real need arise.



Within a few hours after the activation, more than 100 civil resources vehicles had gathered at the Singapore Expo for inspections and verifications. Minister of State for Defence, Associate Professor (A/P) Koo Tsai Kee, witnessed this mobilisation exercise with about 100 visitors including Advisory Council for Community Relations in Defence (ACCORD) members,

grassroots leaders and civil resource owners. In his speech, A/P Koo stressed the need for civil resources to be deployed in tandem with the SAF's. He said, “Resources such as tanks, fighter jets and warships are specifically owned by the SAF. But in a war, we need more than these resources, and these resources lie in the civilian sector. Such resources, which include transport and construction, are not needed by the military all year round. Thus, when an emergency arises, we mobilise them to support our military.”



For an island nation whose only resource is its people, this civil resource mobilisation is a fine reflection of Total Defence in action. The unflinching support of the participating civil resource owners was even more noteworthy amidst the current economic gloom. It demonstrates their full support for Total Defence and reiterates the determination of our people to stand united in the defence of our country. This point was further emphasised by A/P Koo when he said, “If we can deter potential aggressors through our Total Defence system, we will have no need to go to war. Defence requires the support of the entire nation and even in times like this, Singaporeans must still continue to support Total Defence.”

small vehicle was clearly not feasible. To overcome this technical impasse, the developer, Singapore Technologies Kinetics, conceived a new cutting-edge two-in-one engine which enables the Trailblazer to move slowly for flailing purposes, and speedily when travelling with the rest of our fast-moving forces.

All Terrain Capability

While most armoured CMVs worldwide cannot operate on undulating ground, the Trailblazer is able to traverse through any terrain because it was built on the Bionix chassis. COL Ng added, “Let's put it this way – wherever you can plant the mine, the Trailblazer can clear it.”

In addition to its mine-clearing prowess, the Trailblazer is able to mark its trails using a lane marking system with pneumatically fired rods. This enables vehicles to quickly travel behind the Trailblazer safely without losing momentum. COL Ng explained, “In our 3rd Generation Army, there is hardly any pause. If we hit an obstacle, we'd have to breach it quickly so that the entire operation can be smoothly executed. The Trailblazer enhances our 3rd Generation Army's ability to manoeuvre at will.

“In addition, our Combat Engineers are able to operate a lot more safely. Now, we only require a commander and an operator in an armoured cabin to clear the mines and mark the lanes, instead of a platoon of Combat Engineers to do it. And the Trailblazer can do its tasks in just ten minutes!”

On their part, our civil resource owners have not let the current tough economic times cloud their priorities. Mr Teo Hoon Beng, the Chief Controller of the Civil Resources Authority, shared, “The quick and ready response of the civil resource owners in providing these resources is key to a civil resource mobilisation exercise. This enhances our operational readiness as we can ensure that in times of emergency, we will be ready.”



For the civil resource owners, their swift response to the activation was important in testing their operational capabilities. Mr Oh Siong Huat from Eng Seng Construction Pte Ltd, commented, “By meeting the requirements of a mobilisation exercise, we are also testing our capabilities. Even though we move our equipment out, we still need to ensure that our productivity is not compromised.” However, while these exercises do require some sacrifices on their part, many of them are very willing to contribute to the defence cause. Mr Desmond Lim from LTH Logistics Singapore Pte Ltd highlighted, “It feels great to work together with the SAF, contributing to the country's preparedness by providing logistical support.”

The New SAF Career Schemes

Meeting Future Challenges Today

Story by Ian Cheong / Photography by Wan Zhong Wei & Chia Han Sheng / Cover Design by Jonathan Ong



“Our people are our edge. The enhanced HR schemes will help our Army recruit, develop and retain quality regulars to sharpen our edge. This will serve to raise our human capital in our transformation to a 3rd Generation Army.”

COL Tan Chong Lee,
Assistant Chief of the General Staff (Personnel)

Singaporeans know very well the truism that “people are our greatest resource”. Despite our island’s small size and scarcity of natural resources, Singapore has transformed herself from an impoverished trading post into one of the world’s best cities. A major reason for this success has been the constant development of our human capital through education and hard work.

Like Singapore, the SAF too has evolved tremendously in its role as the defender of this island nation. Our servicemen have also become more educated. Thus, in order to continue our transformation towards a 3rd Generation fighting force, it is paramount that the SAF’s career schemes keep pace with the changing times so as to remain competitive and attractive.

