



ONE OF A KIND

Remembering SAFTI's First Batch
2nd Edition

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2nd edition
ONE OF A KIND
Remembering SAFTI's First Batch

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RAMACHANDRAN MENON
EDITOR

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MESSAGE BY MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

This book is a treasure trove of personal stories from the officers who graduated in the first Officer Cadet Course at the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) in July 1967. Through their experiences, recounted with matter-of-fact honesty, we develop a deeper appreciation about the origins and birthing process of the OCS, and indeed that of the wider SAF.

The First Batch was put together when a newly independent Singapore faced so many challenges. Against the trauma of separation from Malaysia, threats from Konfrontasi and communism, these pioneers were acutely aware of the responsibility placed on them to defend a vulnerable Singapore. Against all these odds in our then improverished country with very basic provisions for a militia, the First Batch were sustained predominantly by their love and commitment to this country, our independence and our freedom. They knew that Singapore's defences depended ultimately on the ability to build up a professional SAF, led by capable officers and commanders. They persevered through tough training that strengthened their leadership ability, enriched their character and grew their confidence. Their humble beginnings laid the strong foundations for today's Singapore Armed Forces.

Subsequent generations of OCS graduates would build on their foundation, to uphold the honourable legacy of these pioneers to defend our home with stout hearts and unwavering resolve. The achievements of the First Batch show us that Singapore is strongest when we hold fast to the conviction to protect what is ours, and when we live by the values we hold dear - for duty, honour and country. These timeless principles anchor us firmly in an uncertain world and give us courage to build a better and brighter Singapore.

I thank the officers of the First Batch for sharing your experiences in this book. May your dedication in safeguarding our home continue to be an inspiration to generations of Singaporeans to come.



DR NG ENG HEN
Minister for Defence
11th June 2015





This book is dedicated to

DR. GOH KENG SWEE

who inspired many generations
of SAF officers as the
Minister for the Interior and Defence



PREFACE

On 18th June, 1966, the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute was officially opened by Dr Goh Keng Swee to train both Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers in the art of warfare and military leadership. However, by the early 1980s, the rapid development of the Singapore Armed Forces stretched the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute's facilities as it struggled to cope with the increasing demands of Officer and NCO training. In 1982, then-Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew first mooted the idea of a Tri-Service Military Institute to face this challenge and on 9th June, 1990, Mr Lee officiated at the Ground Breaking Ceremony for SAFTI Military Institute (SAFTI MI). In 1995, SAFTI MI moved from Pasir Laba Camp to its present location.



SAFTI in June 1966.

SAFTI MI is now an international byword for training and nurturing military commanders, not only for the Singapore Armed Forces but also from friendly nations in many parts of the world. It conducts leadership development courses for all Three Officer Corps of the SAF – the Officer Corps, the Warrant Officer Corps and the Military Expert Corps from across the three services. It is a sophisticated training establishment equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and open parade squares where cadets will eventually graduate from.

The present SAFTI MI is a far cry from what its antecedent, the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute at Pasir Laba was on 1st June, 1966. On that day, the first cohort of potential



The Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Goh Keng Swee at the Opening Ceremony of SAFTI on 18th June, 1966.

officer cadets debussed from military 3-ton trucks in a forlorn, half-completed low-rise military camp to find themselves up close and personal with snappy, staccato, non-commissioned sergeant majors who seemed totally lacking in human empathy. They showed their human side eventually, but for the first two weeks, the demands of these sergeant majors and those with ranks on their shoulders seemed so daunting that some 50% of the recruits wanted to pack up and go home immediately. As these recruits were essentially volunteer career soldiers for the newly minted Singapore Armed Forces, they did not have an obligation to serve. But, most were persuaded to stay and many took quite readily to the life of the infantry soldier. Out of the 140 who started training as officer cadets, 117 were commissioned on 16th July, 1967.

The first edition of *One Of A Kind* was published in 2007 by SAFTI MI and launched by then-Minister for Defence, Mr. Teo Chee Hean. It was recognised as an opportunity to record the collective diary of the first cohort of SAFTI at Pasir Laba, probably the only eye-witness account by an inaugural class of a military officer training institute at the time.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the commissioning of the first cohort loomed (2017), some of them proposed issuing a new edition of *One Of A Kind*. One of us, Lieutenant General (RET) Ng Jui Ping, who retired as the Chief of Defence Force, spoke to Dr. Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence. The rest, as they say, is history, as RADM Giam Hock Koon, Commandant SAFTI



Dr Goh Keng Swee, Minister for the Interior and Defence, officiating at the Commissioning Parade in July 1967.

MI undertook this project to share these valuable stories from the First Batch for the benefit of current and future generations of servicemen and women, including our Singaporean sons who serve National Service.

COLONEL (RETIRED) RAMACHANDRAN MENON
Editor



A HISTORY LESSON THE FIRST BATCH DID NOT GET

I. SINGAPORE: A MILITARY OUTPOST SINCE FOUNDING

Defence had always been an important element in governing Singapore from its founding on 29th January, 1819 till incorporation into Malaysia on 16th September, 1963. A major consideration for selecting Singapore as a trading station had been to serve as a military outpost for the protection of British interests in the Far East. These interests included the shipping in the Straits of Malacca, the protection of the trade route between China and India, and providing a bastion against Dutch colonial expansion in South East Asia. On 6th February, 1819, the very day Raffles signed the formal treaty with Sultan Hussein Mohamed Shah of Johor and Temenggong Shree Maharajah Abdul Rahman, the local Chieftain of Singapore, Raffles addressed this issue. He instructed Major (later Colonel) William Farquhar, the first Resident and Commandant of Singapore, to construct a fort or blockhouse on the hill that became Government Hill and in time, Fort Canning, with magazines and barracks for “the permanent residence of 30 European artillery and for the temporary accommodation of the rest of the garrison in case of emergency.”¹

In a letter from Bengal to Farquhar dated 11th January, 1820, the British East India Company (BEIC) also categorically stated that “Singapore was to be considered rather as a military post than as a fixed settlement, that artificial encouragement was not to be given to the immigration of natives...”²

Representing the British Government in areas where it operated, the BEIC stationed troops in Singapore immediately after the treaty was signed. Led by one Captain J. Seppings, the first contingent, a detachment of the 2nd Battalion, 20th Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry, which was then deployed also in Penang and Bencoolen, arrived in 1819 itself.³ It also became a practice to station a Royal Navy (RN) ship in the harbour with Royal Marines on board.

The primarily military role envisioned for Singapore was eclipsed by two developments. By 1824, Singapore had surpassed Penang in trade turnover. Also, in the same year, the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty ended rivalry with the Dutch for dominance outside the Indonesian archipelago. Thereafter, the administrators of the island had no concrete enemy to address in their defence planning for more than a century and their defence preparations were directed towards a possible naval attack by European powers with which Britain might be at war from time to time. There was also always the prospect of some kind of pirate attack against the settlement. On the strident urgings of the expatriate community, military emissaries from India or London undertook studies to propose appropriate defence concepts. The practical outcome was that dominating and strategic sites around the harbour were designated as forts and gun emplacements, which might or might not be adequately provided for in terms of weapons,

personnel or ammunition. As Singapore developed, garrison troops were drawn from the British Indian Army or British regiments and elements of the Royal Artillery (RA).

From Buckley's anecdotes, from the beginning, the expatriate community itself in Singapore were concerned with threats to themselves from both Chinese immigrants and Malay pirates and agitated for the island's administrators to provide suitable defences against such threats. But although the British tended to separate police powers from the military, there seemed to have been a sense that the police could handle internal security if they were augmented by garrison troops. In the early decades of Singapore's founding, a small police element working with magistrates would seem to have been considered adequate. The attitude probably derived from the fact that the island was ruled by a military governor who could activate any process he deemed fit to protect the European community, such as calling out the military to quell civil riots. Nevertheless, the availability of additional resources was not guaranteed and the expatriates in Singapore in the 1840s and 1850s decided it was prudent to take a proactive role in their own self-defence. Matters came to a head on 5th May, 1854 when violence broke out between the Teochew and Hokkien communities, ostensibly over an argument concerning an underweight 'Kati' of rice, but actually over issues rooted in China. Rioting flared out of control the next day and the deployment of troops and Marines (quartered aboard a naval vessel on station in the Singapore harbour) brought only temporary peace along their immediate line of advance. When it became clear that the police were too thinly spread, several expatriates mounted their own patrols or complemented the police patrols in the worst affected areas. The violence only abated after some 400 deaths and the burning of about 300 'native' houses.⁴

II. THE VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT IN SINGAPORE

Successful Asians had begun to make significant contributions to social causes early in the island's development. These included Tan Tock Seng who funded a pauper's hospital in 1844, Hoo Ah Kay (Whampoa), who was appointed a member of the Legislative Council in 1869 and Cheang Hong Lim, who contributed a public garden in Chinatown in 1876. But the expatriates regarded themselves an exclusive ruling class in Singapore until the mid-twentieth century. In response to what they saw as inadequate steps by the colonial administrators to provide for the ever-present possibility that the native population could run amok, they felt they should have a contingency to mobilise and arm themselves as necessary. The 1854 rioting by the Chinese triggered the creation of a Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps (SVRC), which Governor W.J. Butterworth duly authorised, with the prior endorsement of Bengal. The Volunteer movement endured, though through many metamorphoses, eventually spreading to the other Straits Settlements and the Malay states. Obviously, it provided a venue for members to hobnob with the upper crust and to see and be seen by the British royalty who occasionally visited the Colony. It was an opportunity to pick up a medal or two by way of recognition. The duties were not especially onerous, being mostly weapons training, weekend camps, snipe

shooting in Farrer Park, ceremonial parades and mess life. But there was also a sense of civic responsibility and a genuine interest in military activities. Nothing significant by way of operations happened from the inception of the SVRC through the rest of the 1800s, which was spent mainly in sustaining membership. Organisationally however, the movement was re-launched as a Volunteer Artillery formation (SVA) in 1888. But at the turn of the century, with the outreach to Asian communities in the Straits Settlements, there was a surge of interest and general growth in numbers and types of units. Ironically, in 1901, the movement that started as an insurance against threats from Chinese communities saw the enrolment of a Chinese Infantry Company. The Sepoy Mutiny of 15th February, 1915 was viewed as a vindication of the Volunteer movement as the Volunteers were instrumental in quelling the mutiny and seen as offering a trustworthy alternative to the hired help. While the Great War atmosphere of the previous decade had triggered off similar movements in the federated and unfederated Malay States, it grew exponentially when the movement was centralised in Singapore as the Straits Settlements Volunteer Corps (SSVC) in 1922. In 1934 a Naval Volunteers element was added and was followed in 1936 by a Volunteer Air Force component. The Volunteers kept the faith during the dark days of Japanese aggression and occupation, suffering many dead, wounded and captured. They disbanded after the war and re-formed again, to participate in communist counter-insurgency operations and later against Indonesian guerrillas attempting to wreck the merger of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak as a single political entity. On separation from Malaysia on 9th August, 1965, those who were from Singapore were reconstituted as the People's Defence Force. Many accepted permanent full-time service and manned important staff and command jobs in the new Ministry of the Interior and Defence, some to hold key senior appointments in the early days of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), including Director, General Staff (two), the Chief of Navy, Chief of Artillery (two), Chief of Armour and Commander, Singapore Air Defence Command.⁵

