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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MR HOWE YOON CHONG,
AT THE COMMISSIONING PARADE FOR OFFICER CADETS OF THE
11TH SMC AND 7TH MIDSHIPMAN'S COURSE AT SAFTI
ON FRIDAY, 17 OCTOBER 1980 AT 5.30 PM

Today's Combined Commissioning Parade marks the successful completion by 314 officer cadets in the 11th Standard Military Course and 52 midshipmen in the 7th Midshipman's Course. They have received theoretical and practical training. They have learned technical and tactical skills. They now have a deeper understanding of what military life is all about, and what defending the country will involve. They realize the demands of the military profession and the importance of being really well trained. On receiving their commission, they will be posted to active units where they will put into practice what they have learned. In the process they will cultivate the art of man-management. We congratulate them for their success in completing their courses and wish them well in their new assignments.

Generally our people have accepted that to maintain freedom, independence, and security, we need a sizeable defence force. Frudence dictates that the responsibility to defend our home and country must be shouldered by every citizen. Our national service trains young men for the armed forces. Their military skills will be updated and improved while they are in the reserves with each in-camp training. Every effort will also be made by the SAF to train reservists to keep themselves physically fit. Military training must be accepted by our young men as a way of life. National servicemen and reservists alike must take their training and exercises seriously. This is a continuing responsibility of every citizen.

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Eventually military training will be built into our education system so that a young Singaporean's education will not be complete unless in addition to academic studies, sports, and other extra-curricular activities, he or she is also trained to defend the country. Military service must be accepted unobtrusively as a second career and a life-long commitment of every citizen.

Taken in the right spirit our type of national service can contribute towards instilling discipline, commitment, patriotism, and solidarity among our people. It will help encourage greater tolerance, understanding, civic conscious, and social cohesion in the population. Every citizen should therefore fully support our national service and reservist training.

However, after this national service system has been with us for more than a decade, there are still parents who have fears and apprehensions about their sons being enlisted to do military training. The deeply ingrained objections to good sons being soldiers may have partly contributed to these fears. But allegations of rough treatment of young national servicemen, the apparent waste of them spending two years in the armed forces, plus reports of accidents and injuries during training have also contributed towards these apprehensions. MINDEF is well aware of these problems and will do its utmost to dispel these misgivings. One good way is for young men like those who are participating in this Combined Commissioning Parade today to show by their own example what national service really entails. Without doubt it trains them in military skills, it teaches them to be highly disciplined, to live in harmony with others, and to understand the deeper implications of the many economic, social, and political problems that confront the nation.

Today's officer cadets and midshipmen are the younger generation military leaders. Your successful completion of this course should dispel whatever misgivings your parents may have about national service. By your example other parents will feel more assured when their sons are enlisted into national service. Make the best use of your posting in the units to gain greater knowledge, experience, and maturity. Your time is precious. Now that you are in the Armed Forces you should make the best of it to learn as much as you can and

to excel in whatever you do. Never permit any time to be wasted by trying to be clever to do the minimum to get by. You will only be fooling yourself.

The SAF as you know places great importance on good leadership. From now onwards your role as SAF officers is to lead men. Leadership qualities can be cultivated. Many books have been written about military leadership. Where you are concerned the following advice may help you to be good officers:-

- (a) You must develop qualities of initiative, judgement, courage, decisiveness, resourcefulness, and many other similar traits necessary for a successful leader. These qualities by themselves may not be enough. The good military leader will have that extra quality that will get his men to share his vision, commitment, and endeavour.
- (b) You must gain the respect and confidence of those you lead. You must be sincerely concerned about their welfare. You must maintain good discipline, be strict and fair.
- (c) Your personal behaviour, your ability and competence, your self-confidence, your not shirking work, and your willingness and ability to do what you require your men to do will illustrate whether you are the leader they can trust.

It is generally accepted in all armed forces that there are no bad soldiers, but only bad officers. Without any doubt, the morale of a unit, its combat effectiveness, and its discipline vary directly with the capabilities, competence, and leadership qualities of the officer in charge. For most newly commissioned officers the difficulties in leading men stem as much from their own deficiencies and lack of understanding of human nature as from the immaturity of the young national servicemen placed under their charge.

Our young soldiers are part of the SAF, but they are definitely not cogs in an impersonal machine. Every individual soldier has been brought up with loving care by his parents or relatives. Being their

officer you have to maintain strict discipline, but at the same time you must treat each one with the concern due to a fellow citizen. You must not require your men to do what you yourself will not do. Be patient with the weaker and slower learners. Give them more encouragement and extra time so that they can catch up. Be quick to give praise for any job well done. Give credit to your men when the unit does well. Take full responsibility and accept the blame when the unit fails to do as well as it should. At the end of each day do an honest review of what you and your unit had done. Learn from your mistakes, and draw up plans so that the next lesson or exercise will be better and more interesting than the previous one.

You are probably very young to shoulder the heavy responsibilities of an SAF officer. But I am fully confident that you will be quick to learn. You must not only train your men to fight well but they must learn how best to survive under battle conditions. When they turn to you for advice and assistance, be genuinely concerned about their well-being and listen to their problems, no matter how small they seem to you. Conduct yourself with honour, integrity, and courage. Always be credible, you cannot preach the need for strict discipline and good behaviour and then get arrested for disorderly conduct. mould your men into skilled fighters; influence them to be good citizens. The officer must give of his best to get the best out of his men. Military leadership is a most exacting task and the bond between the officer and his men can be very strong indeed. Many cases have been recorded in military history where soldiers have sacrificed themselves for their officer and officers have given their lives for their men.

The organization of a modern fighting force is very complex. The SAF needs better and more intelligent young men to join its officer cadre. We must build up a corps of highly intelligent, well trained, and dedicated officers. Hence while wishing all of you an interesting assignment for the balance of your national service, I would like to express the hope that some of you will get to like your work sufficiently to want to sign on for a short contract. A career in the Army or Navy is both challenging and rewarding. You get job satisfaction, you

perform the patriotic duty of defending your home and country, and you have every opportunity for further education and advancement. The defence and security of our country must be of paramount importance to every right thinking citizen. Some at least of our more intelligent and better educated young people should rise to the challenge and opt for a military career.