On 14 May, Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean unveiled a slew of enhancements to the existing Officers’ and Warrant Officers’ schemes. He also announced the creation of a new military career scheme, the Military Domain Experts Scheme (MDES). These changes will come into effect by the first quarter of 2010. In his announcement, DPM Teo explained, “Maintaining a strong and capable SAF depends on recruiting and retaining able and committed people to keep the SAF forceful and dynamic. These changes will allow us to recruit, develop and retain the able and committed people we need to build a strong, capable and dynamic 3rd Generation SAF.”

The Need for Dynamism and Diversity



Our officers play a key leadership role in the battlefield

Our current schemes of service for military personnel were introduced in the late 1990s. Since then, several enhancements have been implemented to enable the SAF to continue to meet its manpower needs. And as the roles and expectations of our servicemen continue to evolve, it is timely for another holistic review. Officers’ roles have expanded to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex security environment. Warrant Officers today not only conduct regimental parades and drills, but also play key roles as trainers and mentors – imparting the necessary skills, values and knowledge to the rank and file. A new corps of servicemen who are experts in their respective military domains is also needed to support a sophisticated and technology-centric SAF.

This evolving landscape provided the impetus for the SAF to effect these career scheme changes. COL Tan Chong Lee, Assistant Chief of the General Staff (Personnel), expounded, “A key feature of today’s emerging human resource landscape is that people are becoming more educated and have higher career aspirations. With a declining birth rate, our regular force will be lean but will still need to be of good quality. We need to ensure this quality in the way we recruit and retain our regulars.”

To ensure the effectiveness and robustness of the new schemes, much thought and effort have been put in. COL Tan further explained, “We have spent more than a year running through these ideas. One important consideration we had was the feedback on the current career schemes. Another was how we are evolving into a 3rd Generation Army. Thus, in the design of this construct, we envisaged a scheme that could meet the human capital requirements of the future.”

Meeting the Needs of the Ground

Effecting a change of such magnitude requires comprehensive planning and preparation and this is no different for the SAF. Chief of Staff, Joint Staff, BG Chan Chun Sing said, “This is perhaps the most comprehensive change we have made to the career schemes of our people. Hence, we had to be very deliberate in how we went about doing this. In every step, we constantly consulted our servicemen about their individual needs and aspirations and thus came up with policies that will meet their needs.” Commanders at every level have been key partners in this process, giving feedback and communicating the changes.



COA and our Army’s senior commanders engaging servicemen on the new changes

Head Personnel Development Branch, G1-Army LTC Melvyn Ong has been involved in the conception of the scheme enhancements since 2007 and remembers how it all began, “We started with a couple of ideas and engaged our people to understand what was uppermost in their minds and how we could improve the HR schemes for them. It involved a great deal of listening and clarifying, so the enhancements are really ‘by our people’ and address key issues they have raised – such as how the raising of the officer retirement age to 50 will meet officer life cycle needs better, while ensuring our officer career still remains fast-paced and compact; how the removal of the Premium Plan gate will allow us to retain and groom our Specialists more decisively, and better to meet their aspirations; and how a deep specialist scheme will allow us to develop our engineers and technicians better, because our system-of-system demands will rise in the 3rd Generation Army.”

This ground engagement was crucial in ensuring that our servicemen and women not only could understand the various changes made, but also feedback their concerns. This allowed the management to further fine-tune the new schemes. One key engagement tool was the numerous cascade briefings and dialogue sessions conducted by G1-Army for the various units and formations. Almost 3000 regulars were present when ACGS(Pers), COL Tan, first shared the key features of the new schemes on 31st March and 2nd April. Over the weeks that followed, G1-Army visited almost every Division and Formation personally to give every serviceman a chance to share their concerns and have

their questions answered. COL Tan explained, “Communication is key. We want everybody to give their feedback and be aware of the enhancements and for them to see the fruit of their feedback. It has been intense but necessary and extremely worthwhile!” LTC Melvyn added, “we made the choice to announce the changes early, and while there is some uncertainty because details are not finalised, our people have welcomed the chance to be a part of the consultation process. With their inputs, we are on track to work out the details in the next few months.”



Briefings at the formation level ensured that servicemen were brought up to speed

Indeed, this engagement effort has paid dividends, as many of our servicemen and women welcomed the 2-way consultative approach undertaken by the senior management in MINDEF and the SAF to conceptualise this initiative. MWO Daniel Wee, the Brigade Sergeant Major of 2nd Singapore Infantry Brigade (2 SIB), shared, “These briefings were important as they really reflected the top level’s strong interest in engaging the people on the ground. This kept everyone up to speed about the scheme, and when feedback was given, they were very receptive to it. I think that this approach is very good as our views have helped to shape a scheme that really caters to our needs.”