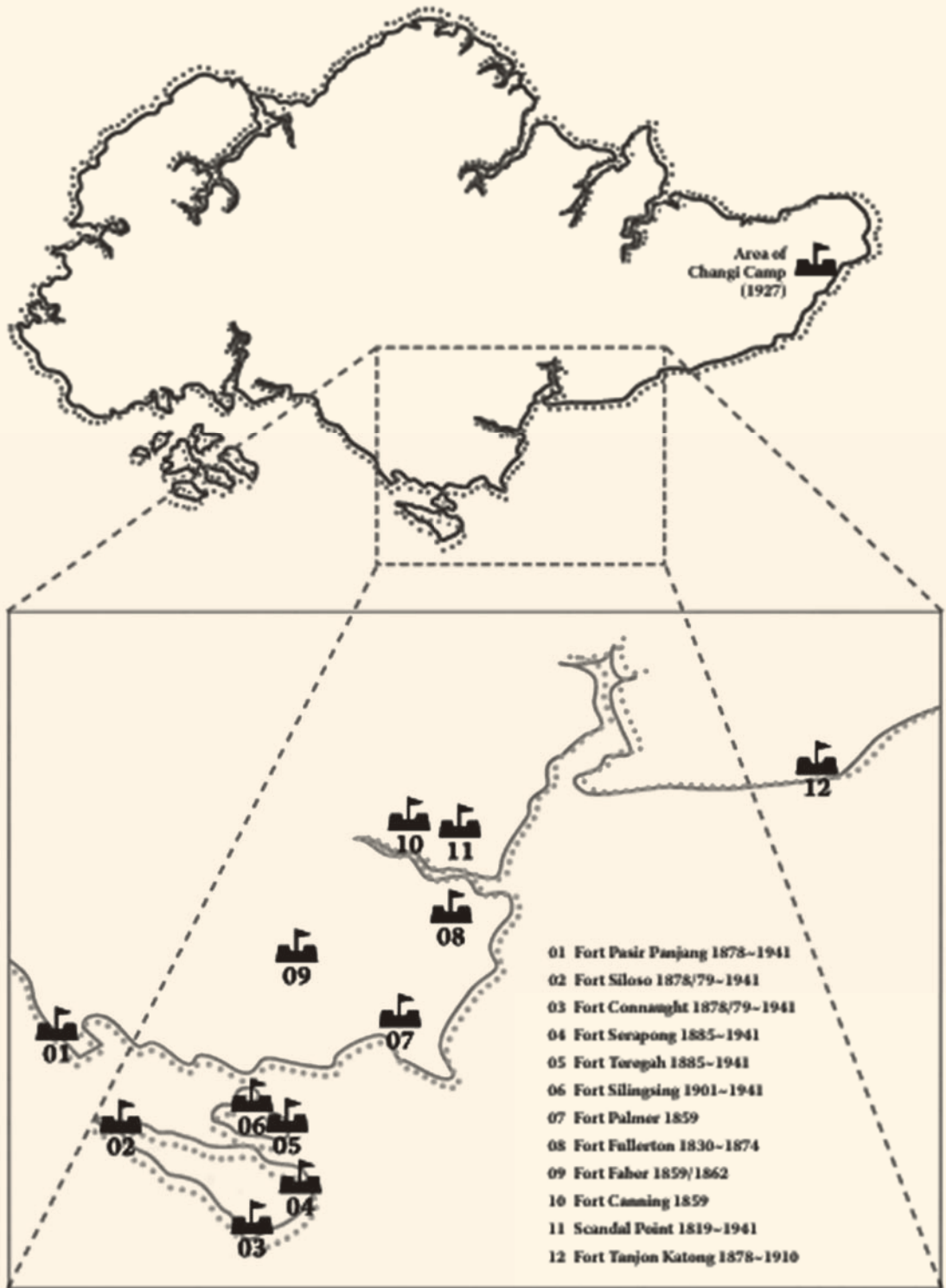
III. AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH FORCES IN SINGAPORE

Initially, Singapore was administered as a dependency of the East India Company station at Bencoolen on the southwest coast of Sumatra, where Raffles, with the title of Lieutenant Governor, was in charge. The first Resident of Singapore, William Farquhar, reported to Raffles, but during the tenure of the second Resident, Dr. John Crawfurd of the Bengal Civil Service, the administration was transferred directly to the Governor-General of India (then a BEIC appointment) who ruled India for the British Crown. In 1826, Singapore, Malacca and Penang were incorporated as the Straits Settlements, one of four Presidencies of India. In 1832, Singapore became the centre of government for the three trading stations, and on 1st April, 1867, the Straits Settlements as a whole became a Crown Colony under the Colonial Office in London. As a component of the Presidency, the chief administrator of Singapore was called Resident Councillor, but from the time the Straits Settlements were constituted, its head of government became known as Governor-General of the Straits Settlements.⁶

The removal of the Dutch threat to Singapore after the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1824 did not absolve the Singapore administration from maintaining some sort of protection for the island and the port itself. Security considerations in Singapore began to centre on two issues: the general protection of the settlement from external regional threats wherever they may arise; and the protection of the European community from native uprisings and riots.

Under Indian administration, provisions for Singapore's external defence suffered because of distance, the absence of any immediate threat and, most of all, the lack of funds. Despite Singapore's success, its free port status meant limited revenue to the administrators, whereas the European community on the island was not in a position to take on the burden on its own. Things did not improve when the Straits Settlements came under the Colonial Office in London for pretty much the same reasons, but with one additional impediment: the War Office came into the picture and there was no agreement on the concept of defences. For most of the time, the prevailing wisdom was that Singapore was best defended by fixed fortifications in commanding positions around Keppel Harbour, RN warships stationed in the region and elements of a British Indian Army regiment deployed on the island. Numerous studies commissioned by the Governor or the War Office strongly recommended one scheme or other but proposals were squabbled over or allowed to lapse without action. From around the time the Straits Settlements came into existence to the eve of the Great War, now called World War I (WWI), Singapore's external defence comprised of a British Indian Army regiment, a battery of Royal Artillery, a squadron of Royal Engineers and a small complement of native troops. Whatever was done, such as the construction of Fort Canning and Fort Fullerton, was often counter-productive. For example, the cannon at either of these forts could not engage an enemy man-o'-war in the harbour without sinking some of the hundreds of trading vessels berthed there; in other instances, guns were supplied without the ammunition or personnel trained to fire them; or when British troops were deployed in Singapore they were excused from going out into the sun or the 'unhealthy' local environment. In one sense, however, these problems proved academic because the threat assessments were flawed to begin with. The only security issue that was effectively addressed was the perceived lawlessness of the Chinese communities in Singapore and the danger the resident European community believed this posed to itself.⁷

The vacillations over the defences of Singapore were, in the final analysis, rooted in the issue of who would foot the bill (or at least the lion's share of it): the British Government or the colony itself. There was nothing immediate in the Singapore scenario to threaten any embarrassing development to the British Government and the quibbling over one proposal after another reflected bureaucratic paper shuffling. The formation of a Local Defence Committee that actively monitored and periodically reported on the state of the defences was a positive outcome, as was the commitment of the Volunteers, who after 1901 enrolled Asiatic members and expanded their range of units.⁸ Prospects of conflict with Germany drew down RN assets



Map of Singapore showing the disposition of military installations in the 19th Century.

in the Far East around 1910. To compensate, land forces in Singapore were increased to about 3,500 personnel including Volunteers.⁹ Singapore, however, did not figure significantly in World War I, other than by way of the sideshow of the Sepoy Mutiny.

The end of WWI brought significant changes to the international strategic balance and the British began to build up the defences of Singapore because of the growing perception that Japan was becoming a serious threat to Britain in the Asia-Pacific region. Britain and Japan had signed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 under which there had been considerable technology transfer from Britain to Japan, particularly in the field of shipbuilding. However, it was evident that Japan had colonial ambitions and these would be in conflict with Britain's Far East interests.

By 1918, the reach of navies—the measure of power projection—had become truly global. Capital ships, i.e. battleships and battle cruisers, unambiguously represented military capability and intent. At the end of WWI, Britain's overseas possessions exceeded that of all other countries by far, but Britain was financially strapped, with the administration of its empire and its military forces severely stretched. European nations were still in search of colonies in Asia, Africa, South America and the Pacific. But the imperial club now had an Asian aspirant, namely Japan, who had not only defeated Russia—a European power—in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, but had also engaged German troops in China during WWI. At the time, Britain and France had been grateful but the Japanese military mindset was now becoming a serious concern. With the war over, Britain began to reassess its position in the pecking order of nations. She could only conclude that in terms of power projection, she would soon be eclipsed by the United States (US), which had helped to change the course of WWI, and possibly by an increasingly assertive Japan, which was desperate for its own colonial sources of oil and primary products in East Asia.

Once Britain concluded that its best interests lay in accommodating the US—which seemed to be on a collision course with Japan in the Pacific—the Anglo-Japanese Alliance became untenable. From around 1919, the Chiefs of Staff, the Admiralty, the War Office and the cabinets of the different governments in office in Britain went through many iterations of strategic analysis on the best way to defend British interests in its far-flung empire—in the home islands, the Middle East, Africa, India, South East Asia and the Dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The key consideration of how to prioritise expenditure over the period of post-war recovery had been severely exacerbated by the Great Depression of 1929 to 1933. There was also a gradual hardening of positions in the debate on the role of air power versus naval power: the Admiralty had neither compelling evidence nor the inclination to concede that air power was the mortal enemy of capital ships, whereas the Royal Air Force (RAF) was obliged to project a potential rather than actual superiority on the basis of current technical advancements in a new field. At the time, the merger of air and maritime

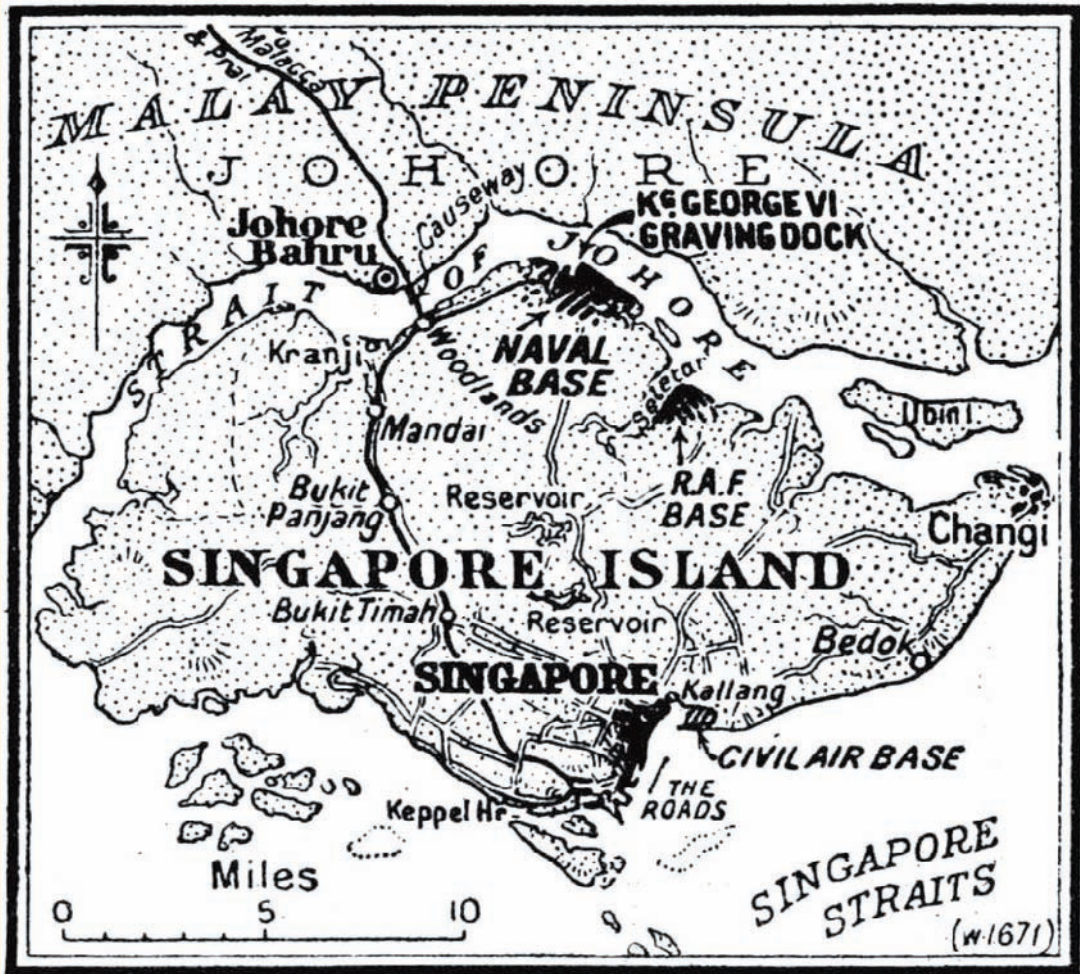


Located in present day Woodlands, the 1,000-foot King George IV Graving Dock was big enough to take in the biggest ships of its time. Picture courtesy of “The Times Weekly Edition”.

power in the configuration of aircraft carriers was hardly a blip on the horizon, so to speak. Even if had been more developed, it is unlikely that Britain could have financed the build-up of adequate carrier groups compared to a sparse sprinkling of fixed air bases in the theatre of operations.

