

NDP 2007

Turning Possibilities into a Memorable Reality



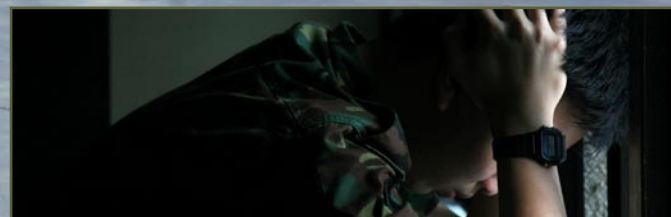
Thanking Employers for
Their Support

3



Commando Officer
Conquers Mount Everest

6



Paracounselling: Caring
for our Heartware

8

Armour Change of Command - Driving Armour Forward

Under the leadership of BG (NS) Wong Ann Chai, the Armour Formation's transformation towards being a part of the 3rd Generation SAF is in motion. This transformation will be carried further by BG Philip Lim, who assumed the position of Chief Armour Officer (CAO) at a Change of Command Parade on 6 July at Sungei Gedong Camp.



In his farewell speech, BG (NS) Wong spoke on the need for constant advancement, "It is very hard to keep a bicycle upright when standing still. The far better way is to cycle it and pedal hard. Even though Armour weighs tons, its essence is like a bicycle – keep it moving, oil the parts, train the biker, chart out the route, travel light and fight heavy. Armour cannot and must not stand still like a bicycle which is static – it is this dynamism and constant looking ahead that has kept things going for the past 40 years."

In his interview with Army News, BG (NS) Wong was modest about his achievements in Armour, which include the launch of the first digitised armoured unit comprising Bionix IIs equipped with the Battlefield Management System, incorporating the latest military datalink and network technologies. Concurrently, the efforts to replace the ageing SM-1 tanks resulted in the acquisition of the Leopard 2A4 Main Battle Tanks. He said, "My people made all the difference. The essence of Armour is never about one individual. It is about bringing out the very best in our talented people, and collectively we become one." Even though BG (NS) Wong will leave the SAF to join a local bank, his heart will stay with our Army, "Leaving the Army? No one really leaves the Army – after 22 years in service, it is a part of my life, and is a very integral part of my upbringing. The Army has been a fantastic place to be, and I only hope it could have been a longer career. Through the Army, we receive education, training, and make life-long friends who fight shoulder-to-shoulder. My joining Global Financial Markets in DBS reflects on the credibility that the Army offers in terms of leadership, organisation and capability development."

Officers Entrusted With Greater Responsibility



Commander 9th Singapore Division (9 Div) / Chief Infantry Officer, BG Chan Chun Sing believes that Liverpool Football Club and our Army share a thing or two in common. "You'll never walk alone," he said. "The Army is too big for a one man show. There are challenges in the organisation we have to overcome, but we will do it as a team." BG Chan is one of seven SAF officers who were promoted to the rank of Brigadier-General. A total of 541 officers from our Army were promoted to the next rank in two ceremonies, the Army Officers' Promotion Ceremony on 22 June and the SAF Officers' Promotion Ceremony on 28 June. The ceremonies were held at the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), with both regulars and national servicemen among the promotees.

These promotions reflect MINDEF's acknowledgement of the officers' performance and demonstrated potential, and the importance of recognising and retaining good officers to sustain a highly professional SAF. A higher rank also signifies the ability to hold greater responsibility. For BG Chan, credit for the promotion is due to his men and staff as well. He said, "The promotion is a recognition of not just myself, but more importantly, the people I've worked with." BG Chan places much importance on such teamwork, speaking of his men as an extended family who have been the main motivation throughout his career. Recalling how he encouraged his obese soldiers to develop a healthy lifestyle, he said, "The Army takes in people from all sectors of Singaporean society. My role is not to take in

the best and produce the best, but to take in anyone and make a difference to their life."