MAJ Fairoz, the S3 of 1st Battalion, Singapore Guards (1 GDS), echoed, “This 2-way approach allowed us to clarify any issues we had and for the management to gather feedback from the ground. Through this, they could tweak the scheme to make things even better. Ultimately, these policies are for our people and the best group to hear from is the people who are directly affected by this scheme.”

Balancing Needs

As seen, the two-way approach has resulted in a scheme that will better cater to our people’s needs. BG Chan commented, “We must look beyond the current situation and position ourselves to provide compelling careers for the school leavers as well as people in the force today.” To achieve this, the different needs of people in various stages of their careers were taken into consideration. BG Chan added, “We have to keep pace with the evolving life-cycle needs of today.”

Besides focusing on the different needs of our people, the new schemes also support the organisational needs of the SAF. These organisational needs are contingent on having “able and committed” people in the force. Mr Tan Kwang Cheak, Director of Manpower, highlighted, “We need people for jobs where dynamism and a high level of mental and physical energy are needed to constantly challenge the current mindset so that the organisation can stay ahead. A compact and fast-paced career therefore remains an attractive proposition for these people.”



LTC Teo is looking forward to the benefits that the new scheme will bring

This compact and fast-paced career that the SAF offers is precisely what many of our people look out for, and these new changes reinforce this. LTC Raymond Teo, the Commanding Officer of 30th Battalion, Singapore Combat Engineers (30 SCE), shared, “With the new scheme, I can hold more appointments and thus make a difference to the people under me.”

For MSG Won Choon Hun, a Specialist Trainer at Army Combat Engineers Group (ARMCEG), this new scheme will aid in his leadership development. He said, “There are many courses that will help us develop into better leaders. Currently, some of these courses are only open for Warrant Officers, but the new Warrant Officer construct will have new leadership courses we can attend, even earlier in our career and this will develop us better. The focus on more continuing education opportunities is also a good one.”

The new SAF Career Scheme will impact the careers of many of our personnel. Army News explains some of these key changes.

Key Changes



Officers

• Providing More Experience

Officers will have the choice of retiring at the age of 50. A longer service will provide more time for ground training, technology education and opportunities for personal development. Officers will now have more time to train and undertake a wider variety of ground postings. Their careers will still be compact, fast-paced and challenging.

• Academic Upgrading

There will be more opportunities for academic upgrading. Tie-ups with Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore Institute of Management University (UniSIM) as well as other courses with foreign universities, will provide such upgrading opportunities. For non-graduates, the tie-up with UniSIM will give them the opportunity to take up part-time undergraduate courses, while graduates can choose to pursue their Masters’ at NTU.

Changes to Look Forward to

These comprehensive changes have been well-received by the regular servicemen and many viewed them as in sync with their career aspirations. The prospect of a raised retirement age was a much welcomed change. MAJ Fairoz said, “By having a choice to retire at age 50, we now have greater flexibility. This flexibility is important for us as we now have the option of contributing more. I have had the opportunity of going overseas for four weeks during Operation Flying Eagle. With five more years, I will not only have more opportunities to participate in more of such operations, but also to continue contributing to the training and grooming of the next generation.” LTC Teo affirmed this. He quipped, “I am very happy with these policies. Essentially, it just means that I have five more years to continue doing what I like!”

For our Specialists, the new 3WO rank gives them recognition of their ability. MWO Wee, who himself went through the Specialist ranks, said, “This opportunity to join the Warrant Officer Corps early is a very positive recognition for senior Specialists. Given the added responsibilities these Specialists hold,



Warrant Officers

• Up-profiling the roles of Warrant Officers

Warrant Officers and Specialists play key roles as trainers and custodians of the values, skills and knowledge necessary for maintaining a credible and professional SAF. They are key partners to the Officer Corps and their jobs will be re-designed and enlarged to stretch their abilities and maximise their potential. The expanded roles and responsibilities of Warrant Officers as combat trainers are exemplified in their appointments as Warrant Officer Chief Trainers and Heads of Training Wings. For instance, at the battalion level, the Battalion Regimental Sergeant Major will take on the role of Chief Trainer for the Battalion in weapons and direct training supervision.

