



# SPEECH

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## Speech by Chief of Army, MG Neo Kian Hong for 1 SIR 50th Anniversary

09 Jul 07

### Introduction

Minister for Defence, Mr Teo Chee Hean, distinguished guests, associates of the First Battalion Singapore Infantry Regiment, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining us to celebrate a very special occasion - the 50th Anniversary of our oldest battalion in the Singapore Armed Forces, 1 SIR.

### History of 1 SIR

Fifty years ago on 12 Mar 1957, 1 SIR was formed against a backdrop of impending self-government for Singapore. It was a time of uncertainty and anxiety: the communist movement and civil strife threatened to derail Singapore's progress towards independence. Given the task of protecting Singapore's internal security, 1 SIR was formed. From this simple yet tumultuous beginning, a generation of young Singaporeans answered the call of duty to establish our very first battalion of regular soldiers.

From small beginnings at Ulu Pandan Camp, 1 SIR soon grew to a total strength of 654 officers and men by Jul 1959. 1 SIR first saw action during the Confrontation years from 1963 to 1964, when the unit was deployed to Borneo. The commanders and men of 1 SIR showed professionalism and fighting spirit to accomplish their missions. 1 SIR was again called into action during the racial riots in 1964, with men and commanders putting aside racial affiliations and performed their duties with firmness and impartiality, to help restore security and calm in a period of domestic tension. With the onset of National Service in 1967, it came as no surprise that many of 1 SIR's experienced commanders provided the core of experienced trainers of our first batches of national servicemen in 3 and 4 SIR. In that sense, 1 SIR together with 2 SIR, provided the foundation on which our Army and the first generation SAF took shape.

As the oldest and most experienced battalion in our Army, 1 SIR continued to demonstrate that it was always capable and ready to answer the call of duty. In May 1975, at the end of the Vietnam War, 1 SIR was once again called to action in Operation Thunderstorm. 1 SIR, as part of the 2nd Singapore Infantry Brigade, was tasked to set up a refugee camp at Bedok to receive and control refugees from the war-torn country. The unit again answered the call of

duty in the wake of the Hotel New World disaster in Mar 1986, when it assisted the SCDF in rescue operations. Indeed, being the SAF's oldest Battalion, 1 SIR's history is closely intertwined with Singapore's nation building journey.

1 SIR can also be proud that many Singaporeans who had served in the unit in its pioneering years had gone on to greater heights within the armed forces, such as LG (Ret) Winston Choo and General (Ret) Ghazali who went on to become CDFs in the SAF and MAF respectively. One of the little known facts about 1 SIR's history is that our guest of honour, Minister for Defence Mr Teo Chee Hean, had also served in the unit from December 1972 to April 1973 as a young national serviceman.

## 1 SIR Today

1 SIR today is a vastly transformed unit. Although it continues to be prepared for operational duties, its main focus is on raising and training operationally-ready infantry battalions, here at its new home in Mandai Hill Camp. Since the inception of the mono-intake system in 1980, 1 SIR has played a major role in transforming many young men into confident and professional soldiers. Although each 1 SIR mono-intake battalion has its own unique experiences and characteristics, they all share the same desire for excellence. This strive for excellence has enabled 1 SIR to win numerous awards and accolades. Its achievements include winning the Best Infantry Unit Award seven times, and the most prestigious Best Combat Unit Award twice. With such a tradition of excellence, I am confident that 1 SIR will continue to excel.

## Commemorating 40 Years of National Service

The contributions and sacrifices of our NSmen have been essential in building up our capability today to deter aggression and protect our home and preserve peace and security. 1 SIR has certainly played its role in building up our Army to be a credible deterrent force, one capable of achieving a swift and decisive victory over the adversary. To this, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to those who have served in the Battalion over the last 50 years. Today, the pioneering spirit of 1 SIR lives on and reflects the spirit of National Service that we are commemorating this year.

## Future Challenges for 1 SIR

Going forward, 1 SIR will have to adapt and transform together with the rest of the Army. As the battlefield becomes more uncertain and more complex, 1 SIR must be more flexible and agile to be able to undertake a full spectrum of operations.

1 SIR has also adapted to the changing demographic profile of our national servicemen. Today our people are better educated and technically more savvy. Like the rest of our Army, 1 SIR will have to deliver quality training and achieve high administrative efficiency, in order to harness the full potential of our people and give our servicemen a positive Army experience. 1 SIR will also play an integral role in testing and validating new doctrines for the 3rd Generation Army. 1 SIR's challenge is to continue to fly its flag high as it moves ahead as part of our current transformation into the Third Generation fighting force.

## Conclusion

Today, 1 SIR has come a long way from an under-strength infantry battalion of the 1950s

with a narrow focus on internal security issues. Fifty years on, today's 1 SIR is forward looking and professional, working closely with other agencies within the Army and the SAF to protect Singapore's security. The transformation begun in the 1970s, to shape the Battalion to meet today's new requirements and is continuing and evolving. As 1 SIR moves into her next 50 years, it is well-positioned to respond to the challenges in the future. 1 SIR must always remain operationally ready, ready to be called upon to defend our home.

I wish 1 SIR a happy Golden Jubilee. 1 SIR, Yang Pertama Dan Utama!

Thank you.

**News Release:**

- The SAF's Pioneer Infantry Battalion Turns 50 (MINDEF\_20070709001.pdf)

National Archives of Singapore