Another promotee, COL (VOL) Ng Keok Boon, exemplified dedication and commitment to our Army when he recently volunteered to extend his national service. The Deputy Commander of 9 Div Artillery HQ, COL (VOL) Ng takes every In-Camp Training seriously. He said, "If something is worth doing, I will try my best to do it well. I guess by volunteering, it sets an example for the people within the same group to look at how I behave and put in more effort to contribute."



Towards a Thinking Army

When he began writing on transformation and the changing nature of warfare, CPT Gareth Wong hardly thought of entering the Chief of Defence Force (CDF) Essay Competition, much less winning it. A Platoon Commander in the 4th Battalion Singapore Infantry Regiment and a SAF Overseas Scholar, CPT Wong bagged the first prize with his essay 'Beyond the Velvet Curtain of Transformation – How the Future of Warfare will be Shaped'. Besides the top three prizes, seven merit awards and ten commendations were given out at the presentation ceremony on 27 June, in SAFTI Military Institute. CDF, LG (then-MG) Desmond Kuek, gave out the prizes.

CPT Wong's studies on the Israel-Lebanon conflict inspired him to write the essay, which emphasises the need to think beyond our 3rd Generation transformation. He said, "We should not just take the 3rd Generation Army as a technological enhancement. Equally important is imbuing population resilience. This involves having confidence in our capabilities, and emotional strength – our heartware." CPT Wong hopes that his essay will stimulate people to think further on these issues.

The CDF Essay Competition, which attracted 280 entries this year, is a platform for SAF officers to contribute their

insights beyond their immediate work area. Chief Judge, Commander 6th Singapore Division, COL Lim Teck Yin said, "It aims to encourage SAF officers to research and reflect on professional issues, and share their views and experiences. These are important objectives given that the SAF's continuing success hinges partly on the creativity of its leaders and the quality of the discourse that steers us along the development path." Essays from the competition have also received recognition overseas, such as from the Defence and Security International magazine.



An Evening With the President



More than 800 SAF personnel were present at the Presidential Garden Reception at the Istana on 8 July, where they had the opportunity to meet our President, Mr S R Nathan. Also present were various ministers, the Chief of Defence Force and the Service Chiefs. This annual event recognises the contributions and dedication of MINDEF and SAF personnel to the defence of Singapore. This year, the reception also acknowledged the contributions of our National Servicemen, as we commemorate 40 years of National Service.

Thanking Employers for Their Support



No NS deferments for over a decade? City Development Limited (CDL) is probably one of the few companies that can boast this impressive record. CDL, which received the Minister for Defence award in 2006, was back this year to receive the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Special Award at this year's Total Defence Awards at Shangri-La Hotel on 25 July. These awards recognise employers and civil resource owners which have shown exemplary support for Total Defence. For the first time, it was organised jointly by MINDEF and MHA in commemoration of 40 years of NS.

Minister for Defence, Mr Teo Chee Hean spoke on the importance of employer support, "In a highly competitive environment and an open labour market like Singapore, employer support is increasingly vital. Your support for NS gives our NSmen peace of mind so that they can focus on their in-camp training without having to worry unduly about their job." As such, companies like CDL make it a policy to give time off from work for their employees to fulfil their NS duties. CDL's Managing Director, Mr Kwek Leng Joo, explained, "National

defence is fundamental for the economic growth of our nation, and the role played by our NSmen in the defence of our country cannot be compromised. Every contribution from both employers and Nsmen counts. At CDL, we believe in providing a conducive and supportive environment so that our employees can respond readily and positively when called upon by the nation to fulfil their NS duties."

Civil resource owners were also recognised that evening. One of them was Barwil Unitor Ships Service, which keeps its delivery trucks on 24-hour standby for recall. Mr Yong Char Kar, Regional

Controller, commented, "For MNCs like us, what we look for is stability and growth in the country that we invest and do business in. We recognise the fact that a strong and a self-reliant defence force is a platform for the growth that we see in Singapore today."