• New Third Warrant Officer (3WO) Rank

This facilitates the smooth transition from Specialist to Warrant Officer and high performing Specialists can attain the new 3WO rank as early as the end of their sixth year in service. This new rank serves to motivate and recognise their good performance and potential. 3WOs can be expected to take on force preparatory and training roles, such as that of ramping up the combat proficiencies of our soldiers.

• Early Academic Opportunities

Promising Specialists with Warrant Officer potential can be offered degree sponsorships from as early as the end of their second year of service. This will help meet the aspirations of our servicemen who wish to upgrade themselves professionally and academically.



MWO Wee believes that the 3WO rank will grant senior specialists more recognition

these roles should be recognised. This 3WO rank is a solid demonstration of our Army’s recognition of their roles and ability.” MSG Won particularly looks forward to the opportunity of earlier academic advancement. He shared, “Personally, there are many courses that I am interested in. With this new scheme, I now have the opportunity to upgrade myself through these courses.”

Our logisticians too, are looking forward to become Military Domain Experts. SSG Wee Chin Kwang, a trainer from Ordnance Engineering Training Institute, said, “As I deal with sophisticated equipment and systems, I can now spend more time building this expertise.” CPT Tan Lee Kuan, a Deputy Depot Commander of 11th Forward Maintenance Depot (11 FMD), shared SSG Wee’s belief. He commented, “With a longer career,

Military Domain Experts

The new Military Domain Experts Scheme (MDES) is designed to recruit, groom and retain talent for deep specialisation in key military domains such as technical and engineering fields. In his address, DPM Teo said, “Military Domain Experts (MDEs) will work with cutting edge systems, receive more academic and professional upgrading opportunities, as well as attractive market-based remuneration.”

Some key features of this scheme include:

• A Professional and Rewarding Career

With the emphasis on deep specialisation, Military Experts under MDES will have a uniformed career up till age 60. They will also enjoy market-competitive salaries. With more years of service, MDEs can fully hone and develop their proficiencies in their domain. As uniformed personnel, they will be deployed in operational roles and will be governed by SAF regimentation guidelines.

• An 8-tiered Rank Structure

MDEs will have a new rank structure from ME1 to ME8, with ME8 being the highest rank. Progression will hinge on the individual’s level of professional expertise. ME7 and ME8 personnel can expect tenured appointments.

• Professional and Academic Development

MDEs will have opportunities to upgrade themselves. For example, MDEs who are diploma-holders will have opportunities early in their career to upgrade their skills and qualifications through university degrees. This will allow them to acquire the necessary academic qualifications and skills for graduate-level jobs.

For our Army, about 20% of our force is expected to convert to the MDES scheme to effectively support our 3rd Generation transformation. COL Tan shared, “The MDES will significantly raise the engineering capability of our people. In line with the 3rd Generation Army transformation, we have been bringing in increasingly sophisticated weapon systems and capabilities. We need a good engineering corps to support, develop and maintain these systems.”

I have the chance to nurture my specialisation in the required fields. Holding this rank will mean that I am recognised as a Subject Matter Expert and that I can support my customers to the best of my ability.”

Maintaining Our Edge

As we transform ourselves into a 3rd Generation fighting force, we will always need to remember that ultimately, it is our people who are key. The new career schemes will ensure that we continue to attract the best people into the force and through their professional development, they will remain our edge. COL Tan summed it up, “Our Army’s capabilities will not be complete without having good people running and developing these systems. We want to ensure that our people remain engaged and committed so they can give their best for the nation and we will continue working closely with all commanders and Human Resource managers to ensure the schemes are implemented well.”

New CARMO at the Helm

Story by Ian Cheong / Photography by Wan Zhong Wei

“The past 30 months have been a whirlwind but we have succeeded in doing quite a bit. The modernisation effort that HQ Army Medical Services (AMS) has embarked on is probably the greatest in the past 40 years and I really couldn’t have asked for a better team to work with.” With this tribute to his men, COL (Dr) Benjamin Seet bade a fond farewell to AMS as he handed over his appointment as Chief Army Medical Officer (CARMO) and the concurrent appointment of Commander SAF Medical Training Institute (SMTI) to LTC (Dr) Chua Wei Chong on 8 May. COL (Dr) Seet assumed the appointment of Chief of SAF Medical Corps on 28 May.