The other great problem was that the threat scenario was speculative. Apart from a vague uneasiness about the state of international relations based on spotty intelligence and the interpretation of diplomatic initiatives, there was neither a concrete enemy nor a crisis timeframe to concentrate the minds of the decision makers. In the event, it was agreed that a naval base big enough to accommodate and maintain a main battle fleet should be built at Singapore (as opposed to Sydney or Hong Kong), and such a fleet would be despatched in good time to take up station against a Japanese threat. Beyond that, the debate bogged down over aid from the US, the guarantee of timely intelligence, the expectation of sending a fleet over 10,000 nautical miles in the face of a simultaneous threat to the British home islands, the time that could be bought by military aid sent from India and what form the fixed defences in Singapore should take. There was even a debate on whether the naval base should be Keppel Harbour itself or on the northeast coast of Singapore, though this was settled with the realisation that co-locating the naval base with the commercial harbour would hardly be conducive to Singapore’s port operations, its economic mainstay.¹⁰

The withdrawal from the League of Nations by Japan and Germany in 1933 and the withdrawal of Germany the same year from the Disarmament Conference eventually spurred Britain to



Early map showing locations of British naval and air bases in Singapore prior to WWII. Picture courtesy of "The Times Weekly Edition".

make a more concerted effort to build up the Singapore base. This had started in 1926 with the award of a contract to Swan Hunter to build a floating dock that was eventually towed in two halves to Singapore. In 1928, a contract had also been awarded to Sir John Jackson (Singapore) Ltd. to begin work on the graving docks and wharves in Sembawang. By 1935, when Sultan Ibrahim of Johore made a massive donation of £500,000 towards the project, the area between Sembawang and Changi had been transformed from marshland to a sprawling military complex of service installations, gun emplacements, airfields, hangars, workshops, stores, pumping stations, power stations, a hospital, barracks and housing units. An airfield had been put up at Tengah and additional facilities at Kallang to support a flying boat squadron.¹¹ The area between Pasir Panjang and Alexandra had also been developed into army facilities. Altogether, British military installations mushroomed all over Singapore, from Blakang Mati (Sentosa Island) to Woodlands and the whole of the North East, whereas the previous concentrations

had been in Pasir Panjang, Alexandra, Normanton, Gillman and Tanglin.¹²

Other preparations went on, but although to many observers a war with Japan for Malaya was a matter of when and not if, a strategy was yet to be agreed. Up to 1935, it was thought that Japan would attack from the sea to take Singapore in a *coup de main* (in the jargon of the time), hence the emphasis on gun defences supported by torpedo bombers and garrison troops, with reinforcement by a main fleet despatched from the Mediterranean when hostilities seemed imminent. But, from the tenure of Major General (MG) William Dobbie as General Officer Commanding, Malaya, in November 1935, his successor Major General L.V. Bond and eventually to Lieutenant-General Arthur E. Percival, it had become an article of faith that the Japanese would attack Singapore from the Malayan Peninsula and not by sea from the south. With Britain already at war with Germany from late 1939, what little could be done to prepare Singapore to deter Japan was attempted. Troops were sent from India and Australia and RAF squadrons to air bases in Singapore and Malaya. Fixed defences were put up in Singapore and contingency plans for operations in the Malayan Peninsula were drawn up. There was even a contingency plan to deny the Japanese a foothold in South Thailand. Japan's occupation of Tonkin on 22nd September, 1940, and the imposition of sanctions against her by the US and Britain lent urgency to the effort, but it was to prove too late. Raw troops, dated equipment and the distraction of the war in Europe right up to Pearl Harbour and the landings in Singora and Patani on 8th December, 1941, sealed the fate of Malaya and Singapore. Despite all the attention it got, the sinking of the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battle cruiser *Repulse* on 10th December, 1941 off the east coast of Malaya was irrelevant to the military outcome, though it was a devastating blow to the morale of civilians and soldiers alike in Malaya and Singapore.



Map of Singapore showing Singapore's defences in 1937.

In November 1941, British forces in Malaya comprised ten brigades with a total of 32 battalions, distributed among the 11th Indian Division, the 9th Indian Division, the 8th Australian Division and the 1st and 2nd Malaya Brigade. They came under the command of three Corps, initially located at Kuala Lumpur. The tanks that had been begged for, never arrived. The air force element comprised 181 dated combat aircraft, but no modern torpedo bombers, dive bombers or transport aircraft. After *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, the RN was an assortment of minesweepers and patrol craft manned by regulars and volunteers. Singapore was defended by 18 x 6-inch, 6 x 9.2-inch and 5 x 15-inch guns, with various other anti-aircraft and smaller calibre weapons in individually fortified positions. But the ammunition for the big guns consisted mainly of anti-shipping rounds and only 150 and 900 of high-explosive rounds were available for the 9.2 and 6-inch guns respectively. Contrary to sensational post-war analysis however, the deployment of most of the guns enabled them to fire landward as well.¹³

Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita, regarded as Japan's best field commander, led the Japanese forces against the British. Yamashita's 25th Army comprised the 5th, 18th and the Imperial Guards divisions, the 3rd Air Group of 450 up-to-date combat aircraft, the 22nd Naval Flotilla with 150 Zero fighters and the Southern Fleet made up of the battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna*, six modern heavy cruisers, and numerous smaller vessels. In addition, Yamashita had the 56th Division, which he left at home to conserve supplies.¹⁴

Singapore fell on 15th February, 1942. Many in Malaya and Singapore concluded that Britain had sacrificed Singapore in the interest of the home islands, a charge rejected by Winston Churchill, Britain's wartime Prime Minister. Japan went on to colonise the rest of South East Asia, including the Philippines and was poised to threaten Australia. It was to prove a long and tragic three years and seven months for Singapore as an outpost of Japan.

With the defeat of Japan in the Pacific and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allies, including the Soviet Union, which, at the last minute, had declared war on her, to better stake a claim for the spoils. On 12th September, 1945, Vice-Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) accepted the surrender of all Japanese forces in the area without a fight. As the surrender pre-empted 'Operation Zipper' which was to have rolled up the Japanese in South East Asia, Zipper was notionally conducted by way of a logistical exercise.¹⁵ Yamashita was hanged on 23rd February, 1946 in the Philippines after being tried as a war criminal and an appeal to General MacArthur had failed.

From the time of the surrender, Malaya and Singapore came under a British Military Administration (BMA), which itself came under SEAC, then mainly headquartered in Singapore. The 5th Indian Division secured the Island and the repair of pre-war military

facilities was urgently initiated. By November 1945, all three of Britain's services were occupying their former facilities in Singapore. RAF HQ was set up in Changi Air Base, which was configured also as the air transportation hub. Tengah was assigned to air defence units and Seletar to stores and maintenance. By March 1946, the Admiralty had definitively concluded that only Singapore was close enough to the region to restore a credible British naval presence and secure British interest in South and East Asia. In April 1946, civil government was reinstated and by November that year, SEAC was disbanded. In the meantime, Singapore's place in British defence policy was thoroughly reviewed. It was agreed that if Britain was to remain a global power, Singapore was a vital asset. The island was now a well-protected base for all three services and the centre of gravity for the facilitation of Britain's defence policy in the region. Singapore would provide the main supporting base for the RN and the regional headquarters for the RAF and British land forces, as well as friendly forces for regional operations.¹⁶

The above decisions acknowledged that nationalism was on the march in Asia, making it even more imperative for Britain to exploit Singapore's strategic location. Events closely following the end of World War II (WWII) prompted this view: Indonesian independence in 1946; Indian independence in 1947; communist victory in China, in 1949; the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), in 1949; and the Korean War, from 1950 to 1953. With the advent of the Cold War, and especially after the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, South East Asia, while a secondary front, was nonetheless a linchpin in the worldwide ideological stakes. Britain was able to make a major contribution to the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, a collective security pact led by the US. During the Malayan Emergency against communist guerrillas, British military bases in Singapore played a pivotal support role, something that was repeated towards the end of the British stay when Indonesia mounted 'Konfrontasi' (armed confrontation) against the Malaysian merger.

As it turned out, the RAF began to wrest the lead role from the other two services and Tengah was upgraded to become the United Kingdom's most up-to-date air base outside the United Kingdom (UK), while Sembawang became the main support base. By 1962, the RAF could airlift one entire brigade to Singapore in nine days. In March 1962, Singapore was designated one of three worldwide tri-service hubs of British military forces together with the UK itself and Aden. It was placed under the command of the unified Far East Command.¹⁷

IV. PROVIDING FOR LOCAL MILITARY CAPABILITY

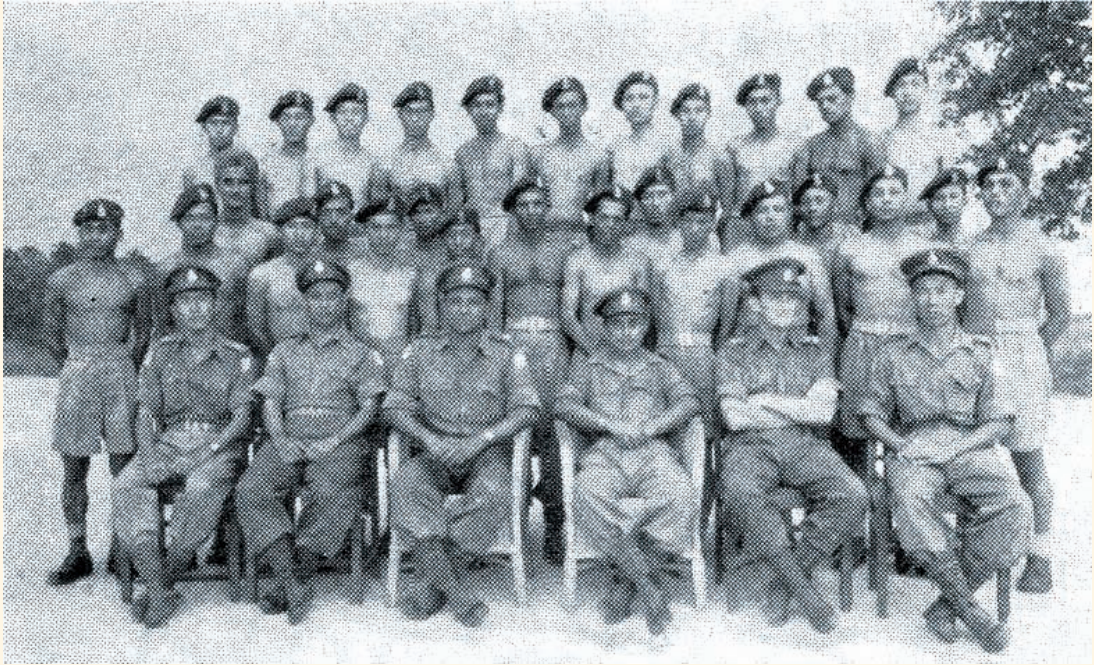
While the BMA was in place from 5th September, 1945, when the Japanese officially surrendered, to 31st March, 1946, a momentous administrative initiative had been cooking behind the scenes. With the return of the civil administration on 1st April, 1946, the formation of the Malayan Union comprising the federated and unfederated states of peninsular Malaya with Penang and Malacca was announced and Singapore declared a separate Crown Colony. The Malayan Union scheme itself—which many Malays bitterly objected to because it would have given

non-Malays equal political status, and had led to the creation of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) which would be the main component of the ruling coalition after Malayan independence—was scrapped within 3 months and replaced by the Federation of Malaya on 1st February, 1948.¹⁸

By the early 1950s, the colonial environment was undergoing a terminal transformation. An impoverished Britain, scarred with the stigma of defeat by an Asian power, was neither able nor inclined to hang on to colonial possessions, whereas the colonial subjects themselves were chafing to be rid of the yoke of a foreign rule that had failed to provide even the security that might have been expected of it. Nationalism was gaining ground rapidly in South East Asia, starting with the rejection of the returning Dutch by the Indonesians and spurred on by the success of the Indian independence movement and the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu. There was pressure from many quarters for the British to rationalise their role in South East Asia and the issue had largely become a matter of face-saving but responsible disengagement.

In Singapore, the local population had become increasingly restive for more say in the government, resulting in a provision for six popularly elected members to the Legislative Council. Singapore's first elections for political office (to the Legislative Council) were held on 20th March, 1948. But the threat of communism forced the British to speed up democratisation and self-government and in 1955, Singaporeans went to the polls for their first Legislative Assembly, to be led by a popularly elected Chief Minister. The Governor still had the right to appoint key members of the Assembly and there were several other members who would be nominated. The first Legislative Assembly negotiated with the British Government for further constitutional changes. Singapore's first general elections for a fully elected Legislative Assembly under a Singapore Constitution that provided for a Head of State (initially the outgoing British Governor, Sir William Goode) and a Prime Minister, was held in May 1959.¹⁹ However, the British, through the High Commissioner to Singapore, retained responsibility for external defence and foreign affairs (except on matters pertaining to trade). An Internal Security Council made up of representatives of the British Government, representatives from the Singapore Government and a representative from the Federation of Malaya (with a crucial casting vote) dealt with issues of internal security in Singapore. In the face of communist agitation, partly because of its strategic location and partly because of its predominantly Chinese population, underlying nearly every political milestone for Singapore was Britain's long-term view of its role in South East Asia and Malaya's sensitivities towards the future status of Singapore within the Malayan scheme of things.