Connecting With Our Future Soldiers

Ever wondered how soldiers detect their enemies in the dark? This and many other 'secrets' were disclosed to over 300 students from Tampines Junior College, when they visited our Army's School of Infantry Specialists (SISPEC) at Pasir Laba Camp on 11 July. They toured the camp accommodation and facilities, and were briefed on some of our infantry's equipment. Among the equipment displayed were Night Vision Goggles, which allow our soldiers to see and shoot accurately at night. The students were able to try out the goggles and spot infantrymen hiding amidst camouflage netting in a darkened room. They also learnt about the weapons that SISPEC trainees have to be familiar with before they become infantry specialists.



The students also participated in a dialogue with Chief of Defence Force (CDF), LG Desmond Kuek, where he addressed their queries on National Service and the SAF. During the dialogue, CDF emphasised that despite the SAF's development of sophisticated systems and platforms, it is our people who give us the decisive edge. He said, "National Service will continue to be the backbone of the SAF. It's the quality of our people which we have to leverage on." CDF also elaborated on the benefits of having an Army made up mainly of National Servicemen. He said, "Every male citizen comes into National Service, including the best and the brightest. We can draw talent from every cohort of servicemen, giving us a significant advantage over regular armies."



The visit made an impression on many of the students, especially those who were visiting an Army camp for the first time. Chung Ho Yin, a student from Hong Kong said, "The display on the Army's night vision capabilities was quite interesting. Although I do not have to serve National Service, I think it is an experience I might want to go through."



NDP 2007

Turning Possibilities into a Memorable Reality

NDP 2007, held in Marina Bay for the first time, was unforgettable for many reasons. Soldiers marched and performers danced on the largest floating platform in the world, accompanied by a 240-strong orchestra, the biggest assembled for any NDP. They were watched by 27,000 spectators in the seating gallery, and thousands more from various vantage points along Marina Bay, including the hotels in the vicinity. Army News takes a look at why this year's NDP was one to remember:

Floating Platform – They saw only the Objective, the Obstacles Give Way

Back in 2003, the Engineer Formation was tasked with finding an alternative location for NDP 2007 due to the planned closure of the National Stadium in 2007 for redevelopment. Alternative venues considered, such as Jalan Besar Stadium, Singapore Indoor Stadium, Turf Club and Marina South, all had severe space and logistical constraints. Rising to the challenge, the Engineers exercised their ingenuity and creativity to conceptualise the world's largest floating platform. They worked with multiple agencies, including Singapore Sports Council, Urban Redevelopment Agency and Defence Science and Technology Agency, to push through this revolutionary idea.

In an interview with Army News, COL Teo Jing Siong, Chairman of NDP 2007 Executive Committee commented, "I think this is a very good example of innovation and thinking out of the box, because normally if people are told to look for another stadium, they will just find another stadium. I think this is a reflection of what our future Army can be, where we have to work with people, have to be technologically savvy and at the same time, innovate and come up with new ideas."

With a flexible pontoon system, the floating platform can be reconfigured for other events, such as soccer matches and boat shows. Look out for many more activities on the Bay!

A crowd-pleaser at every NDP, the Red Lions parachute in from the sky in a dazzling display of precision and control.



Bionix II Infantry Fighting Vehicles roll past the spectator's stand in an impressive display of our Army's hardware.



Boosting the Entertainment Factor- From Limitations to Liberalisation

NDP 2007's entertainment factor was heightened by more than an hour of pre-parade entertainment, which saw performances by crowd favourites such as the Dim Sum Dollies and Sheikh Haikel. Furthermore, the NDP show included holographic images projected onto water screens, fire balls bursting from the front of the promenade, and the incorporation of the perennial crowd favourite, fireworks. Chairman of NDP 2007 Show Committee, COL Alvin Kek said, "We wanted to re-conceptualise the show into a large-scale visual and musical performance that would be truly refreshing, visually stunning and emotionally engaging. We decided to do away with the usual three segmented acts, and have five shorter segments to keep the spectators constantly engaged."