For COL (Dr) Seet, his stint as CARMO has been a very fulfilling one. He said, “This modernisation effort has been on a scale that has not been seen since the start of the Medical Corps. However, this change is very necessary if we are to meet our vision of being a world-class medical service. Being part of this process itself is an achievement.” According to COL (Dr) Seet, HQAMS has to transform to support the changing role of the Army. He illuminated, “The role and mission of the Army have changed greatly over the years. We have gone from a traditional combat force to a full spectrum force taking on new operational missions in Afghanistan and the Gulf of Aden. We need to remain relevant in our support to the Army. Thus, it is important that in line with a world-class Army, we transform into a world-class medical service ourselves.”

It is thus no surprise that HQAMS had to benchmark themselves against the very best. COL (Dr) Seet commented, “We benchmark ourselves against the best medical corps in the US Army, US Marines and so on. They are the lead players in military medicine and we need to benchmark ourselves in terms of the quality of training, equipping, systems, and doctrines.”



Besides benchmarking against the leaders in military medicine, they also had to benchmark themselves against civilian medical practice. HQAMS established linkages with Tan Tock Seng Hospital, National University Hospital and Nanyang Polytechnic. LTC (Dr) Chua Wei Chong, previously the Deputy CARMO before assuming his new appointment, explained, “These professional linkages with our civilian counterparts allow us to apply the best practices of civilian hospital practice to the field. This continued collaboration is important to ensure that we are always kept abreast with the latest in civilian and military medicine.

All the benchmarking efforts and professional linkages would be futile if people are resistant to change. LTC (Dr) Chua shared, “The most important component in any system is the human factor, as the ability to deliver a world-class medical ser-

vice is contingent on the people who carry it through. In order to do this, every individual has to have the same vision of excellence.” To cultivate this culture of excellence, some key changes have been made. COL (Dr) Seet shared on changes made when he was CARMO. He said, “The key is to ensure that we have people who are good enough to do the enhanced jobs. To do so, we have trained and upgraded our personnel so that they can take on the new roles with confidence, without compromising on their professional competency and clinical currency.”

That the Army Medical Services had achieved so much in recent years is due in no small part to the training transformation within the community. COL (Dr) Seet added, “A lot of things are happening in Iraq and Afghanistan and all the latest knowledge is coming out of there. We need to understand this and then assimilate it into our medical system.” In this respect, SMTI ensures that its trainers remain professionally relevant. LTC (Dr) Chua said, “All trainers should not only have clinically sound skills, but also be a practitioner in his own field. This ensures that the trainer can continue to impart his knowledge not just from the textbook, but from his clinical experience as well. Having a strong team of trainers who are current in their practice is key to a very good training system in SMTI.”

As LTC (Dr) Chua looks forward to the challenges of his new appointments as CARMO and COMD SMTI, he is confident that with the spirit and attitude of his men, they will continue to excel. He said, “As CARMO, it is important that I impart and energise our people with the right attitudes and mindsets to achieve our vision. I hope that I can continue to groom the next generation of doctors and medics so that they can keep the SAF flag flying high.”

Strong Commitment Amidst Trying Economic Times

Story by Chia Han Sheng / Photography by Jonathan Ong and contributed by 685 Guards

“The unit’s mission focus, drive, enthusiasm, fighting spirit, command and control, and initiative were all very outstanding. What was also impressive was their ability to learn from their mistakes of earlier missions and improve.” said Commander Army Training and Evaluation Centre (ATEC) COL Lim Kwang Tang as he reflected on 685th Guards Battalion’s (685 Guards) exceptional ATEC Evaluation Stage Two performance. The battalion which completed its evaluation in February achieved a score of REDCON 2A and was described by COL Lim as “the best performing NS unit of Work Year 2008.”



Perhaps what was even more impressive was the high level of commitment displayed by the NSmen in spite of these trying financial times. Prior to the ATEC Evaluation, Commanding Officer, 685 Guards LTC Tey Lien Cheong who holds a concurrent appointment as Head General Staff Military Police Command, faced a surge in the number of deferment requests from his men. This came as more NSmen grew concerned about their jobs and their time away from the office. However, out of the many that applied, LTC Tey only granted a handful of applicants deferment. He elaborated, “Denying deferment requests is a very hard decision. For each person short, the rest have to carry an additional load. However, I knew they had their struggles. Thus, on their second appeal, I spent a long time talking to them personally. The key is to be sincere, and rationalise with them that one man short means one less for the battalion.”

Despite the many rejected deferment requests, 685 Guards still rallied together with a disciplined spirit to achieve mission success. In fact, their performance was so exceptional that COL Lim awarded 15 Letters of Commendation to the men and commanders, with one letter specially commending 685 Guards for their splendid collective effort. On average, most units receive three of such commendations. What made the achievement even more heart-warming was the fact that the recipients included several NSmen whose deferral requests had been rejected.