The armed insurgency mounted by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), better known as the First Malayan Emergency (1948 – 1960) was at its height while the political scene was changing in Malaya and Singapore. In fact, the changes mooted in both Malaya and Singapore were designed to pull the rug from under the communists, whose main platform was anti-



Officers and NCOs from the 1st National Service intake, 1954.

colonialism. To help deal with the communist threat, as well as to enlarge the nucleus for a more substantive military capability, an abortive attempt was made to implement part-time national service in Singapore in 1954 (legislated in 1952) to augment Singapore's volunteer local forces. The scheme was seen as conscription by a foreign power, thereby feeding the communist cause and became hugely unpopular. In view of its failure, local Singaporean leaders including Mr. David Marshall, the first Chief Minister, had pressed the British for the creation of regular Singaporean units in the latter half of the 1950s. The British undertook to provide the officers and finances to raise one infantry battalion in 1957 and the 1st Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment (1 SIR) was formed in Ulu Pandan Camp. In the event, a concerted effort by Commonwealth and Malayan forces under the inspired leadership of General (later Field Marshal) Sir Gerald Templer broke the back of the communist armed insurgency in Malaya. By combining the roles of High Commissioner to Malaya and Chief of Operations, Templer was in a position to institute drastic measures such as resettling Chinese farmers in protected New Villages thereby denying the communists access to both material resources and their network of information and couriers called '*min yuen*'. To demonstrate confidence and to eliminate the anti-colonial agenda, Malaya was granted independence on 31st August, 1957 even before the remnants of the insurgency were mopped up. Britain and Malaya concluded the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA) to secure Malaya's defence. The AMDA provided, among other things, for the British to help raise and train

Malayan military forces. On their part Malaya agreed to Britain maintaining bases and forces on its territory, subject to them not being used in support of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) to which Britain was committed under the 1954 Manila Pact. Malaya had stipulated this to pursue a non-alignment policy mainly to prevent being dragged into a conflict with China. Since Britain could still use Singapore, this was not a problem.²⁰

V. THE MALAYAN NAVAL BASE IN SINGAPORE

When Malaya became independent in 1957, there was the curious situation of the Royal Malayan Navy being based at KD (Kapal DiRaja) Malaya in Woodlands and K.D. Pelandok in Khatib, Singapore. At the time, given that Singapore was still British and there were no basing facilities even remotely comparable to Woodlands in Malayan territory, with the prospect of Singapore eventually being incorporated into Malaya, this was not anomalous. But, the creation of the Royal Malayan Navy had a chequered history. In 1934, a Straits Settlements Royal Naval Volunteer Reserves had been created in Singapore, starting with Commander L.A.W. Johnson, MVO, RN (Ret) and an authorised establishment of 50 Officers and 200 Malay ratings.²¹ The reason for stipulating Malays may have had to do with the prospect of creating a nucleus for a Malayan Navy in due course. It is also unclear at this late date if the numbers represented the actual response or the authorised strength, but in any case it was a very successful Volunteer force that went on to play a respectable role against the Japanese as part of the Singapore Wing of the Malayan Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. However, when the Volunteers were called up in 1939 in anticipation of a Japanese offensive, the Colonial Government in Singapore also decided to strengthen the defences of Singapore by separately raising a Malay Section within the fulltime Royal Navy.²² This group popularly became known as the ‘Malay Navy’, serving mostly as ratings in the communications branch of minesweepers and patrol craft. Like their Volunteer counterparts, they played a heroic role against the Japanese, suffering many casualties in the process. With the surrender of Singapore imminent, all naval personnel were ordered to evacuate and disperse, which they did with varying degrees of success. After the Japanese surrender, about 150 personnel returned to Singapore. They were accommodated in Farrer Park and later at Blakang Mati but due to financial constraints, the ‘Malay Navy’ was disbanded between February and April 1947.²³ But in December 1948, the Colonial Government created a Malayan Naval Force as the colony’s contribution to the defence of Malaya and the nucleus came from the ex-‘Malay Navy’. In 1952, the Malayan Naval Force was designated the Royal Malayan Navy; it was still a British entity, controlled and financed by Singapore. In 1958, a year after Malayan independence, the force was transferred wholly to the Malayan Government, where it retained the Royal prefix but under the Malayan King (Yang Di Pertuan Agong).²⁴ As there was no base then available in Malaya, the Royal Malayan Navy (RMN) headquarters remained in Woodlands in KD Malaya until it relocated to a base built in Lumut in 1994.²⁵ (KD Pelandok, which had been the basic training camp, had been handed over to the Singapore Government in February 1982).

VI. SINGAPORE'S MILITARY ASSETS ON THE EVE OF MERGER

In 1962, again with British financial and manpower support, the second SIR battalion (2 SIR) was raised at Tanah Merah Besar Camp in Changi and relocated to Camp Temasek (beside 1 SIR in Ulu Pandan Camp) in July 1963,²⁶ to be officially opened on 19th August as Holland Road Camp by the Yang Di-Pertuan Negara, Inche Yusof bin Ishak.²⁷ Thus, on the eve of merger the local land forces comprised 2 battalions worth of Volunteer Infantry, with a Volunteer Artillery battery, a Volunteer Armoured Car squadron, a Volunteer Signals squadron and a Volunteer squadron of Field Engineers, a General Transport Company and the Women's Auxiliary Corps, plus the two SIR battalions.²⁸ The Volunteer Navy element, which had originally been part of the Singapore Division of the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, including personnel of the Singapore Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, or SWANS,²⁹ had three ships: *Laburnum*, a static ex-Japanese mine layer named Wakataka presented to the Singapore Division to replace the first *Laburnum* which had been sunk in WWII; *Panglima*, the third of that name, a 35.7m Ford Class large patrol craft built locally by Vosper Thorneycroft; and *Panji*, a launch used for ship handling training.³⁰ The wartime Straits Settlements Volunteer Air Force had briefly been revived as the Singapore Wing of the Malayan Auxiliary Air Force providing light reconnaissance and fighter control duties, but with the end of the Malayan Emergency it had been disbanded in 1960.³¹ All the Volunteer units were primarily geared towards internal security operations and had seen sundry deployments to release the regular field forces for jungle operations.³²

VII. MERGER WITH THE MALAYAN FEDERATION

When Singapore, together with Sabah and Sarawak, merged with the Malayan Federation to form Malaysia on 16th September, 1963, the local military and police forces came under the Federal Government. The AMDA was renegotiated to include the defence of Singapore, while the British position on SEATO—now that British bases in Singapore were technically in Malaysian territory—was left unresolved for the moment.³³ The personnel of 1 and 2 SIR were given the option to leave the service or stay, as their contracts had been with a different principal; about 30 percent left and the depleted battalions came under command of the 4th Malaysian Infantry Brigade (4 MIB) headquartered at Fort Canning.³⁴ 4 MIB also commanded the 4th, 5th and 6th Battalions, Royal Malay Regiment and its area of responsibility was the Singapore-Johor military district. British forces based in Singapore continued to provide support. The Volunteers remained as such as they were nearly all Singaporeans or expatriates and were free to quit. However, the organisation was subsumed under the Malayan Territorial Army structure, with the designations of 10th Battalion Territorial Army, 20th Artillery and 30th Engineers and in the case of the naval elements, under the Royal Malaysian Navy Volunteer Reserve. For the Volunteers, one positive outcome was that they now could deploy for training in the larger territory of Malaysia.³⁵ But almost immediately the military units were exposed to operations against Indonesian 'Konfrontasi'

or ‘Confrontation’, Indonesia’s attempt to destabilise Malaysia, which had begun in January 1963. 1 and 2 SIR were deployed for jungle operations and the volunteers were mobilised to assist the two regular battalions in protecting key points and installations in Singapore itself, the Southern Islands and South Johor. The SVC infantry companies and the Volunteer Artillery contributed to jungle patrols against Indonesian guerrillas. The Volunteer Artillery also deployed in Sabah to support the 7th and 8th MIB and 2 SIR.³⁶

With merger, British colonial rule over Singapore was relinquished and Singapore’s security became a Malaysian responsibility. However, both Singapore and Malaysia welcomed the continued stay by British forces in Singapore. For Singapore, the British military presence was a major contribution to its economy, as well as an insurance against untoward developments in its relations with Malaysia. Malaysia for its part found the AMDA reassuring as communists were still active in Indonesia, Indo-China and the Philippines and communist cells remained active in the Thai-Malaysian border areas. The practical value of British basing in Singapore had become amply evident as soon as Indonesia mounted armed confrontation against the merger. But, all the same, as the British were now guests in an independent nation, the writing was on the wall.

VIII. THE SINGAPORE VIGILANTE CORPS

Another by-product of Konfrontasi had been the creation of the Singapore Vigilante Corps. When the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur took over responsibility for Singapore’s security, it agreed to a Singapore proposal on 14th April, 1964 to set up a Vigilante Corps to counter Indonesian infiltration and fifth-column operations in Singapore. A Vigilante Corps (VC) Working Committee under the Singapore Deputy Commissioner of Police was created to look into the administration of the Corps. Registration of corpsmen started on 22nd April. All male residents of 18 years and above were eligible, and by 16th May, more than 12,500 had signed up in 100 Community Centres throughout the Island. They were trained by the Police and the first patrols were deployed by 4th June. Patrols were mounted in the vicinity of participants’ homes twice a week. Corpsmen were issued with identification, armbands, whistles, staves, torchlights and raincoats and the Singapore Government announced a compensation scheme for injuries incurred in the course of duty. The VC operated as individual units from Community Centres under the supervision of the Police.³⁷

IX. SEPARATION FROM MALAYSIA

The parting of the ways between Singapore and Malaysia in just under two years (16th September, 1963 to 9th August, 1965) came when it was mutually agreed between key Singaporean and Malaysian leaders that Malaysia would expel Singapore rather than attempt to force-fit incompatible value systems. But hanging over the whole separation was the undeniable fact that the defence of

Singapore and peninsular Malaysia were inextricably linked. Moreover, Britain's commitment to AMDA remained and on separation, Britain, to all intents and purposes, still expected to occupy its military installations in Singapore as its base of operations for AMDA as well as other regional security interests. Also, Malaysia had its naval base in Singapore with no prospect of re-location in the immediate future. And, to complicate matters, Konfrontasi was still ongoing.³⁸

On separation, Singapore was left vulnerable in nearly every field. Political sentiments being what they were at the time, Singapore's sovereign independence was tenuous. It was heavily dependent on the presence of the British bases and continued dominance of the political scene in Malaysia of Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian Prime Minister, who had mooted the separation (as opposed to enforced federation sans the current Singapore political leadership). The practical aspects of de-linking Singapore from Malaysia would take time and one of the thorniest areas would be in military matters, given that these had been under direct Federal Government purview.

Under Article V of the Separation Agreement of 7th August, 1965 Singapore and Malaysia were to enter into a treaty of external defence and mutual assistance, subject to the establishment of a Joint Defence Council. The Malaysian Government would give the Singapore Government assistance such as it considered reasonable and adequate for external defence. The Malaysian Government would have the right to continue to maintain the bases and facilities used by its military forces in Singapore and to use them as the Malaysian Government saw fit for external defence. Additionally, neither party would sign treaties with others that would be detrimental to the independence and territorial defence of the other.³⁹

Apart from the two regular infantry battalions (less those Malaysian nationals who wanted to remain with Malaysia) and the volunteer infantry units, all military elements currently under the Malaysian Armed Forces that had belonged to Singapore before merger would revert to Singapore.

At the time of separation, the two SIR battalions were still under operational control of 4 MIB. As had been agreed prior to separation, 2 SIR had been sent to Sebatik Island (off Sabah) for a six-month operational deployment against 'Konfrontasi', while 1 SIR was barracked at Ulu Pandan Camp. Meanwhile the 5th Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment (5 RMR), was occupying Holland Road Camp, 2 SIR's home. The issues that were raised in the course of resolving this problem were to contribute to the priority the Singapore leadership assigned to the creation of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

X. BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM SINGAPORE

The return of the Labour Party to power in the UK in 1964 initiated a review of Britain's overseas defence commitments, despite the resistance of the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson and the Defence Minister, Dennis Healy.⁴⁰ There just seemed no alternative to withdrawal from Singapore to realise the massive cuts demanded in defence cost. Unfortunately, the debates coincided with the breakdown in relations between Singapore and the Malaysian Federal Government and were viewed in some circles as an excuse by Britain to get out of a sticky wicket. By the time the separation occurred, the withdrawal was a foregone conclusion, and in 1967, the schedule was announced. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew was able to negotiate only a nine-month delay till the end of 1971, when general elections were due in Britain.⁴¹ But the outcome of the elections offered no reversal of policy.

Singapore received a British aid package worth about £50 million, defence technology transfers including the operation of air defence facilities, the Bloodhound surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) deployed in Singapore, several Hunter trainer aircraft plus training for pilots in Britain and generous terms for the transfer of British facilities in the island to the Singapore Government.⁴²

The AMDA was replaced by the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), which provided for consultations among Singapore, Malaysia, Britain, Australia and New Zealand in the event of any external threat to the local partners.⁴³ An Integrated Air Defence System linking the radar facilities in Singapore, the air defence missile umbrella and interceptor aircraft of the FPDA partners, was set up under an overall Australian commander based at Butterworth. The 28th Commonwealth Brigade was redesignated the ANZUK brigade and relocated from Malaysia to Nee Soon Camp in Singapore. A contingent each of helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft continued to operate out of Tengah. There were also arrangements for RN and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) units to rotate through Singapore. Britain formally terminated the Far East Land Forces (FARELF) structure on 29th October, 1971. This was followed on 31st October by the Far East Air Force, bringing an end to the whole Far East Command. By March 1976, all Australian and British troops stationed in Singapore were withdrawn.⁴⁴ The New Zealand battalion stayed on till 1989.

XI. THE AFTERMATH OF SEPARATION

The term Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) *per se* came into use only after separation from Malaysia. Prior to that, there had been several similar terms representing the military organisations set up in Singapore, namely the original Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps; the Singapore Volunteer Artillery; its eventual successor the Singapore Volunteer Corps; and in 1954, the Singapore Military Force. Under Malaysia, the regular units, 1 and 2 SIR, were parts of the Malaysian Armed Forces (renamed 1st and 2nd Battalions, Malaysian Infantry Regiment), while on mobilisation, the

Volunteers, as part of the Malaysian Territorial Army, would have come under command of the designated Malaysian headquarters that had operational command of the forces from Singapore.

