

# Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

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SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE, AT THE  
AIR FORCE GRADUATION PARADE AT CHANGI AIR BASE ON FRIDAY,  
8 MAY 1981 AT 5.00 PM

Previous graduation parades have been for pilots only. Today for the first time RSAF is conducting a Combined Graduation Parade not only for 38 pilots but also for 34 Air Maintenance Officers, nine Air Traffic Controllers, and eight Air Defence Controllers as well. Actually 43 pilots and 35 Air Maintenance Officers who completed their courses should be here today, but four pilots are overseas on training while one pilot and one air maintenance officer are indisposed and cannot attend the Parade.

I remember saying at the last graduation parade on 12 September 80 that every pilot flying his mission must understand that he did so with the assistance of a whole host of highly skilled and devoted staff on the ground and that for each pilot who flies there were at least 20 of these skilled and experienced staff including engineers, technical specialists, and maintenance crews plus air traffic controllers and many others to support him. It is therefore fitting that RSAF should take the cue and give public recognition to the air maintenance officers, air traffic and air defence controllers by including these technical specialists and air vocationalists in this Combined Graduation Parade.

RSAF has taken a bold step in the right direction. The various technical specialists and air vocationalists can take heart that their contributions to the Air Force are very much appreciated and that they have a very important role to play in the Air Force. The trend is set for the future and it augurs well for closer cooperation, better understanding of their respective duties, and improved team-work between our pilots and the various technical specialists and air vocationalists. We

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can look forward to higher standards of performance and better quality in servicing and maintenance work. Better working relations will enhance the confidence and morale of our pilots when they proceed on their missions.

RSAF is very much a high technology-oriented operation. The emphasis is on excellence not only in our pilots, technical specialists and air vocationalists, but also in aircraft, equipment, missiles and other hardware. Air defence systems have developed dramatically with important advances in science and technology. The degree of sophistication must be matched by corresponding high levels of servicing, testing, and maintenance. Uncompromising standards of excellence must constantly be demanded. The level of excellence that pilots, engineers, technical staff, and other specialists can attain will determine the capability and competence of the Air Force and the air defence system. Without proper servicing and maintenance, the sophisticated aircraft and weapons that money can buy will become liabilities rather than assets. As our pilots gain in experience, their demands for better aircraft and equipment must be accompanied by a corresponding increase in the skills and competence of the engineers, technicians, and other specialists to provide a higher standard of servicing, maintenance and supporting services.

The inclusion of air defence controllers in this Parade is most significant. It illustrates that air warfare is no more a matter of dog-fights which test the skills and endurance of the air-aces as one fighter pilot tries to outdo the other with greater daring and aplomb neither is it a simple contest between pilots flying fighters and bombers from opposite sides, each trying to destroy the other to gain air supremacy or to cause destruction. Today air warfare is highly technical and specialized. In addition to sophisticated aircraft, the opposing sides will have advanced missile systems, complicated electronic devices, and counter measures. Air defence units will deploy intricate radars to keep track of aircraft in flight. Modern electronics which are marvels of human ingenuity will enable advanced missile systems to eventually elevate air warfare to the level we read about in science fiction, where destruction of the enemy can be caused by the simple push of a button. The day may come when the role of pilots and special technical crews will be totally different from what it is today or they may no longer be necessary. But until that stage is reached our Air Force must keep on training pilots and technical specialists and air vocationalists. In

fact with aircraft and weapons systems becoming more sophisticated their role will gain in importance.

RSAF can be effective in modern warfare only when its highly trained pilots are supported by very skilled technical specialists and air vocationalists of various categories. Air warfare today involves highly trained pilots, skilled in operating very sophisticated aircraft, equipment, missiles, and electronic systems which must constantly be maintained and serviced by a whole host of technical specialists. Without proper servicing and maintenance all the costly aircraft, missiles, and equipment may become useless. Hence as between pilots and technical specialists there must exist a very close personal bond with one ensuring the success of the other working as a team. Everyone in the team is as important as the other, and everyone must achieve the highest standards of excellence to ensure success.

When the excellence of any one party is not matched by similar excellence in the others, the level of the efficiency of the Air Force will be reduced to that of the weakest party. It is important that the spirit to achieve the highest standards of performance and to produce the best quality of work should pervade every level of RSAF. Every member of the Air Force must be totally committed to team-work and must be concerned for the welfare and safety of every member of the team.

I am sure that all the distinguished guests, the many friends and relatives who are gathered here to witness this Combined Graduation Parade will join me in extending our congratulations and best wishes to those who are participating in the Parade. We hope that they will meet with every success as they go into the next stage of their career. They have trained so hard and so assiduously to be at this Graduation Parade. In time with more experience they will improve their skills and become excellent pilots, technical specialists and air vocationalists. But often questions are asked as to what constitute a good technical specialist or air vocationalist or what makes a good pilot.

We know that the level of excellence of technical specialists and air vocationalists can be determined without much difficulty by examining the quality of their work, their ability to work as a team, their attitude towards their duties and responsibilities, and their determination to excel in whatever work they do.

It is much more difficult however to determine what is a good pilot. For him the measure of his excellence is not simply how well or to what level of skill he has been trained, or even how skilful he can handle his aircraft or the number of "kills" he secured in simulated dog-fights or the "hits" he obtained in practice exercises. The requirements of a good pilot goes far beyond performance capabilities. The pilot is essentially a combatant. His performance in combat depends on his personal confidence, courage, and dependability. A combatant who doubts his own ability to succeed in a mission cannot be a good pilot. A good pilot must consider every assignment a personal challenge. He must deem it the greatest service that he can render the Air Force and his country, when he can expeditiously and successfully accomplish every mission.

May I conclude by wishing everyone of you excellent progress and and job satisfaction in your career and that working together our technical specialists and air vocationalists will ensure that our pilots will successfully accomplish every mission for the glory of the RSAF.

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