LTA (NS) Wan Howe Kian was a commander who demonstrated such a positive attitude amidst these trying times. He



had just begun work with Great Eastern late last year and his new employers requested that he defer the entire three weeks of



ATEC Evaluation and preparation. LTA (NS) Wan elaborated, “When I first took the job I knew that companies are usually unwilling to release new employees within their first six months. The project that I was working on required much effort and manpower. At the same time, the unit had been preparing for the ATEC Evaluation for six years and it would have been an anticlimax if that investment did not materialise.”

LTA (NS) Wan eventually struck a balance between his NS and work commitments, deferring the first week of his commander’s ATEC preparation and attending the two subsequent weeks of ATEC Evaluation. As a commander, LTA (NS) Wan also had to deal with the morale and ground sentiment of his men. He explained, “We called a meeting as we wanted to tell everyone that we understand that times are not easy, and that we all made some sacrifices to come in for ICT. We didn’t want anybody to feel that they had the bad end of the deal. Everyone was facing the same issues, regardless of rank.”

For 3SG (NS) Tay Kok Wee, attending the ATEC Evaluation meant forfeiting an important examination for his Business Management Course at SIM University. He elaborated, “I could not reschedule the test and so its weightage has been carried to my year-end exam. This makes the year-end paper more difficult and that was my sacrifice.” After the ATEC evaluation,

3SG (NS) Tay was commended for his initiative in taking over the additional role of manning the signal set when the Officer Commanding’s runner was down. He explained, “When you see the rest of the guys working so hard, you can’t possibly drag the company down by not putting in effort.”

685 Guards has many more heroes who contributed significantly to the battalion’s success. Whether they received a letter of commendation or not, their commitment to defence is certainly noteworthy. This commitment by the men was succinctly articulated by LTA (NS) Wan. He said, “The last seven years have been made all the more enjoyable because of all the people I’ve had the opportunity to work with. The Guards family is a good place to be, the men here take a lot of pride in what we do. We’re the kind of people who hate to lose. Even when we’re really tired we still push.”

Army News salutes our dedicated NSmen for guarding our country with unwavering commitment. Their exemplary performance and determination is a shining ray of encouragement amidst the present economic gloom.

685 Guards’ 14 Letter of Commendation Recipients

CPT (NS) Wong Boon Kang Amos, CPT (NS) Wong Loong Wai Franxis, LTA (NS) Sen Pau Meng, LTA (NS) Phang Kuo-Meng Edward, LTA (NS) Sng Chee Kwang, 1SG (NS) Lim Tze Kwee Bernard, 2SG (NS) Oh Kim Chuan, 2SG (NS) Chong Weng Kin, 3SG (NS) Tan Kwee Chuan, 3SG (NS) Mohammad Riduan Bin Sani, 3SG (NS) Tay Kok Wee, 3SG (NS) Ang Swee Leong Jeffrey, CPL (NS) Lim Zhi Han, LCP (NS) Tham Wai Lun

Systematic and Thorough Medical Screening for Pre-Enlistees

Story by Ian Cheong / Diagram by Jonathan Ong

Every weekday, many 16 to 18-year old Singapore males make a once-in-a-lifetime ‘pilgrimage’ to Central Manpower Base (CMPB) nestled in Depot Road, marking the start of their National Service journey. Besides registering for NS, they must also undergo an important examination at the Medical Classification Centre (MCC) there, so that their Physical Employment Standard (PES) can be determined.

The MCC sees on average, 150 to 180 pre-enlistees daily, all of whom are required to undergo its seven screening tests (see diagram on the right). LTC (Dr) Christopher Cheok, Commanding Officer of the MCC, explained, “We first get them to list out their medical history, including their detailed family history, before we conduct these tests.” These comprehensive tests determine the PES status of our future soldiers, thereby ensuring that they will be optimally deployed during their two years of Full-time National Service. LTC (Dr) Cheok shared, “Our tests need to be rigorous as it will give us a comprehensive sweep of the medical conditions, whereby we check on key areas of health that will affect their training.”

In order to achieve this level of rigour, many crucial steps have been put in place. One such step is the training of the medics. For some specialised areas, the medics are sent for courses at Singapore Polytechnic to learn the necessary skills. Another step taken is the processes adopted. LTC (Dr) Cheok commented, “Our standards of classification have been endorsed by external specialists and also by other hospitals around Singapore.” Another such programme that they have put in place is the Cardiac Screening Programme.

