

15 MAR 1980

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 - tel. 328491 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 362207 / 362271.

ACC. NO.

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0050	J
05-1/80/03/07	

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MR HOWE YOON CHONG,
AT THE GRADUATION PARADE OF PILOTS AT THE FLYING TRAINING
SCHOOL, CHANGI AIR BASE ON FRIDAY, 7 MARCH 1980 AT 5.00 PM

To begin with congratulations are in order for the new pilots participating in today's passing out parade. They are the graduates from four Flying Training School (FTS) training courses. They comprise five, three, seven and 13 graduates who have completed the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th courses respectively. For this graduation ceremony only 24 are present, the remaining four being indisposed and cannot participate.

All these new pilots have been put through a rigorous flying training programme. They have passed their tests and are now on the threshold of their career as RSAF pilots. They are ready to join the pilots at our air bases to be given further training, instruction, and flying experience to make them proficient to perform different tasks and undertake missions for the RSAF. I am sure that the new pilots will find much satisfaction in their work as they progress from one stage to another and we all wish them well.

It is almost exactly one year ago on 9 March 1979 when I first addressed a similar passing out parade here. At that time I mentioned that the FTS must increase its intake and expand its training facilities to meet the acute shortage of fighter-pilots and transport-pilots in the RSAF. Since then much work has been done and the FTS is getting ready to cope with many more trainees. Its system of training has also been critically reviewed with drastic changes being made to bring about improvements in training all round.

During the last 12 months, the FTS has been provided with more Qualified Flying Instructors (QFIs), new training aircraft, and additional training equipment and staff. The initial progress to train more pilots has been slow. The FTS is hard-pressed to deal with the problems of rapid expansion. But all the FTS officers involved have responded to the

new demands on them with creditable enthusiasm and they should soon get the better of these problems. Whatever the difficulties I must remind all FTS officers never to compromise on professional standards and not to sacrifice quality for quantity. FTS must work hard to produce the best pilots possible, and always strive for excellence and continuing improvements. Having taken all the new pressures in their stride, I am sure that officers of the FTS will surmount all obstacles to train successfully better pilots in larger numbers from the 21st course onwards.

Beginning with the 21st Course the new flying training programme has been revised to take advantage of the experience of the FTS over the last few years. It will incorporate many good points from other successful and well-established flying training schools in friendly countries. With these changes and the acquisition of new training equipment as well as training aircraft, the FTS will now make full use of all available daylight hours for flying training. As from the 21st Course all successful trainees will be able to reach the wings stage in one year instead of the present one and a half.

There has been an overwhelming response to our recent advertisements inviting applications for trainee pilots. The minimum physical standards required of the applicants are stringent and the selection process strict. Yet many suitable young people have passed the tests, and been selected for training to become pilots. Experience has shown, however, that even after such careful selection, some trainees will not make good due to physical capacity, temperament, and character. This is often discovered during the course of training. The FTS has, therefore, to acquire an increasing capability to evaluate the progress of every trainee at each stage of training so that those who are not likely to make good pilots can be advised at an early stage about their prospects without wasting their time and the very scarce resources of the FTS.

To the new pilots my advice is that you should take your job of flying with great seriousness and concentration. Service in the RSAF is very demanding. It requires constant alertness, great skill, enthusiasm, and hard work. Flying is a profession that must keep pace with the latest advancement in science and technology. It has no place for the easy-going, the self-satisfied, and the complacent. Improvements in flying skills and technical competence have no limits. As a pilot you will have to keep on learning and improving. Every pilot in the

RSAF must attain the highest degree of professional skill to equal the best of best. Only then can we build up our national air force to which our pilots can feel justifiably proud to belong. Your advancement in the RSAF will be rapid provided you work hard and improve your skills. Depending on your ability, training, and hard work, you will be eligible to fly the most modern aircraft in the RSAF.

Take your flying in your operational squadrons seriously. There is a great deal more for you to learn. As pilots in the RSAF you have a special role to play in the defence of your country. Your call to duty to defend Singapore may come sooner than you realize. As you gain in experience and skill you can look forward to promotion and advancement in your career. The more outstanding among you can take up executive appointments in the squadrons or staff positions in the HQ RSAF. All of you will have to do some teaching either as flying instructors or as pilot attack instructors.

You must never allow yourself to be carried away by the exhilaration of flying. Learn early the paramount importance of safety and accident prevention. Pay careful attention to the measures that must be taken to ensure survival. You owe it to yourself, your loved ones, your colleagues, and your comrades-in-arms to survive. Safety and accident prevention must become second nature in you and evoke automatic reactions in whatever you do. Though accidents are difficult to eliminate, you must strive to have no accidents in the RSAF. One accident is just one too many.

The standard of performance of new pilots will depend as much on your skills as on the instruction and training you receive from your instructors. There will be an increasing demand for qualified flying instructors to train more pilots. Presently we have to recruit qualified flying instructors from overseas. We have also to send our fighter-pilots overseas to take lessons from qualified and experienced pilot attack instructors (PAIs). These are, however, only temporary stop-gap measures. The QPIs who have been helping out will have to return to their own countries on completion of their assignments. The RSAF must be able to provide its own QPIs and PAIs.

Up till now our pilots have not been brought up to think in terms of teaching and learning at the same time. Our more senior pilots other than those who are QPIs have not been transmitting their own skills and

their experience to younger pilots. Many take it for granted that their responsibility does not include the instruction of new pilots and trainees. This attitude must change. The more experienced RSAF pilots should, in addition to doing their normal flying, take on duties as instructors. Only in this way can skills and improvements relevant to our conditions and fresh ideas gained from practical experience be introduced for the more efficient training of our younger pilots. Where the RSAF is concerned, every trained and experienced pilot will from henceforth have in addition to upgrading his own skills, take on training duties as QPIs in the FTS. We do recognize that in some cases those who are skilled at flying do not make good instructors, but with some effort it is possible for their skills to be transmitted to the younger pilots. There are plans to send some of our better RSAF pilots overseas to upgrade their skills but on their return they must do some teaching as QPIs or PAIs to train others. In the process the RSAF will become self-sufficient in instructors and with more experience it will be able to evolve its own methods of training and flying doctrine.

The RSAF is a young organization and you are truly the pioneers. On you will depend the standards that will determine whether the RSAF will be numbered among the best of the best. You have a very heavy responsibility on your shoulders. Being a progressive and rapidly expanding organization, life in the RSAF will be one series of work, work, and more work. It is not a place for those who stagnate but those who enjoy satisfaction in doing a good job will find the RSAF most rewarding. Being young and enthusiastic you will no doubt look forward to the challenge ahead and I wish you every success.

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