On top of that, there were two NDP celebration songs this year - 'There's No Place I'd Rather Be' sung by Kit Chan, and 'Will You', which is performed by eight singers with different musical backgrounds. Kit Chan commented, "I really like it, because unlike previous NDP songs, it's more of a love song than a patriotic song. What is special about it is that throughout the song, the word Singapore does not appear, while interestingly it talks about all the wonderful places you've been to - Paris and Rome. When you are really talking to someone very close and intimate, you don't have to say their name, you just have to say 'I love you'. The chorus goes 'There's no place I'll rather be, you'll always be a part of me', and I think that's really sweet and intimate. As Jimmy (the song's composer) said, it's his love song for Singapore - I guess it's mine too."

People on Parade – The Spirit of our Nation in Action

Some road users might have been puzzled to see LTC (NS) See Tow Pak Onn shouting in the air-conditioned confines of his car. Road rage? LTC (NS) See Tow was actually practising his parade commands while driving, as it was difficult to find an open space in which to do so. As the third NSman to be given the honour of being a NDP Parade Commander, he shared, "It is really significant for me as a NSman to be given this opportunity. It is certainly a tribute to all NSmen." At 49 years old, LTC (NS) See Tow walks daily to keep fit. His job as International Surface Operations Manager in an international oil company also helps to keep him active. In spite of the physical exertions that the parade commander has to undergo, LTC (NS) See Tow, Brigade Commander of 24th Singapore Infantry Brigade, views it as his duty, "It's what we have to do; it's what we are trained to do so."

For Parade Sergeant Major, MWO Eric Chong, Sergeant Major of 3rd Division Support Command, his NDP experience taught him to stay even more composed, patient and humble. Furthermore, working with the different contingents, especially the students, made him feel young again. He said, "When I train with the uniformed groups, I felt the bubbling joy and endless enthusiasm from them. It made me want to give more for them, making sure that their learning curve is not as steep as that in the military." Speaking on the new location of this year's NDP, MWO Chong commented, "I think it's a really exciting one, especially when we are doing right in front of Marina Bay, with the backdrop of where the future Integrated Resorts will be, which bodes well for our future economic prosperity."

A Chinook helicopter flies in, proudly bearing our national flag, escorted by four AH-64D Apache Longbow Attack Helicopters. The Apache Helicopters also gave an impressive display of their agility and manoeuvrability.



Dynamic Defence Display: Dashing, Daring and Different

A notable addition to this year's parade segment was the ten-minute Dynamic Defence Display (3D). This showcased 40 Commandos rappelling down Sheares Bridge, one for each year of National Service. One of them was LTA (NS) Bala Prakash, a Detachment Commander from the 1st Commando Battalion. A fresh graduate of the Singapore Institute of Management, LTA (NS) Prakash volunteered for it for several reasons. He said, "I volunteered because I've always found rappelling fun, it's something new as it's being held at Marina Bay, and best of all it's rappelling down Sheares Bridge, something not everyone will have the chance to experience." He also said, "This is something that is going to be in my memory for a long time, as a Commando and a NSman, I feel very proud to be among the first to rappel down Sheares Bridge in a NDP." While the height and individual rappelling proficiency posed no problems for these Commandos, the key challenge they faced was co-ordinating the speed and timing of each rappeller. Training together for many months seems to have done the trick, for it was executed to perfection on the actual day.

The show also gave the spectators a glimpse of the 3rd Generation soldiers as they rushed into the Seating Gallery. The action was not limited to the floating platform as the Republic of Singapore Navy and Police Coast Guard showed off their fast craft in the bay. To conclude the 3D segment, two Apache Helicopters performed some impressive maneuvers, culminating in an 'aerial salute' to the nation. The Dynamic Defence Display was given two thumbs up by Mdm Alice Tan. She said, "The display shows that we are very progressive, constantly improving our technology, thus allowing our armed forces to better defend Singapore."