This programme ensures that pre-enlistees with abnormal heart conditions highlighted during the screening tests will undergo further health investigations. For example, an obese pre-enlistee will also undergo a cholesterol test. This test is necessary as his cholesterol level may affect his training. These stringent medical checks have uncovered many potentially serious cases of cardiovascular conditions. Since 2005, more than 100 service-

men had been detected with potentially life-threatening heart conditions such as cardiomyopathy (a heart muscle disease that can cause sudden cardiac death in young adults) and were accorded the appropriate PES.

The stringent and systematic health screening at the MCC has evidently, paid many dividends. LTC (Dr) Cheok added, “Our pre-employment screening exceeds the standards of many companies in Singapore. This is very important as we need to provide the highest level of safety for all our enlistees.”

1. Laboratory. Urine tests for blood, proteins and glucose are carried out. Blood tests for haemoglobin levels and blood groups are also conducted.

2. Dental. A Dental X-Ray is taken. A dental officer will also check the dental health of the pre-enlistee.

3. X-Rays. A Chest X-Ray will reveal the health of the heart and lungs.

4. Eye. Tests for colour-blindness and short-sightedness are carried out.

5. Audiometry. A hearing test to detect any hearing impairments.

6. Body Anthropometry. The height, weight, Body Mass Index (BMI), body fat analysis, blood pressure and heart rate of the pre-enlistee is recorded. An Electrocardiogram (ECG) is also conducted to detect abnormalities. Abnormalities will be taken note of and further tests will be carried out.

7. Review. A Medical Officer reviews all the information collected and accords the appropriate PES status. Pre-enlistees who require further checks will be accorded a provisional PES status.

Back from Overseas for ICT

Story by Marcus Ho / Photography by Wan Zhong Wei

“Ain’t no mountain high enough, ain’t no valley low enough, ain’t no river wide enough, to keep me from getting to you” are lyrics that were once belted out by singing sensation Diana Ross in her hit song “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough”. While Diana Ross may have been referring to a long lost love, these lyrics had a different meaning for two NSmen from 427th Battalion, Singapore Armoured Regiment (427 SAR). For LTC (NS) James Wee, Commanding Officer 427 SAR, and CPL (NS) John Tan, coming back for In-Camp-Training and being with their buddies literally required them to cross oceans and valleys.

LTC (NS) Wee and CPL (NS) John Tan currently live and work in the United Kingdom and China respectively. Under NS policy, they could have deferred their ICT should they have needed to postpone their training. However, with a steely commitment to the battalion, both NSmen flew back to Singapore to attend the ICT from 20 to 30 April. For LTC (NS) Wee, the decision to come back was clear. He shared, “My motivation to come back is the people. If the men are back despite their work commitments, then I should be back here to be with them.”

This showing of solidarity is especially important in such trying financial times. LTC (NS) Wee saw a significant rise in deferral requests for this ICT as NSmen juggled the demands of work, family and NS. While LTC (NS) Wee understands the challenges each NSman grapples with, he also recognises the importance of keeping the unit together through the final cycles of ICT. He elaborated, “The strong factor of the unit is the bond among the guys. As commanders, we really want the guys to move and stand down as a unit. The men have a similar desire as well. Standing down with your buddies is a strong motivation.”

This sentiment was also shared by CPT (NS) Simon Soh, Officer Commanding Support Company who extended his NS liabilities to complete the journey with 427 SAR. CPT (NS) Soh effused, “The esprit de corp of all the men and commanders standing down together is great. I travel quite frequently too, but with the advanced notification, I can plan such that there is no clash.” For CPL (NS) John Tan, coming back for ICT was also clear. He elaborated, “I certainly don’t see my work and family responsibilities lightening over the next few years! Furthermore, it is not difficult for me to come back from China given the advance notice for ICT. I definitely want to come back next year.”

Coming back to Singapore for ICT is however not all about bonding and old friends. NSmen face very real concerns of co-ordinating work back at office even when they are on ICT. LTC (NS) Wee shared, “For me, I have to traverse two time zones. At night, when training is over, I converse with clients in Europe. In the day, I spend all my attention with the unit. This can be extra tiring, but I’m sure lots of the guys are managing. There are internet terminals where we can work from at night. In such times, a lot of them are also juggling. If they can do it, I can do it too.” CPL (NS) Tan agreed, “You definitely do hear more people being apprehensive about their jobs, but at the same time, meeting each other can help build networks which are essential for their jobs.”

