

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MR HOWE YOON CHONG, AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY AT THE ISTANA ON 21 MAY 80 AT 6.30 PM

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The Commissioning Ceremony this year is for the 10th Standard Military Course of which there are 463 graduates. This evening's ceremony and four others that will be conducted over the next week or so will together commission some 589 officers of various categories, including those from the RSAF, RSN, and women officers and returned scholars. I shall be addressing myself mainly to the graduates of the 10th Standard Military Course and particularly to the 440 who are serving their National Service.

Officer cadets are initially selected on the basis of their scholastic performance, intelligence, physical fitness, and leadership qualities. Intelligence and physical fitness are ascertainable. Leadership qualities however cannot easily be measured. Yet this is the most important attribute military officers must possess. Should the selection prove to be faulty we end up having the wrong types as military officers. Hence in the four-and-a-half months of the junior term at the SMC an attempt is made to assess the suitability of the cadet before he is given the further training of four-and-a-half months to develop his leadership qualities. No doubt the nine-month course is much too short to deal with military subjects in depth. Officer cadet courses in foreign well-established military academies often last two to four years. The SMC aims at whetting your appetite for more knowledge. It is the first of many training courses in the development of our military officers.

On being commissioned you will be posted to units to gain practical experience. Here your leadership capabilities will be put to the test as you do training and staff work. You will get an overall picture of the functions and responsibilities of military officers. You will gain some maturity and experience in man-management. You should, therefore, make the most of the many opportunities in the units to develop your military knowledge, your ability to teach and more importantly your ability to lead and command men. You must earn the respect of your men and be worthy of their esteem.

You should not fall back on your rank and demand that you be respected. Your men may obey but they will not like you. You will be able to earn their trust and confidence when you show genuine concern for them and are sincerely interested in their welfare. Help them to learn and assist them in their problems. Take military training seriously. It involves the survival of yourself and your men. Your ability to react correctly under attack will make the difference between life and death.

Our National Service of two-and-a-half years is probably inadequate to produce the well trained and experienced military officers we need to fill the higher ranks in our active and reservist units. This cannot be helped. We will have to pay more attention to the training and development of reservist officers and to encourage more of them to maintain an abiding interest in military matters, to keep physically fit, to continue with their military studies, and to complete advanced courses for promotion to higher ranks.

Reservist officers filling important appointments in civilian life will be increasing year by year. As each SMC-trained reservist officer can prove by his own example to the people of his community that he has derived much benefits from national service, more and more people will learn to accept the usefulness of national service. Parents will want their sons to work harder while in national service so that they can attain higher ranks. National service officers have benefitted from improvement in skills and abilities, strengthening of personality and character, and development of physique and military bearing. These qualities will serve them well in civilian life as well as in the Reserves. Through contact and association with officers of different ranks the national service officers should have broadened their outlook and learned the importance of honesty, sincerity, and the adherence to the code of conduct which governs the behaviour of all military officers.

With more and more reservist officers filling posts in various capacities in the country, it will not be long before two important developments will result. Firstly parents will be impressed by the examples of good behaviour, healthy work attitude, sincerity, and honesty of those who have had the benefit of military training. Some conservative circles have continued to hold on to the obsolete concept that good sons do not become soldiers. They will now realize that if their children are to make Singapore their permanent home, they must do their share for national defence and that national service can do their sons no harm but will on the contrary

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give them good training. When they can admire and respect their friends who have had military training, they will soon accept that good sons should become soldiers. Over the last two decades we have changed many old ways of thinking in our community. There is no reason why after so many years of national service we should not be able to reverse this antiquated and obsolete concept held by a few conservative members in our community regarding military service.

Secondly employers on realizing the usefulness of military training and experience will accept them as additional qualifications for responsible appointments in their organizations. Military officers can then aspire to fill many more appointments. In time higher status in civilian appointments will closely correspond to higher military ranks. The military rank that an executive holds in the Reserves may soon be related to his status in civilian life. This will encourage reservists to work harder for promotion in the SAF. Correspondingly it will make executives respect the value of military rank. Officers holding executive posts in large organizations will be welcome as members of the local elite. The military rank of an executive will enhance his status in the community. For example the general manager of a large organization may like to be addressed as COL so and so instead of the simple Mr so and so. Executives will learn to recognise each other not by the club they belong but by the rank that they hold in the SAF.

This state of affairs can only come about if we produce good quality military officers before we release them into the Reserves. It will need hard work, pride of belonging on the part of the reservist to prove their worth to the community. While in the Reserves they must continue to study and to improve. Reservist military training should become part and parcel of their normal life. Their hard work, their capability, honesty, and sincerity, their character, and their commitment will enable these reservist military officers to earn the respect and admiration of the people. When people begin to cherish the value of military service, when employers look upon military service as an additional qualification, when those selected to fill responsible positions come more and more from among the ranks of military officers, then rank and service in the SAF will have earned the recognition they deserve.

Today you are being commissioned as military officers. You must realize the heavy responsibility that rests on your shoulders. You must be conscious of the part you are to play in earning the recognition and respect of the community for military service. It is by your exemplary behaviour and hard work that the people will recognise and accept that military training is an education in itself. An education that can improve discipline, inculcate moral values, develop personal character in our younger people to make them better citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

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