Fireworks Galore! The Culmination of a Memorable NDP

Three buildings allowed fireworks to be fired from their rooftops - UOB Plaza, One Raffles Quay and Republic Plaza. 1SG Xu Qiao Yu was one of those up on the rooftop of UOB Plaza to ensure that all safety precautions were adhered to. It was very windy on top of the flat roof, and she had to wear a safety harness while walking across the gondola tracks. She was also involved in preparing and waterproofing the fireworks for the show. 1SG Xu commented, "After a whole day of preparation, when I see all the fireworks go up successfully, I feel a sense of satisfaction."



Commando Officer Conquers Mount Everest

On 22 May, LTC Ang Yau Choon literally achieved one of life's pinnacles when he successfully scaled Mount Everest as part of an international team. Conquering the highest peak in the world at 8,850 metres is a Herculean feat as the team, which included another Singaporean climber and other foreign participants, had to battle high winds and treacherous terrain, and endure punishing climbs and biting frost.

Arriving at the summit, LTC Ang immediately took out a photograph of his family, clearly wanting them to be there with him in that moment of glory. He also proudly displayed the Army and Commando coat-of-arms and the Singapore Flag to capture that moment for posterity. Savouring the Top-of-the-World feeling and the breathtaking view of the Himalayan Mountain Range, LTC Ang could not help but feel like "a proud emperor surveying his vast kingdom, admiring the beauty of the rolling cloud beneath his feet."

Although LTC Ang is now the Commander of Specialist and Warrant Officer Institute (SWI), his recent achievement brought great pride to the Commando community which he hailed from. In fact, LTC Ang attributed it to his Commando training background that enabled him to achieve this feat. When he first decided to take on this challenge, LTC Ang could not find the time for the required progressive build-up training on mountains of lesser height. Without this important training, he had to draw deep into his physical and mental strength accumulated through his years of Commando training.

LTC Ang shared, "Right from the beginning, Commando training focuses not just on physical fitness but also mental toughness. These are continuously built upon not just in various aspects of training, but also during exercises and even our daily behaviour. Our training routinely contains surprises that teach the soldiers to anticipate the worst so that they are always prepared to immediately rev up and fight vigorously if required." During his climb, every day was a new battle and it was a case of "embark on the mission first, deal with the challenges as they come later."

Even though his Commando background provided a strong base for him to ramp up his training intensity, LTC Ang still had to put in a lot of preparation work. This was a challenge given his hectic work schedule and the need to balance family life. He made extensive use of the regular Army weekly fitness

activities. But the major training was done at nights and during the weekends. He said, "I often trained late into the night, such as climbing up and down the 25-storey HDB flats near my house till way pass midnight. Often, I got puzzling stares from the residents and those passing by." LTC Ang had to also exercise care not to over-exert while embarking on a high intensity training to ramp-up his readiness, as injuries could occur. With advice from his experienced Singaporean team mate, Dr Robert Goh, he was able to focus his training to achieve the most within the limited time.

During the climb on Mount Everest, his lack of training on lower mountains had an effect even though it did not stop him from eventually reaching the peak. Twice, he had to turn around and descend to a lower attitude to recover from the Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) encountered. Doing so gave his body more time to adapt and cope with the lower atmospheric pressure and thinner oxygen. Even after conquering the summit, the descent was no less challenging. LTC Ang shared, "Another group we met had warned us that a section of the icefall we were standing on was highly unstable and dangerous. Indeed, we felt two moments of sudden jerk. After descending from there, we later learnt that the whole section had collapsed about half an hour after we left. We could have been crushed alive." LTC Ang had a harrowing experience when he fell into a bottomless crevasse. Fortunately his safety line held firm. He succinctly summarised these experiences, "Anyone who climbs such a big mountain will invariably have a deep respect for the forces of nature."

