



SPEECH

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Welcome Speech by Chief of Army, MG Neo Kian Hong, at Opening Ceremony of The Army Museum of Singapore

27 Sep 07

Prime Minister and Mrs Lee Hsien Loong,

Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean,

Minister for Manpower and 2nd Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen,

Minister of State for Defence Associate Professor Koo Tsai Kee,

National Archives of Singapore

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening and welcome to the opening of the Army Museum of Singapore.

The idea of a military museum was first mooted by Dr Goh Keng Swee in 1977. The intent was to recount the security challenges Singapore faced at its founding so as to remind Singaporeans not to take the peace we have for granted. It was also intended to celebrate the dauntless spirit of our pioneers who had to build an armed forces from scratch. The Army

Museum has stayed true to the original focus of celebrating the spirit and contributions of our people who defend our country.

MISSION

A visitor going through the museum will quickly sense the Army's continuous quest for progress while remaining anchored to its three rocks of Mission, Values and People.

In the gallery, 'Birth of Our Army', we remember the immense security challenges Singapore faced in the beginning, we celebrate the indomitable spirit of our pioneers who stayed true to the mission of defending Singapore and forging an armed forces. Our sense of mission is clearly emphasised emphatically via the Mission Wall. By expressing the Army's mission with smelted tank steel and used brass ammunition cartridges, we underscore the fact that our mission is only possible with the sacrifices and commitment of our people.

VALUES

The Army's journey from just two battalions to the force it is today is conveyed in the next gallery entitled 'From First Generation to Second Generation'. More importantly, you will sense the professionalism of our National Service Army even in its infancy as the Army was deployed to help maintain peace and order during the racial riots of 1969. Soldiers from the first batch of enlistees like PTE Abdul Karim and CPL Yong Shao Chong contrast the esprit de corps within the Army with the racial tensions within our society then. Already, we can feel the contributions of National Service as a Singaporean institution that has helped forge a cohesive people and society. A more recent example comes from Operation FLYING EAGLE, when we provided assistance to our neighbours in the aftermath of the Boxing Day 2004 Tsunami. MAJ(NS) Paul Supramaniam was on vacation with his family in Australia when he received the call to deploy. He agreed without hesitation, caught the earliest flight out and was in Medan two days later. Beyond professionalism and working side by side with regulars, MAJ(NS) Supramaniam epitomised the value of discipline that the Army continues to emphasise today.

PEOPLE

Earlier, I spoke about Dr Goh's original vision of the museum as a venue to celebrate the spirit of 'Our People'. In this gallery, stories abound of how National Service has become a shared and powerfully bonding Singaporean experience, not just among platoon mates but also across generations between fathers and their sons. My personal favourite is by Mr Ho Kok Hoe, renowned local artist and former President of the Singapore Art Society. Mr Ho, now in his 80s, contributed two paintings, entitled At Ease and My Son. His paintings were of his sons when they enlisted in the mid-70s and demonstrated his confidence and support for National Service.

When we embarked on this journey to develop the museum in 2006, we knew that we were setting a very challenging target of completing the museum to coincide with the 40th anniversary of National Service. Nonetheless, everyone shared our conviction to deliver this tribute to our people, from the Army leadership, the Army formation, the contractors and more importantly, the people who shared their memories and stories with us.

Thank you all for your contributions to what stands before you today as Our Army Museum. I hope all of you will enjoy your visit.

News Release:

- Prime Minister Salutes National Servicemen (MINDEF_20070927001.pdf)

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