



NEWS RELEASE

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Speech by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the Unveiling of the National Service Landmark and the SAF BMTC Opening Ceremony

17 Aug 1999

Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

On 17 August 1967, exactly 32 years ago, Singapore's first batch of male citizens was called up for full-time National Service. Singapore was then a young nation which had just been thrust into independence. It was a time of great uncertainty. We were on our own. Our defence force consisted of a small number of regulars who were ill-equipped to protect our homeland. Our founding leaders had the foresight to realize that Singapore needed to be self-reliant in defence and that no one else was responsible for our sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nation-building would thus include the building of a credible defence force. Every able-bodied male Singaporean would henceforth go through the rites of National Service.

The National Service system has served us well for the past three decades. It has helped to forge a common identity among Singapore males. Fathers now share a common experience with their sons through National Service. We have over the years improved our training systems, acquired state-of-the-art weapons systems and built a credible armed forces manned by dedicated and competent Singaporeans. The SAF today is well recognized as a credible deterrent force capable of not only protecting our nation but also of making significant contributions to the stability of the region. Over the years, continued hard work and dedicated service by our citizens in uniform have enabled the SAF to earn the respect of other armed forces in the world. The security umbrella of the SAF has made it possible for our nation and people to pursue economic success and cultural endeavours with peace of mind.

History and recent conflicts around the world have shown that unless individual nations are capable of defending themselves, they will always be in a vulnerable position. All that Singapore has built since our independence will be destroyed if we do not have the will and

ability to defend ourselves. The recent socio-political troubles in this region brought about by the economic crisis reinforce this fact.

National Service begins with basic military training. Basic Military Training has become a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood for male Singaporeans. Professionally, Basic Military Training is the critical phase of a National Serviceman's service to our nation where the foundation of good soldiering skills is laid. Without a solid basic military foundation, our National Servicemen will not be able to properly acquire the necessary military knowledge and skills in order to fully realize their potential and contribution. The eventual operational competence of all our soldiers depend greatly on the training, knowledge, skills and core values they acquire during Basic Military Training.

While the SAF has been exploiting military technology as force multipliers, it also recognizes the importance of developing our most important resource, the individual soldier. The provision of professional military training and excellent facilities thus becomes very important. No effort has been spared to improve the training facilities for our soldiers. On the same basis, we have developed the new SAF Basic Military Training Centre in the heart of the Pulau Tekong training area. With the well-designed training facilities available, in and around the training centre, the instructors can now better train and develop the recruits into combat ready soldiers. While we demand high standards in basic military competence from our recruits, we must ensure that the recruits can quickly recover physically and psychologically from their daily tough training and transit effectively from their civilian life into a combat ready soldier. Hence, we have also improved the living environment and recreation facilities in SAF Basic Military Training Centre. With the centralised location of the basic military training in Pulau Tekong under the direct supervision of HQ Infantry and HQ BMTC, greater training effectiveness and higher training standards will be achieved.

Today, as we stand at the threshold of the new millennium, we as Singaporeans can say with total confidence that we ourselves are capable of defending our country and our families.

National Service has become a deeply entrenched and well respected Singaporean way of life. To recognise the importance of National Service, MINDEF and the SAF have decided to construct a National Service Landmark which will be unveiled today.

We have decided to build the National Service Landmark at the SAF Basic Military Training Centre to highlight its symbolic value. It is here that most of our sons will take their first step of becoming citizen soldiers. It is also here that many parents will bring their sons on the very first day of their National Service.

It is my sincere hope that the National Service Landmark will remind all of the need, importance and relevance of National Service. I also hope that this landmark will remind Singaporeans of the tremendous sacrifices our young men have made, and will make for the defence of Singapore.

Thank you.

News Release:

- Opening of Basic Military Training Centre in Pulau Tekong (Document No: MINDEF_19990817001.pdf)

National Archives of Singapore