Reflecting on his achievements today, LTC Ang said, "The Commandos and Army built me the way I am today. I believe in living my life to its fullest so that I don't look back in later years and regret over lost dreams and unfulfilled passions. I do anything that I feel challenges me. Previously it was the South Pole and now Mount Everest. While I like extreme challenges, I also believe in sound decision-making, careful planning, and being ever ready to overcome unforeseen difficulties. Finally, I am also thankful to my family and all my friends who supported me in my endeavors."

Indeed, LTC Ang's preparations for his climb reflect an internalisation of the principles of detailed preparation, training and continuous risk management that our Army adopts in all its tasks.



LTC Ang at Everest Camp 4, which was the final resting stop before the summit attempt

Army Fitness: All About the Stretch

For this instalment of our Army Fitness series based on the Army Fitness Handbook, we bring you some tips on stretching and its uses.

Why Stretch?

In any movement there are two groups of muscles at work: agonistic muscles which cause the movement and antagonistic muscles which oppose movement and determine flexibility. The main purpose of stretching is to lengthen muscle and tendon tissue which will increase flexibility and the range of movement. It helps coordination by allowing free and easy movements, and promotes blood circulation.

How To Stretch

During Physical Training, we perform running and jumping exercises before doing static stretching. This is because stretching should always be performed after the muscles are warmed up. Stretching of 'cold' muscles, without warming up, may cause injury. Always stretch to the point of slight discomfort, but not pain. Stretch gently and slowly, holding it for 20-30 seconds. Also, do not hold your breath but instead breath normally.

The most common type of stretching is static stretching. It is easy to use and involves holding a position of near maximum stretch for 20-30 seconds. Repeat thrice for best results. There are two other kinds of stretching, Pro-



Using Stretching Exercises

Stretching can be used in warm-up and cool-down exercises. Warm-ups aim to prepare the body for physical activity, and should incorporate movements specific to that activity. For example, soccer players loosen the groin, while

swimmer rotate shoulders. Warm-ups should not involve long periods of static activity like stretches, but include active movements. Also note that warming-up takes longer in cold weather. Cooling down allows the body to return safely to rest. It prevents dizziness and improves recovery to enable the soldier to continue training the next day. Cooling down is also the best time to improve and maintain flexibility through as series of stretching exercises, since the muscles are warm from activity.

Stretching improves flexibility and blood circulation

Thanks for the feedback!

Dear Readers,

More than 1,000 of you responded in our recent readership survey and we truly appreciate your encouraging and valuable feedback. A high percentage of the respondents gave us positive ratings in the areas of content balance, ease of reading, photography and graphic design. Furthermore, nearly 70% of respondents find Army News a source of information both for what recently happened and what's new in our Army. The high overall satisfaction indicated by 82% of respondents has certainly encouraged the Army News team to further improve our publication.

What You Like about Army News

News coverage on important events and key developments in our Army
Features on weapons, equipment and systems
Level of written language is just right for easy reading
Good photography and pleasant layout / graphic design

Some Suggestions for Improvement

More stories on ground servicemen and their units
More features on formations and their capabilities
More NSmen features
Better prizes for monthly quiz

	Good Photography	77%
	Good Design	72%
	Easy to Read	68%
	Comprehensive News and Events Coverage	75%
	Good Balance of Photos and Text	79%

Average Overall Satisfaction: 7.4/10

New and more prizes!
5 pairs of Golden Village movie tickets up for grabs

Passing On The Baton		
APPOINTMENT	INCOMING	OUTGOING
COMD CTI	COL LIM SWEE CHYE SIMON	COL CHIANG HOCK WOON
CO CBT INT SCHOOL, SMI INSTITUTE	LTC ONG CHEE BOON	-
CO 1 CDO BN	MAJ GOH TIONG CHENG	MAJ POH BOON HOCK
CO ADF	MAJ ONG KAH KEONG PATRICK	LTC ONG SU KIAT MELVYN
CO 3 AMB	MAJ KEITH JUDE HO CHI MIN	MAJ CHUA SZE WEE
CO 32 FCCSB	LTC OWE KOH BENG	LTC (NS) TAN CHEE SENG
CO 430 SAR	LTC DERRICK CHEW KIAT KYOON	-

Quiz Of The Month - JUL / AUG

Send us the correct answer and win a pair of Golden Village movie tickets. There will be 5 winners!