The SAF was forged in the crucible of the heightened political sensitivities that a historically unprecedented event had created, namely the expulsion of a state from a federation by the central government. The fact that the central government had overwhelming military forces and legal prerogatives at its disposal as well as other alternatives such as suppressing the divisive elements in the 'renegade' community only made recourse to expulsion more intriguing. However, for the outcast state, the possibility that this was a shrewd political gamble, which, if successful, would see it crawling back on its hands and knees, willing to accept any terms of reconciliation, was a reality. But that prospect also carried the corollary that if the gamble failed, then the deferred chastisement could yet be applied.

Endnotes

1. Buckley 1965, p. 43
2. *ibid.*, p. 59
3. *ibid.*, p. 60
4. *ibid.*, pp. 585-595
5. Brigadier T.J.D. Campbell (DGS); Brigadier Kirpa Ram Vij (DGS); COL James Aeria (Chief of Navy); COL Mancharan Singh Gill (Chief of Artillery); COL Kwek Boon Yong (Chief of Artillery), LTC Seah Peng Yong (Chief of Armour); COL Ee Tean Chye (Commander, Singapore Air Defence Command)
6. Murfett, et. al., p.56
7. *ibid.*, pp. 87-112
8. *ibid.*, p. 108
9. *ibid.*, p.124
10. *ibid.*, p.151
11. *The Times Weekly Edition*, 3rd March , 1939, p 40
12. Winsley 1938, p.195. Tanglin Barracks had been completed in 1868 for occupation by British troops; prior to the barracks, it had been a 1,600 acre nutmeg plantation belonging to one William Willan and included Mount Harriet which is the site of the building which used to be the Officers' Mess.
13. Murfett, et. al., p. 167
14. *ibid.*, pp. 177-180
15. *ibid.*, p. 281
16. *ibid.*, pp. 282-283
17. *ibid.*, pp. 297-298
18. Lau 2003, pp. 4-5
19. Singapore 2001, p. 33
20. Huxley 2000, p. 3
21. Winsley 1938, p. 115
22. *Our Security: Keselamatan Kita*, 1969, p. 13
23. *ibid.*, loc. cit

24. *ibid.*
25. *Mindef records.*
26. *The Singapore Armed Forces, 1981, p. 41*
27. *History of 2 SIR, 1987, p. 7*
28. *Based on a tote of data from Our Security, Winsley, The Singapore Armed Forces and Huxley.*
29. *Lim 1992, p. 24*
30. *Interview with MAJ (RET) R.V. Simon, RSN, 29th March, 2005.*
31. *Huxley 2000, p. 5*
32. *Mindef records*
33. *Huxley 2000, p. 6*
34. *The Singapore Armed Forces, 1981, p. 42*
35. *Interview with MAJ (RET) S. Muthucumar, SO3 Training/Territorial Army, HQ 4 MIB, Fort Canning, 2nd October, 2003.*
36. *The Singapore Armed Forces, 1981, p. 38*
37. *Singapore Year Book 1964, p. 180*
38. *On 30th September, 1965, the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), attempted to take over openly by eliminating the key military commanders opposed to it. Forty-four year old Major General Mohammed Suharto, Commander of Kostrad, the Army Strategic Reserves, (Komando Strategis Angkatan Darat) counter-attacked to smash the coup. Many communist sympathisers were rounded up and either executed summarily or incarcerated indefinitely. In the aftermath of the failed coup, General Suharto eventually took over as President and subsequently ended the Konfrantasi campaign.*
39. *Singapore Year Book 1966, p.7; Huxley 2000, p. 7*
40. *Murfett, et. al. p. 316*
41. *ibid., p. 323*
42. *ibid., p. 324*
43. *ibid., p. 326*
44. *The 42nd Battalion, Singapore Armoured Regiment, took over the historic Selarang Barracks, which General Yamashita had used temporarily as an operational HQ (as well as a POW detention centre), from 6 RAR.*

MERGER AND SEPARATION

I. BIRTH OF A LION

The name Singapore derives from the Sanskrit word for 'lion city'. The way Singapore became a nation state has no precedent. The tiny island republic came about because it was mutually agreed between the Federal Government of Malaysia and the elected leadership of Singapore that the only solution to the incompatibility of political objectives was outright separation—people, territory, political leadership, economic assets, military assets and civic institutions—23 months after merger. It was all the more bewildering because Singapore's very origins were predicated on its strategic location in one of the most important sea-lanes of the world and its centrality to its hinterland, the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago. There was no question that the Malaysian Government had a constitutional claim as well as a vital national interest to retain Singapore, whose leadership had sought the unification with the widespread endorsement of its populace. Malaysia might have even reinforced its claim with the historical fact that the island had belonged to the Johor Sultanate before Stamford Raffles founded the trading post that was to become the colony and state of Singapore. In realpolitik terms, the island would have been more than worth the international and foreign policy opprobrium that retaining it by force would have generated, especially since its populace as a whole had not been advocating separation. The Malaysian Government could also have addressed the problem of a confrontational Singapore leadership by more circumspect means if it had been so minded. Moreover, the Singapore leadership would have preferred to stay within Malaysia if the Federal Government had offered a slightly less drastic alternative.

II. THE MIRAGE OF MERGER

Malaysia had been the outcome of a number of political developments from 1957, shortly after Malaya, its core entity, became independent. For various reasons including costs, Britain wanted to relinquish its other colonial territories in South East Asia, which then comprised Singapore, the Borneo territories of Sabah (British Borneo) and Sarawak and separately, the Sultanate of Brunei. Singapore would have been part of Malaya when the latter became independent on 31st August, 1957, but for the fact that in April 1946, the British colonial rulers had included only Penang and Malacca from among the three Straits Settlements in the Malayan Union because they were mindful of the fact that extending Malayan citizenship to an additional million plus Chinese would have left the Malay demographic majority in the federation in a precarious position, in addition to being economically underweight in its traditional homeland. As Singapore was also the main British defence node outside the UK, and Britain had major defence commitments in the region, the Singapore issue was deferred to play itself out. But over the next few years, ever increasing domestic pressure in the UK to rationalise its defence expenditures had to be addressed. At the same time, colonialism had become an acute embarrassment and agitation in Singapore for independence could not

be ignored, especially since anti-colonialism was the rallying point of rampant communism in the region.

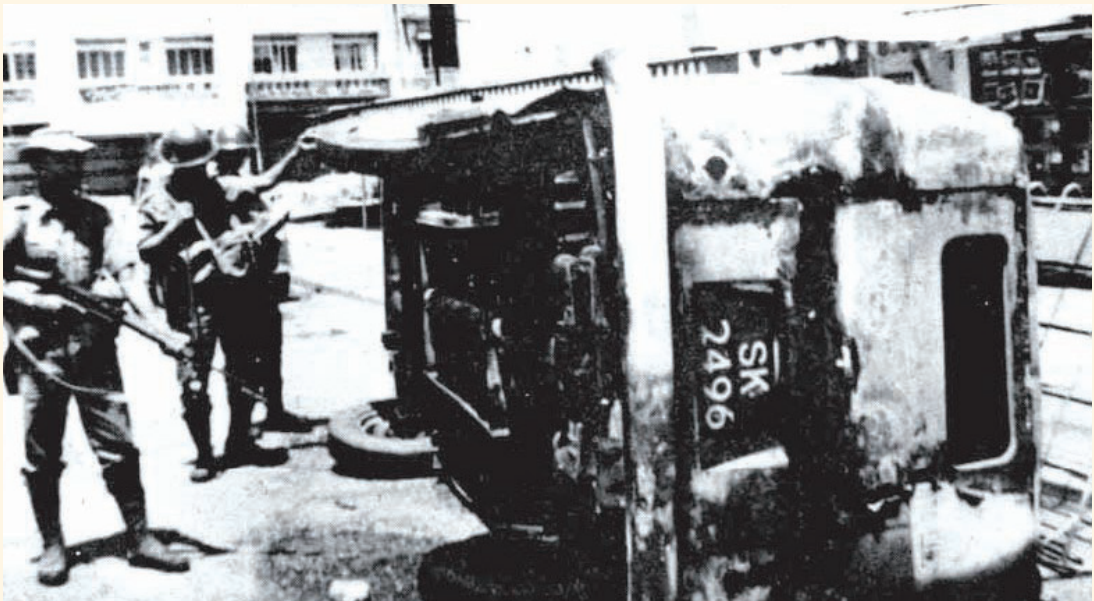
Under the Colonial Office, Singapore, Penang and Malacca had been one administrative entity as the Straits Settlements, but with seamless interaction with the peninsular Malay states. With the abortive implementation of the proposal to create the Malayan Union on 1st April, 1946, Penang and Malacca were relinquished to Malaya. But the Malayan Union scheme had been decisively rejected by the Malay community because it offered political and constitutional equality with indigenous Malays for Chinese, Indian and other immigrants who had settled in Malaya. So, the scheme was abandoned three months after inauguration. In its stead, the Federation of Malaya was created on 1st February, 1948, with Penang and Malacca as member states, under British rule until the Federation was granted full independence in 1957. The Federation of Malaya constitution provided for Islam to be the state religion and for Malays to be regarded as ‘princes of the soil’ or ‘bumiputra’ with exclusive special privileges. In the meantime, Singapore had been left a separate British colony. By 1959, Singapore had been granted internal self-government and was on track for independence from Britain. Under the circumstances, merger with the Federation of Malaya was a logical proposition. But, logical or not, the main objection which had led to the creation of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and derailed the Malayan Union—namely the British initiative to promote constitutional equality for all citizens of Malaya—should have been revisited more diligently by all concerned before the merger was mooted, let alone implemented.

Ironically, by 1961, both Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of self-governing Singapore and Tunku Abdul Rahman, founding Prime Minister of Malaya and later of Malaysia, had concluded—for different reasons—that Singapore should merge with Malaya. For Mr. Lee, the division of Singapore from Malaya was an arbitrary technicality. At the time, to him, Singapore had no future by itself. It needed the Malayan hinterland and common market, while Malaya had much to gain from the strategic location of Singapore and its outstanding natural harbour. The Tunku, on the other hand, had concluded that the British would exit the scene soon, leaving a separately independent Singapore, thereby presenting a base for the further communist subversion of the Malay Peninsula, where armed communist insurgency had barely been crushed. Neither was he blind to the economic benefits of incorporating Singapore into the Federation. However, he was extremely uncomfortable with the robust politics of the colony, more so with its predominantly Chinese population. In addition to their de facto economic domination, Singapore’s one million Chinese combined with Malaya’s 2.3 million Chinese would pose a threat to the political dominance of Malaya’s 3.4 million Malays.¹ For the Tunku, it was a case of damned if he did and damned if he didn’t. In the end, he acquiesced to Malaysia because the Borneo territories and Singapore’s own Malay population of about 150,000 would contribute additional Malay and indigenous populations to maintain Malay domination, while the Borneo territories would more than double Malaya’s territorial assets and access to natural resources. In August 1961, agreement in principle was reached between Singapore and Malaya on the merger and discussions were held in London in

November. The opposition Barisan Sosialis in Singapore rejected the merger, so a referendum was held in Singapore in September 1962, resulting in overwhelming support by Singaporeans for the merger. But, to further ensure that the communist threat posed by the radical left wing would not derail merger, the Internal Security Council conducted several sweeps which arrested and locked up all the active Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) sympathisers in Malaya and Singapore ahead of the merger between December 1962 and March 1963.

III. A MALAYSIAN MALAYSIA VERSUS THE BUMIPUTERA POLICY

When Malaysia was formed on 16th September, 1963, the 'bumiputera' rights that had been guaranteed to Malays under the Federation of Malaya constitution were carried forward to the new confederation to secure the overall domination of the Malays as the rightful owners of the land. This was one of the most contentious of several causes underlying Singapore's expulsion. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew had forged ahead with merger, fully cognisant of the sensitivity of the 'bumiputera' issue, but after merger, he mounted a relentless campaign for a more equal status for all citizens. Singaporean Malays did not qualify directly for 'bumiputera' rights, nor did Singaporeans generally raise too much objection to the discrimination mainly on the basis that it was a trade-off for proprietary access to a larger hinterland. But, in the snap Singapore general elections which the People's Action Party called on 21st September, 1963, just five days after Malaysia was inaugurated, the PAP won 37 seats in Parliament, the left-wing Barisan Sosialis 13 and the Singapore Alliance, one. The Singapore United Malays National Organisation, SUMNO, the Singapore affiliate of the ruling UMNO party in Malaysia, was rejected completely. But, the sting was especially galling because Malay votes had gone to the PAP despite the open, if ill advised, backing of the Tunku himself for SUMNO.



Rioting in Geylang, 1964.

Particularly incensed was UMNO's Chief Publicity Officer, Syed Ja'afar Hasan Albar, later UMNO Secretary General. A migrant to Malaysia from Indonesia just before WWII, he was more 'bumiputera' than many indigenous Malays.² With a personal animus against Mr. Lee, he was to play a provocative role in the events leading to the expulsion of Singapore. Besides Syed Ja'afar Hasan Albar, it also happened that Malaysia's Finance Minister, Mr. Tan Siew Sin, of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), the Chinese element of the ruling coalition in Malaysia, not only engineered onerous financial obligations on Singapore as the price of merger, but also turned on Mr. Lee Kuan Yew seemingly because he felt that the latter was upsetting the MCA applecart in Malaysia.