On top of coming back for the men, LTC (NS) Wee shared that constant interaction between the men and commanders is important. He elaborated, “We get the Platoon Commanders to call them up individually and see if there’s anything we can do. For some cases, we may grant specific time off instead of a blan-



ket excuse from ICT. We try to tailor specific solutions for each case. This has been effective in keeping the unit together.”

With such committed commanders, 427 SAR certainly sets a fine example of strong commitment to defence. When asked by Army News what is one piece of advice he would give to NS commanders, LTC (NS) Wee said, “The advice is to think of the guys first, think of how they can fulfil their national defence responsibilities and think of how we can help as commanders. With these considerations, you can plan your course of action.”

More About 596 SIR

In the story “596 SIR, Secrets to a Successful NS Battalion” published in Issue No. 164, it was mentioned that the unit had won the Best Infantry Unit award during its active days. This is incomplete as 596 SIR then also won the Best Combat Unit title.

Army Officer Scales Mount Everest

Story by Chia Han Sheng / Photography contributed by MAJ Lee Peh Gee



MAJ Lee standing triumphant at the summit

22 May 2009 was a day that MAJ Lee Peh Gee, Deputy Head Logistics, HQ Signals and Command Systems would never forget. As she stood on the peak of Mount Everest, even the blistering winds could not rob her of the joy she felt. MAJ Lee was part of Singapore's first women's team to conquer the world's tallest summit, which stands at 8850 metres. However, as she savoured the success of five years of hard work, getting down the mountain safely was on her mind. On her descent, MAJ Lee had to cope with frostbites, piercing winds and sun burns. MAJ Lee has since returned to sunny Singapore and Army News caught up with her to find out how she weathered through it all.

Congratulations on reaching the peak of Mount Everest! How did you feel upon reaching the summit?

When I stood at the top of the world, I found it to be a very beautiful place - I could see above the clouds and also see the other peaks below us. I also felt a sense of fulfilment as what

we'd been working on for the past five years finally came through for us.

What were the defining moments of the climb?

The sense of camaraderie amongst the teammates was most memorable. On our climb down, the weather turned bad and I suffered some frostbites on my cheeks, sunburns and windburns. When I came down and my teammates saw me in this condition, they cried and I was surprised and very touched that they cared for me very much. That sense of camaraderie and bonding was a defining moment for me.

What made you want to take on such a daunting challenge?

Climbing Everest was a desire that I wrote down when I was 14 years old. I was inspired by the book, "Chicken Soup for the Soul". In the book, there was a story about a man who wrote a list of things that he wanted to do with his life. I followed him and listed out things that I would challenge myself with and really learn to overcome. During that session, I decided to list climbing Mount Everest as a key objective. And so when the opportunity arose to climb Everest with a team of women, I grabbed the opportunity to join them.

How did it feel to be part of the first Singapore Women's team to ascend Everest?

I thought it was more meaningful to do it with the women's team. For some, as long as you have the money you can do it on your own, but I'm very proud to be with them because they are one of the finest groups of women and were able to make dreams come true despite the many challenges we faced.

How was the preparation like?

We had long runs of 10 to 15 kilometres each week and gym

sessions. We also had six to ten sets of staircase climbing 30 storeys with 20-kilogramme back-packs and 2.5-kilogramme ankle weights. We also did more staircase climbing at Bukit Timah Hill. All in all, training was about six times a week.

Is there anything from your training in the Army that was useful for your climb?

The Army has given me a strong sense of discipline and this was very useful in overcoming the many challenges faced. Climbing is certainly energy draining and uncomfortable. It's a lot more comfortable to stay in the warm sleeping bag instead of getting up early and stepping into the cold. Other seemingly small but important things included forcing yourself to eat even if you lose appetite. This basic discipline in the team ensured that we were able to function at that altitude.

Have you gained any lessons from this achievement that you can plough back into your Army career?

I believe the biggest takeaway is from my preparation for the climb over the past five years. I've grown and learnt to challenge my limitations both physically and mentally. I believe that this will continue to shape my working attitude and help me in my future challenges.

Your colleagues and friends in the Army have been rooting for you all the way. Is there anything you would like to say to them?

I could only have done it with the support of understanding superiors, colleagues and family. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to participate in this Everest expedition. Without you holding the fort in my absence, I would not have had such a successful climb.

Our Soldiers' professionalism, commitment and dedication are the cornerstones of our Army's transformation.

See it up close at the Army Open House 2009

**3rd - 7th September 2009
9AM to 7PM daily
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