Q: How many Commandos repelled down Sheares Bridge during NDP07?

Closing Date : 15 October 2007

Answer: Rank / Name: Unit: E-mail: NRIC: Contact No:

1. This contest is open to all Army personnel except the executive staff of Army News Section.
2. Each person is allowed one entry.
3. Winners will be notified by Email. Prizes are not exchangeable for cash.
4. The judges' decision is final. Please send us your entries via mail or email us at armynews@starnet.gov.sg.
5. Prizes not collected within a month of notification will be forfeited.

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OUR ARMY IS BREAKING NEW GROUND ON POWER98FM!

MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS, 7PM TO 8PM

TUNE IN NOW FOR MORE ON OUR ARMY! POWER98FM



Our SAFOS holders (from left) OCTs Koo Kai Siong, Benny Tan, Wong Zeng Yu and David Kwek are looking forward to the challenges ahead

On 18 August, six officer cadets were awarded the prestigious SAF Overseas Scholarship (SAFOS), of which four were from our Army.

For OCT Benny Tan, serving in the military has been his childhood dream. He said, "I was in NCC (Land) and have always wanted to be in the Armed Forces. The commanders at Basic Military Training also left a deep impression on me, leading by example and joining us in tough training. They shaped my attitude as a future commander." Fellow OCT Koo Kai Siong was offered scholarships from the Economic Development Board and Government Investment Corporation, but chose the SAFOS for the challenges it provides. He said, "As our Army is currently in the midst of its transformation journey, I think there are many issues which will require attention. I foresee both intellectual and physical challenges ahead."

The SAFOS programme attracts the brightest students from each cohort and sponsors their tertiary education at distinguished overseas universities. Upon returning, they will hold various challenging appointments in the organisation. The training and developmental opportunities that they will receive will also prepare them to assume key positions in the public sector, after leaving the SAF.

Past SAFOS scholars include Minister for Defence, Mr Teo Chee Hean, Chief of Defence Force, LG Desmond Kuek, and Chief of Army, MG Neo Kian Hong. Besides the SAFOS, ten students received the SAF Merit Scholarship, while five were awarded the Defence Merit Scholarship. All three scholarships are part of the SAF and MINDEF's effort to emphasise talent grooming and leadership development for our people.

Paracounselling Caring For Our Heartware

Meeting Our Emotional Needs

REC Char Siew Bao just enlisted for National Service last month. An enthusiastic basketball player, he enjoys being outdoors and exercising as part of his Basic Military Training. However, due to a bunk-mate reporting late for training, his company has been confined for two weekends and he is feeling homesick. To make matters worse, his girlfriend dumped him as she felt he was not spending enough time with her...

This is one of many emotionally-taxing situations that our SAF personnel could face, and, which our paracounsellors have to deal with in the course of their work. Paracounsellors are specially selected SAF personnel who volunteer because they have a passion for helping others. They take on this challenge in addition to their daily duties. They are a diverse lot, comprising Officers, Warrant Officers and non-uniformed staff. To qualify as paracounsellors, they go through a five-day Preparatory Course which equips them with a solid framework of counselling skills and awareness of topical issues related to counselling. Today, there are over 900 paracounsellors in units and departments across the SAF.

Help Is Close At Hand

In our Army, sophisticated technology is not the only factor that gives us an edge in our operational readiness. Our people are also crucial contributors whom we value and support. For those who face emotional difficulties in their personal or work life, there is a net of counselling services which they can turn to. These channels include Unit Commanders, Medical Officers, Orientation Officers, and a 24-hour hotline. The Paracounselling scheme, started in 1982, complements these services as an important avenue of help at the Unit level.

