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SPEECH BY MR LIM CHEE ANN, MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO, AT  
THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF SAF OFFICERS AT THE ISTANA  
ON 15 JULY 1981 AT 6.30 PM

This evening, the select group of commissioned SAF officers will be further strengthened by another 110 Army, three Navy and 21 Air Force officers. While each of you can feel justifiably proud of having earned your commission, you are now embarking on a high calling which demands the utmost devotion to duty. It will indeed be a severe test of your commitment to duty as you strive to shoulder the heavy responsibilities you have as a SAF officer.

There are always easy ways of discharging responsibility. One can delegate duties, pass down the barest of instructions and then leave it to subordinates to do the work. However these are not the ways of a good leader, nor are they the qualities which the SAF expects its officers to display.

As newly commissioned officers you will have to develop your capacity to manage your subordinates, building on the skills you have acquired during training. This is crucial for unless you learn how to manage people effectively you will not become an effective commander. The hallmark of a good commander is not just the ability to issue sharp orders and discipline those under your charge. You will also need to win the respect of your men through the way you lead them and move them behind you to pursue common objectives.

It is the first responsibility of a leader to understand that his subordinates are not similar and uniform digits but separate and very different individuals, each with his own strengths and weaknesses. As a commander, you would need to appreciate the different social and cultural backgrounds, and sensitivities of your men, each of whom will have acquired

a distinct character and emotional make-up during the 18 years prior to his enlistment. You can therefore deal successfully with them only if you know them well.

While you should expect a uniformly high standard of discipline from your men, you will soon discover that different people react differently in the same set of circumstances, each person responding in a way that reflects his background, character, temperament and motivation. This makes it all the more challenging for you to get your men to perform as a team, working together towards a common target. This is the acid test of a good and effective commander; how to foster better teamwork and promote higher performance amongst his men.

There are no short cuts to creating greater combat efficiency through teamwork. You can only succeed if you make the effort to understand your soldiers well, particularly by taking the time and trouble not only to teach them military skills but to interact with them closely. By so doing, you will be able to motivate each and everyone of them to give of his best.

When you succeed in getting your men to work as a team, you will have helped them to draw the most benefit from their military service. But the most important reason for creating a group that can fight as a team effectively is that it will ensure the survival of the team members with minimum casualties. For it is well known that in combat the individual soldier can be no safer than the group. Looked at in another way, when the nation is lost no individual in it is spared the consequences of the loss.

Your ability to lead well will result in every one of your men knowing that he has been treated fairly and wisely in his service with the SAF. He will know that not only has the country benefitted from his military service, but that he has also learned something worthwhile from his military training. He gets to understand about group survival and appreciates the need for effective teamwork apart from acquiring military skills and learning about the SAF.

As the SAF takes in over 20,000 young men each year, it will be a matter of time before the majority of male Singaporeans acquire an understanding and attitude about the SAF. Through them, their families

and gradually society as a whole will be influenced. If these attitudes are favourable, the SAF would benefit through having a good reputation and rapport with the vast majority of the Singapore citizenry. Conversely, if the impressions formed of the SAF by those who have served in it are negative or adverse, the SAF will be creating its own ill-will in our society. Your sphere of responsibility is therefore much larger than the platoon you command. This is quite a sobering thought for you as young commanders.

Whether the attitudes formed will be favourable or otherwise will largely depend on the level of responsibility and devotion you maintain in carrying out your duties. By your good work and able leadership you will not only help each young Singaporean to shape his character but also instil in him a high regard and respect for the SAF. Moreover, you will help to build up through your performance an understanding amongst Singaporeans of the true meaning of service, leadership, dedication and group loyalty. And out of this understanding the true Singaporean identity will emerge to become a cohesive force that will rally the disparate groups of citizens in times of crisis. This is one facet of your duties as a SAF officer in which you must not fail to discharge effectively.

With that reminder I congratulate each and every one of you on becoming a commissioned officer of the SAF and wish you every success in your service.

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