But the underlying fear was real enough: if the PAP's non-communal politics could secure the support of the Singapore Malays to the total rejection of UMNO's affiliate in Singapore, it could also, sooner or later, influence the voting pattern in Malaysia if the PAP unleashed itself in Malaysian politics.

IV. EXPULSION

The drama played out over the 23 months during which Singapore was part of the merger. It led to deadly riots in Singapore in 1964, instigated from across the Causeway; to proposals for the Singapore government leadership to be gaoled; to the formation by the PAP in conjunction with non-Alliance parties in Malaysia of a Malaysian Solidarity Convention as an opposition bloc against the ruling alliance in Malaysia on a platform of racial equality; to the consideration of various ideas to marginalise Singapore's participation in Federal politics and economy; and to the final decision to expel Singapore, thereby keeping the PAP leadership out of Malaysia.

Singapore's ouster eliminated the main threat to the Federal Government, which was the assault on the bumiputera policy and the prospect of ethnic polarisation. As to the security threat that communists posed through Singapore—the concern which had tipped the Tunku's decision in favour of accepting Singapore into Malaysia—the PAP's massive win in the 21st September, 1963 general elections, confirmed by the defeat of the communist open-front Barisan Sosialis' candidate Ong Chang Sam in a straight fight against the PAP's Lee Khoo Choy in the Hong Lim by-elections of 10th July, 1964, had demonstrated that the communist threat out of Singapore had terminally declined.

Traumatic as the expulsion was to be for Singapore, the peaceful parting of ways was the outcome of a relatively mature approach by politicians of great stature on both sides. Singapore was fortunate in having to deal with Tunku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Justice, Ismail bin Abdul Razak, at a time when the norm in developing countries was to settle political scores with violence and non-constitutional measures. The details of the separation were handled between Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak and Singapore's Finance Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, who was assisted by Singapore's Minister for Law, Mr. E. W. Barker. Details were kept secret even from inner circles, including

Anthony Head, the British High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, up to the very last moment to prevent movement on the ground.³ The separation was announced as a *fait accompli* on the morning of the effective day itself, 9th August, 1965.

Nevertheless, there were those who felt that the Tunku had been soft, that a provocateur had been allowed to get away scot-free and that a prize had been lost. Syed Ja'afar Hassan Albar resigned from his current post as UMNO Secretary General in protest. Some in the security services would have recommended alternative solutions, had it not been for the complication of the massive presence of the British forces in Singapore. The situation was tense and many people in Malaysia and Singapore were surprised that the Singapore Government had been let off so lightly.

But it was a done deal. On the face of it, an orderly resolution of a potentially explosive situation had been achieved. A Bill was passed in the Federal Parliament on Monday, 9th August, 1965, authenticating the decision to excise Singapore from Malaysia and abolishing the sovereignty of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the powers of the Federal Parliament over Singapore.⁴ Article V “bound both parties to enter into a treaty on external defence and mutual assistance which would provide for the creation of a Joint Defence Council; for Singapore to afford reasonable and adequate assistance and contributing units of its own armed forces for external defence; for Malaysia to continue to maintain and use for external defence, its bases in Singapore; and for each party to undertake not to enter into any treaty or agreement with a foreign country which may be detrimental to the independence or defence of the territory of the other.”⁵ There were also provisions for the continuation of existing terms on the supply of water from Johor State to Singapore and the return to Singapore of all territories under its sovereign administration prior to merger.⁶ By 20th September, 41 nations had directly recognised Singapore’s independence and Singapore’s application to the General Assembly of the United Nations, jointly sponsored by Malaysia, Jordan and the Ivory Coast was unanimously accepted and recommended by the UN Security Council. On 21st September, Singapore was unanimously admitted to the Assembly.⁷

In retrospect expulsion from Malaysia was probably the best thing that could have happened to Singapore. Without being intended as such, the merger had established conclusively the Singaporean way of life was culturally incompatible with Malaysian bumiputera policy.

Endnotes

1. *Lau 2003, p. 11*
2. *Ibid., 241.*
3. *Ibid., 263.*
4. *Singapore Year Book 1965, p. 11*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid., 12.*
7. *Ibid., 16.*

CREATING THE SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES

I. A SENSE OF VULNERABILITY

One of the first things that the Singapore Government addressed after separation was the creation of an indigenous military capability. The obvious reasons were that as a sovereign state, Singapore would have to safeguard its independence in a turbulent, geopolitical region and take on its collective defence obligations. But, there was also concern that Malaysia would seek to dominate Singapore using its substantial military capabilities. The atmospherics of separation, though they had been maturely handled, still continued to generate a lot of static just below the surface on both sides. For one thing, the Malaysian military had a very large presence in Singapore, not only with its naval base in Woodlands, but also the headquarters of the 4th Malaysian Infantry Brigade (4 MIB) and the 5th Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment (5RMR) in Fort Canning and Holland Road Camp, respectively. In theory, from 9th August, 1965, Commander 4 MIB was to take instructions from the Singapore Government but in practice, he made his presence felt most intrusively when the first independent Singapore Parliament opened in December 1965.¹ Brigadier Syed Mohamed bin Syed Ahmad Alsagoff called on Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and “insisted that his motorcycle outriders escort (Mr. Lee) to Parliament.” As foreign dignitaries would be present at the occasion, Mr. Lee concluded that Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia’s Prime Minister, was sending a reminder to all that “Malaysia was still in charge in Singapore.”² There were other sensitive issues abroad as well, more so because the wounds of separation were still raw, with every negative perspective taking on sinister significance. Perhaps chief among these was that while the Singapore Cabinet had no fear that the Tunku would change his mind, “other powerful Malay leaders, like Syed Ja’afar Hassan Albar who so strongly opposed separation that he had resigned as Secretary-General of UMNO, might persuade Brigadier Alsagoff it was his patriotic duty to reverse separation.”³

II. FURTHER AGGRAVATIONS

There were further aggravations in the following months to reinforce Mr. Lee’s concerns. Malaysia’s proclivities in interpreting the terms and the spirit of the Separation Agreement in two important issues—the first with regard to foreign policy and the second, defence—were cautionary tales.

Normalisation of Relations with Indonesia. The creation of Malaysia had frustrated a grandiose proposal by the government of President Sukarno of Indonesia to establish a larger federation to be called ‘Maphilindo’ which would have included all of the territories within Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. Even before Malaysia was formed, in January 1963 Indonesia launched an armed guerrilla campaign in the Borneo territories against Malaysian forces supported by British and Commonwealth troops. Guerrilla operations were still

ongoing in peninsular Malaysia and the Borneo territories after Singapore separated. The 2nd Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment (2 SIR), renamed Malaysian Infantry Regiment⁴, then under 4 MIB and commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Abdul Latiff bin Hussein from the Royal Malay Regiment, had suffered the most casualties to date when, on 28th February, 1965, a patrol had been ambushed at Bukit Lebam, Kota Tinggi by Indonesian infiltrators, who killed 9 servicemen and wounded 5 others.⁵ Later, 2 SIR reciprocated in two separate incidents. There had also been terror bomb attacks in Singapore in which civilians had been killed and two of the Indonesians responsible had been captured and sentenced to death. But technically, after 9th August, Singapore was no longer a target of Konfrontasi. Besides, on 30th September, 1965, an attempted coup by the Indonesian Communist Party, PKI, to take over the government of President Sukarno had been foiled by Major General Mohamed Suharto, commander of the army's strategic reserve. In the aftermath of the failed PKI coup, Major General Sohar to eventually assumed power and subsequently decided to end the Konfrontasi campaign. For Singapore, resumption of bilateral trade with Indonesia would be a vital economic boost. On 10th April, 1966, Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik announced that Indonesia would recognise Singapore as an independent state. But, Malaysia objected to Singapore accepting the recognition on the technically valid grounds that it contravened the mutual defence terms of the Separation Agreement and the Tunku demanded that Singapore choose between Malaysia and Indonesia.⁶ On 19th April, security checks were enforced on movements between Malaysia and Singapore at the Causeway, while an agreement on common visas for the two territories was allowed to lapse. Singapore thereupon took the position that it would discuss Indonesian recognition with Malaysia. In the event, Malaysia also negotiated an end to Konfrontasi with the Indonesian leadership and on 1st June, 1966 signed a bi-lateral agreement that was formalised on 12th August.

5 RMR in Holland Road Camp. The same hardboiled attitude was evident in the Malaysian Armed Forces responses to Singapore's own defence imperatives. Their approach to vacating Holland Road Camp, 2 SIR's home base, on the unit's return from operational deployment was probably a defining moment in the two countries' post-separation ties. 5 RMR was temporarily housed in Holland Road Camp. Regular Singapore troops were still under the operational command of 4 MIB and 2 SIR had remained on deployment against Indonesian forces in Sebatik Island, off Sabah, despite the separation. When it was due to return in February, it had to be housed under canvas in Farrer Park because the Malaysian Government refused to vacate Holland Road Camp. The Malaysians argued that Malaysia was responsible for the defence of Singapore and that the defence of the two territories was inseparable. For these reasons, Malaysia had the right to station troops in Singapore. The Royal Malaysian Navy was based in Woodlands (and would remain there until 1994 without objection from Singapore), and no specific deadline had been given to 4 MIB to decamp Singapore. This was in line with the underlying concept of the Joint Defence Council and the terms of the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement and reinforced by the fact that officially, Indonesia was still in a state of armed confrontation with Malaysia. But the concern arose from the insistence that it was



Holland Road Camp in 1965.

‘obligatory’ for Singapore to allow Malaysian troops to remain in Singapore and “the exercise of this right depends solely on the judgement of the Malaysian Government.”²⁷ The Malaysians went further: they claimed that Singapore had to allow Malaysian troops to stay in the present bases or provide suitable alternative accommodation. Singapore rejected this interpretation and offered to refer the issue to an independent international or Commonwealth tribunal on the grounds that troops of one state could not be stationed in the territory of another without the latter’s consent.⁸ Fortunately, the issue was defused when the British vacated Khatib Camp in mid-March 1966 and 5 RMR moved into it. However, it was 18 months later before 5 RMR returned to Malaysia in November 1967.⁹

These developments added a sense of vulnerability for Singapore. Moreover, in 1965, at the height of the Cold War, South East Asia was a proxy no-man’s land. Claiming that North Vietnam attacked US naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964, President Lyndon Johnson had invoked the South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty to support a wobbly South Vietnamese dictatorship against the communist North Vietnamese regime backed by the Soviet Union and China. In keeping with the then popular domino theory, continental South East Asia was seen to be in real danger of communist domination if South Vietnam fell to the North Vietnamese.

But, one of the motivations for rapidly building up Singapore’s own military capability was the worry that Malaysia would seek to dominate Singapore in military matters. Referring to the refusal by the MAF to relinquish Holland Road Camp to 2 SIR on its return, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew said “Their unreasonableness only made us more determined to build up the SAF so that

they could not intimidate us in this way. It stiffened our resolve and made us dig our heels in.”¹⁰ Whether the problems with Malaysia were only teething problems which, moderated by the presence of the British forces in Singapore, would eventually have dissipated, is a moot point. But, there was no question that sooner or later, Singapore would have had to provide credibly for its own defence and sovereignty in its national interest, even in foreign relations with its immediate neighbours. Choosing to do it sooner, the Singapore Government also saw in it an unrepeatable opportunity to rally the people around the new national flag, anthem and identity.

III. MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND DEFENCE

On separation, apart from the two regular infantry battalions (less those personnel who were Malaysians or chose to remain with Malaysia) and the two ex-SVC battalions (10th and 11th Battalions, ex-Malaysian Territorial Army) worth of Volunteers, Singapore got back a small Signals contingent which had been with 4 MIB; some personnel from the Armoured Car contingent who had been assigned to the Malaysian reconnaissance regiment; some Volunteer Engineers scattered throughout the MAF; the Singapore component of the Royal Malaysian Navy Volunteer Reserve (which was renamed the Singapore Naval Volunteer Force (SNVF) on 1st January, 1966¹¹ together with the *Laburnum* (static HQ ship of the Volunteers, later renamed *Singapura* and still later scrapped), *Panglima* (a 37.5 metre Ford Class large patrol craft), and an ex-police vessel, the *Bedok*.¹² There had been no Air Force Volunteers from Singapore at the time of the merger as the service had been disbanded in 1960.



MID at Empress Place, 1965.

Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's Finance Minister at separation, had promptly volunteered to be the Minister of Defence and set up the Ministry of Interior and Defence (MID), which incorporated Home Affairs, thereby bringing the Singapore Police Force and the Armed Forces under one ministry.¹³ This was because of the "the geographical size of Singapore and the fact that questions of external security are very closely interwoven with questions of internal security."¹⁴ Additionally, the Police provided a pool of senior officers who could supplement the local military officers in staffing the anticipated military organisation, as was evident in the appointment of Mr. Tan Teck Khim, then Assistant Commissioner of Police, as the first Director, General Staff of the SAF, as well as the secondment of many Police officers to SAF positions created over the next several years.

