

Singapore Government

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20 SEP 1980

05-1/80/09/12

ACC NO	NARC
80 0050	26

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MR HOWE YOON  
CHONG, AT THE FTS GRADUATION CEREMONY AT CHANGI  
AIR BASE ON FRIDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 1980 AT 5.00 PM

On the occasion of this Graduation Ceremony let me take the opportunity to address you on the RSAF and the training and development of our pilots.

The importance of the RSAF in the defence of Singapore cannot be over-emphasized. Without a strong Air Force complemented by a comprehensive system of air defence our population can be subjected to air raids and our vital installations will be exposed to danger. Our defence forces will be harrassed and our troops will not be provided with the necessary ground and logistics support in their operations. The capabilities of the Navy will also be adversely affected. All these factors dictate that we must have a strong Air Force. This means that we must train good pilots and provide them with the necessary aircraft, weapons, and equipment to ensure control of our air space at all times.

The FTS provides basic training for all our pilots. It trains young men and women in flying skills and gives them some practical flying experience. In addition it inculcates correct service attitudes, devotion to duty, dedication to the RSAF, and generally the highest standards of discipline and personal conduct. Over the years the FTS has been reorganized and expanded. The courses it conducts have been updated and revised to meet the changing needs of the RSAF. We must express appreciation for the hard work of the many instructors and staff of the FTS who have given of their best to train our pilots.

We all know that our pilots are a special breed of people. They enjoy most of the glamour in the Armed Forces because their missions are often dangerous and their contribution to the success of battles is crucial.

Every year hundreds of applicants compete to be selected for training in the FTS but only a small number is chosen. The successful candidates must satisfy the highest physical standards, have excellent eyesight, good clear mind, and stable temperament as well as the ability to keep cool under stress. Those are minimum requirements. Trainees up till now have been put through the 15-month Fixed Wing Course and 10-month Rotary Wing Course. In each the training is rigorous and exacting. The RSAF cannot accept any compromise in professional standards. Though the FTS has expanded it must still ensure that there is no let up in the quality of training, neither will there be any lowering of safety standards. The courses and course contents have also been subject to review from time to time.

Today 16 pilots from the 21st and 22nd Fixed Wing Courses and 10 from the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Rotary Wing Courses have received their wings. For them this is an occasion of great importance. They have worked hard during their training. Now that it is successfully completed, they deserve every praise. They are now ready to take the next major step forward to join the ranks of the RSAF to shoulder heavier responsibilities and to learn more from the hard school of experience. For them therefore this graduation marks the end of one stage of their training and the beginning of another stage in their professional career. The months ahead will be much more exciting as they each realize how much more they have to learn and to do. They will soon realize that in the acquisition of skills and knowledge they learn much better through practical experience.

In the field of aeronautics, electronics and avionics the pace of development in science and technology is very fast indeed. Pilots who have completed their training at the FTS will find their learning and studies are just beginning. There is so much more that is now and exciting that has to be learned and

practised. In the process, they will keep abreast of the latest advances in the fields of military aircraft, equipment, and weapons, their types, engines, capabilities, innovations, and also electronics and avionics, etc. This is indeed a very wide area of knowledge and learning. It can best be tackled through reading, discussion, and group effort rather than going it alone. Young pilots may therefore find it more beneficial to study as a team rather than doing it all by oneself.

As military aircraft, weapons, and equipment become more complex, the need for better trained technical staff will correspondingly increase. Every pilot flying a mission must remember that he does so because he has the support of a whole host of highly skilled and devoted staff on the ground including maintenance crews, air traffic controllers, drivers, medical personnel, guards, storemen, cooks, and many others. In the RSAF for every one pilot who flies, there are 20 or more hardworking, highly skilled technical staff to support him. This should act as a constant reminder to him that he owes his well-being to the supporting services which enable him to safely accomplish his mission.

Members of the RSAF, as indeed all members of our Armed Forces, should strive to live up to the expectations of the service. They must not only be skilled in their job or their chosen field of specialization but they must be meticulous and conscientious, and excel in whatever they do. RSAF can justify its place in our society and uphold its good reputation only when its members prove themselves to be a special breed of energetic young people who are highly disciplined and whose personal conduct and behaviour are exemplary. They thrive on challenges and do not simply follow routine but can initiate improvements and innovations. They work hard with great diligence and dedication to maintain the highest standards of professionalism in the Air Force. They do not settle for anything other than the best, both in the discharge of their duties and in what they expect of others. They insist that all who work with them must also be of the same quality and performance. Only when every pilot can fully commit himself

with loyalty and devotion to the defence of the country and to the service of the RSAF can our pilots be equal to the best there is in the world. The RSAF must generate among its pilots and other staff that fierce and intense pride of belonging that distinguishes itself as a dynamic and successful organization. Today's young graduates are pioneers who may in time develop to become the leaders of the future. But there is no short cut. They must apply themselves with diligence and industry to their work ahead.

Coming back to working as a team, young pilots may find that they improve their technical capabilities much faster through interaction with one another and through sharing their experiences. In this way, new ideas and initiatives, improvements and innovations can be discussed, analysed, and investigated. Eventually the results can benefit everyone in the RSAF. This will not only make them more proficient in their work, it will improve the spirit of cooperation and build up lasting friendship among the pilots. Such camaraderie is of utmost importance to the morale of fighting men. The organization and management of the RSAF will be more efficient when the morale of the men is high. The skills and the professionalism of the pilots will be enhanced. Their aircraft equipment and weapons will be upgraded and improved and the safety standards will be raised.

The team work and cooperative spirit among pilots can be extended into the field of research and investigations. You can discuss among yourselves to work out new and improved training and combat techniques, tactics and strategy. You can suggest, better methods to maintain the highly sophisticated equipment, weaponry, and aircraft and to make adaptations or conversions to enhance their efficiency, lethality, and fighting qualities. With more practical experience you can suggest alterations and additions to RSAF aircraft, that will improve its combat proficiency, manoeuvrability, effective range, and even the capability to carry and deliver heavier loads. Such recommendations and suggestions when adopted and implemented can extend the capabilities of RSAF aircraft, equipment, and weapons and improve quality and

efficiency all round. It can result in the RSAF being able to achieve the lowest down time or the highest number of sorties per aircraft.

Only when we can keep on raising the standards and enhancing the proficiency of our pilots in combat and weapons delivery and improving the efficiency of our service and maintenance staff will the RSAF be ready to defend Singapore against all potential aggressors. Young pilots should accept the challenges ahead and seize every opportunity to establish for the RSAF a place of honour in our society and to build for it a glorious tradition so that as important members you can feel justifiably proud.

I wish you every success.

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