A Listening Ear

Paracounsellors play an important role in caring for our personnel by giving a listening ear to their problems. These can range from work stress to the loss of a loved one. As paracounsellors interact with their soldiers on a daily basis, they may be able to provide more personalised and effective help than a counsellor at the other end of a hotline. Head Paracounselling Branch, Mrs Marlene Koh commented, "Like Medical Officers take care of the unit's health requirements, paracounsellors keep every unit self-sufficient in terms of counselling needs. They know the environment well and serve as our eyes and ears on the ground."

MWO Govindasamy Parthiban from 3rd Singapore Infantry Brigade, who recently graduated from the Paracounsellor Preparatory Course, is one of these 'eyes and ears' on the ground. As a Brigade Sergeant Major, he is highly accessible to his men and well-positioned to play the role of a 'big brother' in helping them with their difficulties. He said, "The face is usually a mirror of the heart. As Sergeant Majors, we are able to pick up on the unspoken body language of the men and ascertain their problems. We can then take them aside and talk to them, see what can be done to improve the situation." MWO Parthiban also noted that having a paracounsellor in every unit is a distinct advantage. He said, "It can be more

helpful than calling a hotline, where the men might not be so comfortable to disclose personal details. During a face-to-face talk, they may be more able to talk openly."



MWO Parthiban (right) believes that a face-to-face talk can help service-men to be forthcoming about their difficulties

Dealing With Grief

As part of their training, paracounsellors are versed in managing grief issues. Grief occurs in response to the loss of something dear, such as a pet or a job, and in serious cases, a loved one. The paracounsellor can help the person to heal emotionally by accompanying them and showing compassion through this difficult period. Often, it is our large pool of voluntary paracounsellors who step forward to provide the crucial counselling support to the bereaved following a fatal incident.

One of our paracounsellors, CPT Mohd Nizam bin Yahya, was recently activated to provide support to the Next-Of-Kin affected by the recent F5 crash overseas. He described it as a challenging experience, "I had to be the link person for the HQ and the family. It was important that I do my best and show the family that we will pull through the experience together." CPT Nizam has been a paracounsellor for five years and also volunteered at the Detention Barracks, teaching and discussing the detainees' problems. He shared, "Being a paracounsellor has taught me about people management and being sensitive to others. I have found it worth the effort to go all out and give my bit of sacrifice to help others."

Comprehensive Training

The SAF Paracounselling Preparatory Course spans various topics including the Skilled Helper Model, Suicide Risk Assessment and Management, Grief Management and Compassion Fatigue. It also incorporates role-playing sessions to simulate scenarios which our paracounsellors may encounter. CPT Lim Kok Hui from HQ Transport, who recently became an

SAF Paracounsellor, feels that the Course has equipped her with the foundational skills needed to counsel and gain the trust of her soldiers. She said, "During the course, we role-played as counsellors and clients. We then did reviews and discussions to improve our approach, effectively preparing us for our work."

Besides the initial course, SAF Counselling Centre runs a regular Continuing Education Programme under which experienced speakers are invited to give talks to our paracounsellors. It holds case conferences to keep them updated on trends and facilitate the sharing of tips and experience.

Other than training for paracounsellors, workshops for commanders on practice in counselling skills are also available for officers, warrant officers and specialists. There are also workshops for Officers on suicide prevention. Interested Defence Executive Officers can apply for these workshops via MCMD Online while military personnel can do so through the Training Needs Management System (TNMS).



Role-playing prepares our paracounsellors for sensitive situations like comforting grief-stricken families

If you are interested in volunteering as a paracounsellor, contact the Paracounselling Branch at SAF Counselling Centre for details. Applicants will go through a selection process followed by a Preparatory Course which equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to provide comprehensive and effective front-line counselling.

24-hour counselling hotline
1800 278 0022