MID had one thing going for it: Konfrontasi had given an unintended kick-start to the creation of the SAF. It had compelled Singapore to mobilise the Volunteers during the two years of Malaysia, spruce up the records of local military forces, provide some field experience for troops and raise a pool of staff officers who segued seamlessly into the routine of the new defence establishment.¹⁵ The SMF headquarters at Beach Road Camp was also operational in the primitive form of the times, while the operational deployment of the Volunteers and the two SIR battalions also meant the availability of reasonably seasoned troops, some of whom had been blooded in the Kota Tinggi operations against Indonesian guerrillas. Building on this, MID extended the Volunteer mobilisation, on a voluntary basis, especially among teachers and civil servants. The Singapore Year Book, 1965 reports: "The two Regular Infantry Battalions and the Volunteer Infantry and Artillery have now been brought up to strength and made operational on a full-time basis."¹⁶

Additionally, at the height of Konfrontasi in May 1964, Singapore had, with the agreement of the Federal Government, set up the Vigilante Corps for volunteer local defence. Headed by a Commandant, it used non-lethal weapons though trained in weapon handling and received systematic drilling, training in crowd control, unarmed combat and outdoor living.¹⁷ The Vigilante Corps was to prove useful in the coming years to absorb National Servicemen who were exempted from full time National Service for one reason or another.

Shortly after the formation of MID, HQ Singapore Infantry Brigade was set up at Beach Road Camp in the SVC premises, which had continued in use throughout the merger, as headquarters of the two regular infantry battalions and the mobilised Volunteers. It is variously referred to in some correspondences as HQ 1st Singapore Infantry Brigade¹⁸ and Army HQ.¹⁹ As Singapore had not had a defence ministry before, the traditional separation of the forces' headquarters from the civilian authority was maintained; it also made sense, as the improvised Empress Place premises of MID could not have accommodated both. But it did touch on a conceptual issue to be resolved later: whether the Ministry and the military headquarters should be physically separated or co-located. Within two months of its formation, MID set up shop in Lower Barracks, Pearl's Hill, where enough space was initially available to bring together key uniformed and civilian officials.

IV. ENABLING LEGISLATION

In preparation for the creation of the military forces of independent Singapore, two Acts were passed in Parliament in 1965:²⁰

1. The Singapore Army Act 1965. This Act (passed by Parliament on 23rd December) provided for the establishment and administration of an Army and the creation of an Army Board and dealt with the discipline of the Army and the Armed Forces in general.
2. The People's Defence Force Act 1965. This Act provided for the establishment and administration of the People's Defence Force in lieu of the SVC, provisions being made therein for the raising and maintenance of the Force out of monies provided by Parliament; for the commissioning of officers; for the qualifications of Volunteers for enrolment; for Colour Training; for discipline and trial by Courts Martial; for reserve service of Volunteers; and for mobilised service.

V. THE PEOPLE'S DEFENCE FORCE

The first-cut proposals for the Singapore Armed Forces were traditional and tentative. On 19th December, 1965, the Government announced plans to form a People's Defence Force (PDF). In effect, the PDF was a revitalised post-independence incarnation of the SVC, but it was more than giving the Volunteers a name that was appropriate to the current national agenda. The PDF spearheaded the Government's initiative to create Singapore's indigenous armed forces. Firstly, it formalised the status of the returned Volunteers, who were subsumed under it, as a significant element of independent Singapore's military resources, moving away from the close association of the SVC with the former Colonial Government. Secondly, it made available a vehicle to put in place an inexpensive provisional self-defence capability, while a more concrete and durable defence strategy was being explored. Thirdly, it anticipated the possible resistance of the majority Chinese population towards military service in any form—conscript or career—on the cultural prejudice that only 'bad sons joined the army': a broad-based recruitment into the PDF would gentrify the profession of arms. Finally, it was a way of giving expression to the upsurge of nationalistic fervour that gripped sections of the Singaporean public in response to the expulsion from Malaysia. Able-bodied Members of Parliament, senior civil servants and well-known personalities were encouraged to sign up for officer cadet training. The course was 18 months, part-time. There was a women's wing—PDF (W)—as well. The project was placed under Colonel (COL) Abdul Karim Bagoo (deceased), a Volunteer officer and Principal of Monk's Hill Secondary School. Major (MAJ)(RET) Simon Koh (then a mobilised Volunteer) was in charge of training, which was designed by COL Ronald Wee Soon Huat (deceased), then-Lieutenant-Colonel and senior-most regular Singaporean officer. Then-Captain Winston Choo Wee Leong (regular SIR officer, later Lieutenant-General, Chief of Defence Force) was the Signals Training Officer. There was also an in-house training programme for NCOs and specialists.²¹



Minister for Interior and Defence, Dr. Goh Keng Swee at passing out parade of PDF OCTs, 28th August, 1966.

In 1965, the PDF was envisaged as a 10,000 strong Volunteer reserve force. Training was two evenings a week with weekend and annual training camps. Six training depots were set up: 1 PDF at Beach Road Camp; 2 PDF at Kallang Airport; 3 PDF at Pearl's Hill; 4 PDF at Shenton Way; 5 PDF at Haig Road; 6 PDF at Queenstown.²² Basic training of recruits started in the third week of January 1966.²³ By March 1966, over 3,000 had signed up for training. Officer Cadets and NCOs were trained later in the year. (In 1968, the Singapore Naval Volunteer Force became the PDF (Sea) under the short-lived Sea Defence Command which was renamed the Singapore Maritime Command later that year.)²⁴ In his book, *From Third World To First*, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew says: "We had organised the People's Defence Force (PDF) under the leadership of a motley collection of civil servants, MPs and ministers who had been put through a crash officer training course. The soldiers were civilians, mostly Chinese-educated, recruited through the community centres."²⁵ In May 1966, a PDF Band was formed, largely with support from the Singapore Musician's Association and it led the PDF march-past column on 9th August that year for the National Day Parade.²⁶

To Dr. Goh, the PDF was not quite a stopgap measure or rallying point for nationalism. He initially envisaged the PDF as the mainstay of the SAF Order of Battle (ORBAT):

“The period August 1965 to the end of 1966 was a period of groundwork and planning. The general plan to be implemented then, was to develop a small well-equipped, highly trained and mobile defence force comprising a small nucleus of regulars backed by a large part-time volunteer citizens Force – The People’s Defence Force. Consequently, in early 1967, the volunteers trained in PDF Training Camps were reorganised into Battalions and a PDF training centre at Maju Camp was set up.”²⁷

As it turned out, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew persuaded Dr. Goh to go for a National Service army, and the concept would change radically. “Keng Swee’s original plan was to build up a regular army of 12 battalions between 1966 and 1969. Disagreeing with this plan, I proposed a small standing army plus the capacity to mobilise the whole civilian population who should be trained and put into reserves.”²⁸ In November 1966, the first inkling of conscription was offered when Dr. Goh announced that from 1st January, 1967, all newly appointed government and statutory board officers, subject to medical fitness, would have to do a stint of full-time military service.²⁹ In February 1967, Dr. Goh tabled legislation in Parliament to amend the National Service Ordinance (which had originally been passed by the British in 1952).³⁰ Mr. Lee himself made the formal announcement of the introduction of National Service on 21st February, 1967, at the Toa Payoh Community Centre. Nine hundred young men were called up to make the first full-time intake on 17th August, 1967, reporting to the newly formed 3 and 4 SIR battalions in their temporary quarters in Taman Jurong.³¹

But, that was still to come. In 1965, pursuant to Dr. Goh’s original plan, MID carried out two recruitment drives called Boxer I and Boxer II, primarily to top up the two regular battalions which had been depleted significantly by the repatriation of Malaysian troops. It was also in the context of raising the regular battalions that the enlistment of those who would be the first and subsequent intakes of officer cadet trainees at SAFTI, Pasir Laba, had been initiated in February 1966, except that by then, the Government had already decided on the Israeli Defence Force as Military Advisors for Singapore and they had been helping to formulate the development concepts.

VI. FOREIGN MILITARY EXPERTISE

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew said in his memoirs, that the “British had made no offer to help us build an army as they had done with the Malaysians in the 1950s. They had... incurred the displeasure of the Malaysians. Now, they had to deal with a Malaysia more than a little unhappy with them. And because the Malaysians had sponsored us for membership in both the Commonwealth and the United Nations, the British must have guessed that the

Malaysians would also want to be our military instructors, if for no other reason than to make sure we were not taught more than they knew about defence.”³² Mr. Lee had written to Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Egyptian President Abdul Nasser seeking urgent help to build up Singapore’s armed forces and naval and coastal defences respectively, but both avoided the issue in their responses while congratulating Singapore on achieving independence and wishing the Republic well. Mr. Lee then pursued an earlier spontaneous offer by Israel, resulting in an exchange of visits by delegations and the adoption of Israeli proposals.

Since the first exchange of visits took place in November 1965, the decision to adopt National Service as the foundation for defence forces could have been strongly influenced by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) experience as much as consideration of costs. But the Advisors no doubt contributed to other organisational aspects in MID. MID records indicate that they customised their proposals to Singapore’s needs as they saw them and also as an opportunity to apply lessons they had learned in their own organisation in matters of relationship between civilian and professional military personnel. Among their most specific proposals was the co-location of the military headquarters with the Ministry, civilianising the administrative and especially the logistics support structures and making the Minister of Defence the supreme commander, answerable to the Cabinet. The organisation of MID and subsequently MINDEF strongly reflects this thinking, while in the matter of training the initial cohorts of officers and NCOs and proposing the key components of the land force, their advice was followed closely.

VII. THE STRUCTURE OF MID

Over the next two years, MID laid the structural foundations to tackle both the implementation of National Service and the management and civilian supervision of the SAF. MID was organised into the following Divisions:³³

1. The General Staff Division dealt with matters relating to doctrinal development, policies, regulations, procedures, training and operations.
2. The Manpower Division dealt with personnel management. It was responsible for personnel records, control of postings, promotion and career development, service conditions, classification of vocations and allocation of personnel resources. Under it was set up the Central Manpower Base (CMPB) which was the national centre for processing National Servicemen throughout their service cycle and for other service recruitment.
3. The Logistics Division dealt with supply, transportation and maintenance, control and movement of equipment, weapons and ammunition, research and development to improve available equipment to meet operational specifications, construction of camps and management of real estate.



MINDEF at Upper Barrack, Pearl's Hill, 1970s.

4. The Finance and Home Affairs Division had the dual task of managing the finances of MID and control over the internal security of the Republic through the Police. (With the creation of the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1970, the Finance Division dealt only with MINDEF finances.)

These foundations have stood the test of time and except for a major addition in the form of the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA), are largely intact, although in August 1970, MID was separated into the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs, with the latter taking over the Singapore Police Force and the Internal Security Department (ISD).

VIII. A LOCAL MILITARY TRAINING ACADEMY

Prior to SAFTI, all regular officers for the indigenous military forces had been trained abroad, mostly at the prestigious Federation Military College (FMC) at Sungei Besi in Selangor state, peninsular Malaysia. Here, regular commissions were awarded after a two-year course of study. There was also a Short Service Commission (SSC), which left out the academic subjects, concentrating on a slightly modified version of the military subjects and lasting six months. Initially, the SSC officers would sign a five-year contract of full-time service, followed by two 3-year contracts at the end of which they would have to either opt for a regular commission or quit.³⁴ There were other career regulars who were selected for the coveted commission courses in the Australian Army Officer Cadet School, Portsea, in Victoria, Australia. No local SAF officer in 1965 had been trained at the Royal Military

College, Sandhurst, although two officers had gone for the Camberly Staff College course (COL Ronald Wee and MAJ Edward Low).

There was no military training institution as such in Singapore before SAFTI was setup, though Volunteer officers and NCOs (both regular and volunteer) were trained in military camps in ad hoc courses with help from the British forces stationed in Singapore. SAFTI, the acronym for Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute, was conceived as a central school for the SAF, although the initial preoccupation was with land forces. The Advisors strongly argued in favour of “every course—basic course or specialist course, the maximum that we can concentrate—in one school.... The more we learn these, the better it would be in order to get more coordination and make sure that people are speaking the same language.”³⁵ This concept has been largely maintained, though in the 1960s it was somewhat ahead of its time as the arms and services were being individually raised from scratch, while subsequently, to promote interoperability, it was necessary to conduct joint training at various levels along the career path in SAFTI after specialist training in facilities set up elsewhere.

The Advisors also advocated strongly that officers be groomed from the ground up by going through an intense recruit stage and an NCO stage before being selected for officer cadet training, with on-the-job training as NCOs before the officer cadet stage, if possible. But there were limited active units to absorb all the provisional cadets for on-job training as NCOs. Besides, there was a sense of urgency to staff the units for the introduction of National Service. So, except for those deferred to subsequent batches of officer cadet training, the first cohort of trainees sent to SAFTI went through the three stages lockstep. The deferred trainees were posted to units, some designated as provisional officer cadets and the rest as NCOs with the exception of those who had chosen to resign at that point. However, while NCOs are still selected for officer cadet training to this day, the SAF chose early—as a policy—to feed through potential officers from recruit to officer cadet training without break for various practical reasons associated with the National Service cycle.

