

55

Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 - (tel. 320191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 362207 / 362271)

MC/OCT/20/79 (Defence)

National Archives and
Records Centre, Singapore.

22 OCT 1979

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MR HOWE YOON CHONG, AT
THE COMMISSIONING PARADE FOR OFFICER CADETS OF THE 9TH SMC
AND 7TH MIDSHIPMAN COURSE AT SAFTI ON TUESDAY,
16 OCTOBER 1979 AT 1730 HOURS

19 6050 131

Today's ceremony marks the completion of the OCT Course for 441 Army Cadets and ~~45~~⁴⁷ Midshipmen. They have completed their respective training courses and now qualify to join the Officer Cadre of the SAF. Their training has been for nine months. This is short by any standards. You do not transform a young man, whatever his education or other qualifications, into an Army or Naval Officer in such a short period however good your training may be. Hence, "completion" is probably the wrong word to use for this training. We should rather say that the cadets have gone through the formal course of instruction, but their training and learning have just begun. They have learned some skills and acquired some knowledge about military matters, but they have yet to put into practice what they have learned. They will now be posted back to their units to take charge of men and thus to experience the practical problems connected with the discipline, training, and management of men. Only when these have been properly mastered can they make good officers in the SAF.

The SAF is aware that the training course of nine months is far too short. But in our efforts the defence build-up, we need to produce officers quickly and in large numbers to take charge of the thousands of national servicemen who are being inducted into our Armed Forces each year. Our system of National Service allows us to retain our national servicemen on active service for no longer than $2\frac{1}{2}$ years. Hence just as the trained officers become mature, experienced, and useful as instructors and leaders, they are due to go into reserves and we lose their services.

The proper Armed Forces hierarchy of officers is thus not being built up in our system of national service. The OCT course has resulted in our national servicemen being taught by officers who are probably only a few lessons ahead. This training course is now under review. Some

changes may be necessary to make the officer cadet training more intensive and to augment it with further instructions for the remainder of the young officers' service with the SAF. Alternatively, we may have to attract more young officers with good education and leadership qualities to make the SAF their career. The completion of the OCT Course only means that you have been initiated into the learning process in the SAF. Like a technician, you have just learned how to use the tools of your profession. To acquire real skill, you will need much practice to gain more experience. Your being posted to the units will permit you to obtain the necessary on-the-job training. In the process, you will learn to instruct those put under your charge. You will be able to pick up the art of management and disciplining of men. When you can discharge these responsibilities properly, you will be worthy of being leaders.

Your selection to be trained to become officers has been based on your possessing sufficient formal education to become officers. But educational advantage is not enough. You must prove that you can lead. Your men will not respect you because you have more book learning. You will need to demonstrate leadership qualities. Your training over the last nine months will give you a further advantage. It has provided you with knowledge and skills. But the men whom you will lead have also undergone some training. In fact, they have been given more time to learn. You have probably about six months' advantage in your SAF experience. If you have not learned your lessons well while the men under you have done so, there is a real possibility that their knowledge will be better than yours. This is indeed a sobering thought! It should put you on your guard, and constantly remind you that you must prepare your lessons well, and take a keen interest in whatever you do.

An officer with leadership qualities is not only interested in his work, but also concerned over the welfare of his men. You can be strict and stern, but you must be fair and just. In your case, it is probably better to be humble and learn together with your men. You are not expected to know everything, but you should pay attention to the physical well-being and mental development of your men. The personal concern you show for your men will earn you their respect and confidence. Show that you care for them as individuals and then you can build your platoon or company into a really good fighting unit. In the particular situation in Singapore, it will ensure that our young national servicemen are properly looked after and well-treated and not subject to the harshness

and abuse that sometimes occur in our military establishments in spite of every effort by Mindef to eradicate them. You should also augment your instruction with interesting illustrations and practical lessons, imaginative exercises, and lively discussions that will sustain keen interest and make learning a pleasure rather than a chore that it so often turns out to be.

The SAF has set very high ideals of Duty, Honour, and Country for its officer corps. Their personal life and behaviour must be exemplary at all times. SAF officers must prove that they are better qualified to lead, more competent, better disciplined, better behaved, and more dedicated and interested in their work.

Tradition is as yet still young in the SAF. Yours is the task to start with originality and dignity to build the SAF tradition. Military traditions cannot result from the work of those who are without pride, lacking in interest, and only capable of routine functions. Traditions can only come about from an officer corps that has over a period of time maintained the highest standards of honour, integrity, and professionalism in the military service. On you and your work will depend whether Singapore can build its military traditions.

The targets set for the SAF are ambitious. To do otherwise will be to waste your time and mine. On your shoulders must rest the duty to be really proficient in your professional work. The Ministry of Defence will provide you with the best training, equipment, and weaponry that our resources can permit. Together we shall build a defence force that will be ready at all times to safeguard the sovereignty, integrity, and freedom of the Republic.

We wish you every success.

- - - - -