Given that the First Instructors' Preparatory Course commenced on 15th February, 1966, the planning for the induction of the first intake of officer cadets must have occurred between the Advisors' exploratory visit in November 1965 and that date. The task was assigned to Director of Manpower, Mr. Herman Hochstadt, who headed a team which included both military and police personnel. Using as much of the SMF regulations, with terms and conditions as they could adapt, they put together a promotional brochure called *SERVE WITH PRIDE*. They blitzed the universities, the (single) polytechnic, schools, statutory bodies and civic organisations with the brochure in a crash recruitment programme that found its way into the mailboxes of some 2,500-3,000 trusting young men.

Endnotes

1. *Singapore Year Book 1965*, p. 10
2. *Lee Kuan Yew 2000*, p.26
3. *ibid.*, p.31
4. *Terh 2000*, p.125
5. *History of 2 SIR, 1962 – 1978*, p. 15
6. *Singapore Year Book 1966*, p. 11
7. *ibid.*, p.8
8. *ibid.*, p. 9
9. *Lee Kuan Yew 2000*, p. 32
10. *ibid.*, p.33
11. *The Singapore Armed Forces, 1981*, p.29
12. *Lim 1992*, p 25-27
13. *Lee Kuan Yew 2000*, p.30
14. *Singapore Year Book 1965*, p. 156
15. *Interview with LTC (RET) G. Arumugam, September 2003*
16. *Singapore Year Book 1965*, p. 157
17. *Singapore Year Book 1966*, p. 175
18. *Our Security. Keselamatan Kita* , 1969, p. 21
19. *MID correspondences 1965-67*
20. *Republic of Singapore Government Gazette Acts Supplement No. 6, Friday, December 31, 1965*
21. *Interview with Inche Othman Wok, Minister for Social Affairs 1966, February 2002*
22. *GS Planning Directive MID/GS/06/55/14 dated 1 April 1967: PDF Organization under Temasek II.*
23. *Singapore Year Book 1966*, p.174
24. *Chiang 1990*, p. 49
25. *Lee Kuan Yew 2000*, p. 34
26. *Singapore Year Book 1966*, p. 174
27. *Our Security. Keselamatan Kita, 1969*, p. 21
28. *Lee Kuan Yew 2000*, p. 35
29. *Chiang 1997*, p. 28
30. *ibid.*, p. 36
31. *Shoulder To Shoulder, 2002*, p. 45. In his book *SAF and 30 Years of National Service MINDEF Public Affairs 1997*, Chiang states erroneously (probably a misprint) that the first call-up of National Servicemen was on 17 July 1967.
32. *Lee Kuan Yew 2000*, pp. 29-30
33. *The Singapore Armed Forces, 1981*, p. 19
34. *Terh 2000*, p. 81
35. *Record of Interview with Brigadier General Jak Ellazari by Security and Intelligence Division dated 18, 22, and 26 July 1977.*

SETTING UP SAFTI

I. LOCATING SAFTI

It can be said that the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) had its origins in Jurong Town Primary School in early February 1966, in a district then called Taman Jurong. The school was the base camp for the First Instructors' Preparatory Course, which commenced on 15th February and ended on 7th May. It was also the site from which then Lieutenant Kirpa Ram Vij oversaw the build-up of the administration of the establishment that was still without a name, but referred to as Jurong School. He was assisted by staff picked from the Singapore Military Forces and the school had among other departments, an Orderly Room run by a Chief Clerk, then Staff Sergeant (later Direct Commission Lieutenant, promoted to Captain) Steven Ng Chwee Seang.¹ Jurong Town Primary School was also the venue of the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) Test which the applicants for the first intake took and from where they departed for Pasir Laba for the physical fitness test.

Only a handful, if any, of approximately 300 enlistees, who reported to Beach Road on 1st June, 1966, if any, could have known where they would be spending that night. The rest blithely imagined that the people who were managing their affairs knew precisely what they were about, within well-defined parameters. On hindsight, it is clear that on enlistment day the whole business of creating a training establishment for officer cadets was still a work in progress, undertaken one step at a time. There must have been some sort of planning guidance at the MID level that covered the next few steps, a sort of rudimentary critical path framework drawn up among the senior planners at MID, the Advisors and Lieutenant-Colonel (LTC) Vij, (recently triple-promoted) Director, Jurong School. The immediate issues would have been the formalities of enlisting the applicants, the logistics of housing, equipping and feeding the enlistees and their minders, and the schedule of activities for the couple of weeks just ahead. Being in the context of a military institution (and thereby having a penchant for ironing out ambiguities), a lot of effort may have been expended, with varying degrees of success, to pin down these issues over the two months or so before the first intake for SAFTI reported to Beach Road.

The overstretched quartermaster cell inherited from the SMF, immediate precursors of the Singapore Armed Forces, must have had its work cut out to source and stock up uniforms, field equipment, weapons and ammunition, transportation, signal sets, the minutiae of a military establishment, accounting for each nut and bolt. One Lieutenant Hamid Khan, who had earned a Queen's Quartermaster Commission, would have been very busy under the piratical guidance of Mr. Ong Kah Kok, Director, Logistics. Director of Manpower, Mr. Herman Hochstadt, having already netted trainees for several successive intakes and,

as it turned out, it would have gone on to formulate or at least pencil in the establishment, notional career paths, pay grades and the training of the administrators and supervisors. It would have also filled up the instructor staff positions at SAFTI, while filling the slots that were daily created by the evolving MID. Both the logisticians and the personnel managers freely raided existing establishments: the one the putative but short-lived Army HQ and any cooperative 'resource bank' of the British Far East Land Forces; the other, the civil service and statutory boards. Invoking the authority of the Minister for Interior and Defence, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, de facto Second-in-Command to the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew would silence any objection. Not many would have wanted to test Dr. Goh's patience. In most cases, however, the name of George Bogaars, the Permanent Secretary of MID, handpicked by Dr. Goh and a legend in his own time, would have sufficed.

That Dr. Goh should also be a brilliant economist was perhaps, sheer luck of the draw, for Singapore in those grim days after separation. Where others might have dithered with the idea of a balanced rural and industrial economy, Dr. Goh had already, since self-government in 1959, launched a decisive initiative to turn Singapore into a world-class manufacturing base in consultation with Dr. Albert Wensiemius, a renowned Dutch economic guru at the United Nations. To Dr. Goh, Singapore's acute lack of real estate did not warrant a second thought, for agro-industry as an economic mainstay despite the natural ability of the Chinese community for farming. From 1959, the Government had already been mapping out an economic strategy that went beyond being the *entrepôt* to Malaya and Indonesia. Joining Malaysia in September 1963, added further incentive for industrialisation as it offered a bigger home market for manufactured goods: Singapore planned to be the industrial heartland of the confederation. But, being given the short shrift by Malaysia in August 1965 concentrated the minds of the Singapore Government like nothing had ever done on the road to independence. Now, national security concerns vied for priority with economic survival. By January 1966, clearing and filling the swampland south of Upper Jurong Road was already well under way to create an industrial park. As the 'wild west' of Singapore, with its relatively sparse population, the Jurong area was the part of Singapore least disruptive to reconstitute in support of economic development. That being said, the area had been the rural fiefdoms of famous towkays, successful Singaporean and expatriate Caucasian entrepreneurs whose fruit orchards and rubber plantations were household names among the initiated: Joo Lim Estate, Bajau Estate, Kian Teck San Estate, Lam Kiong Estate, Soon Hin Estate, Ritz Farm, and farther out, Neo Tiew Estate. One can only wonder at what the Singapore Government must have had to do to get the current owners and proprietors, some of whom were based abroad, to relinquish their land.

The resettlement programme for the economic redevelopment of Western Singapore fitted conveniently with the hilly topography of the terrain north of Upper Jurong Road and west of Jalan Bahar and its remoteness from the main habitation centres of Singapore, to make the farmlands of Pasir Laba a good choice military training big enough for the planned expansion

of Singapore's military assets. It was a sad blow to the farmers: 'Pasir Laba' translates directly from Malay to 'soil rich' i.e. rich soil and the re-entrants of Pasir Laba contributed significantly to Singapore's local production of fruits—soursop, mangosteen, chiku, rambutan, durian, jackfruit, starfruit, pommello, lemon and the occasional vine of passion fruit (all of which were deeply appreciated by the first few intakes of SAFTI trainees)—vegetables, and (less salubriously) pork and chicken from the pigsties and chicken runs. The Ministry of National Development bundled off about 95 farmer families from a broad swathe of land on either side of Pasir Laba Road all the way to the bunkers and boatsheds at the Straits of Johor. Dozers and construction equipment followed in indecent haste. The farmers were almost all squatters, but it was the only livelihood they could aspire to. The late Chelliah Tiruchelvarayan, London-trained Chartered Surveyor and a member of a special cell set up for MID in 1966 under Chief Architect, Claude Eber in the Public Works Department, said that there was deep resentment among the farmers, who would vandalise the vehicles of the officials when they were busy at work. In due course, the uprooted farmers were given alternate farming plots around Lim Chu Kang and other areas in compensation.²

However, Pasir Laba was not entirely without prior claims as a military training area, nor even as one for live-firing training. Areas close to the coast at the end of Pasir Laba Road had been used for training of regular troops and Volunteers under the British at least as far back as 1947, and probably even before WWII. There was, for example, the Pasir Laba Firing Ground Rules (1947) issued as General Notice No. S109 dated 31st March, 1947. And there is a record of 33 acres of land at Pasir Laba and the contiguous military training area of 298 acres reverting to the Commissioner of Lands with effect from 15th August, 1963 in old MID files.³

There was also military history at Jurong and Pasir Laba, though there is no evidence that it played a part in the selection of the site for the camp, unless the Chief Israel Defence Force (IDF) Advisor had surpassed himself and read up on the Japanese campaign before arriving in Singapore. The Japanese thrust into Singapore from Johor in the first week of February 1942 had been through here and not Changi in the east as expected. There had been bitter fighting along the shores, swamps and farmlands as they cut their way through the hapless Australian/British defences down Jurong Road to Bukit Timah and further south through Pasir Panjang to claim victory on 15th February. The pre-war bunkers built by the British at the end of Pasir Laba Road and occupied by the 44th Indian Brigade, but bypassed by the Japanese, were to be ignominiously reduced to rubble from the time they were used to demonstrate techniques of fighting in built-up areas for the first intake and for other live-firing exercises with rocket launchers, mortars and grenades.⁴ If there had been any ghosts of WWII skulking around Pasir Laba, they were quiescent: unlike many other military camps in Singapore, no enduring ghost stories have taken root in SAFTI to date, even with major cemeteries dotted all around the area providing a tempting backdrop.



The bleak landscape left behind by clearing market gardens beside Pasir Laba Road before the site erupted with the first buildings of SAFTI, Pasir Laba.



Just after the dozers cleared the farmhouses and vegetable plots to make way for the first buildings of SAFTI. View from Pasir Laba Road from the spot where the main gate would come up.



The site of 'A' Company barracks just after land clearance.

II. THE IMPOSSIBLE IMMEDIATELY, MIRACLES A LITTLE LONGER

If Singapore's recent history conspired to make Pasir Laba a nap shot for the siting of SAFTI, it was the nominated head of the Israeli Advisors, Jak Ellazari who played midwife. Ellazari was slated to take over a division in Israel, but the Israeli Government accorded such a high priority to the Singapore mission that it was prepared to take out people of the highest calibre and Ellazari accepted the sacrifice. Following a meeting between the Israeli Ambassador to Thailand and Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in the aftermath of separation from Malaysia to discuss Israeli assistance in building up an armed force for Singapore,⁵ an Israeli General Staff Officer visited Singapore to put together a plan for the training of military commanders in Singapore.⁶ The Chief Advisor's assignment was to implement the plan. He arrived sometime towards the end of 1965 to chart out the immediate steps. He first met Dr. Goh at Empress Place where he handed over the plan, but over the weekend, MID moved to Pearl's Hill and it was here that the meeting based on the contents of the plan was held with Dr. Goh. From the time of his arrival however, the Chief Advisor had prepared for this meeting by trying to familiarise himself with Singapore, a process which had started in Israel through discussions with a Singapore study team. He sought to gauge the Singaporean pulse as well as identify a suitable training area—a real challenge in the tiny republic! Before going to Pasir Laba, he had visited the off-shore islands of Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong and concluded that Pasir Laba had the best configuration for military training as well as live-firing—an overriding priority—for which hills were indispensable as stop-butts. Ellazari describes MID then as “consisting of Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Mr. Bogaars, Ronald Wee and Jumbo (sic)”⁷ but at the meeting, Dr. Goh, who had pre-digested the plan completely, cut promptly to the chase and asked Ellazari what concrete steps were to be taken immediately. Ellazari pushed for the selection of Pasir Laba as the site for the school, the identification of instructors and the initiation of the instructors' preparatory course, all of which were apparently agreed without further ado.

Ellazari arranged for a visit to Pasir Laba that very afternoon with the Public Works Department (PWD) Engineer, Ho Pak Thoe. The meeting with Dr. Goh had convinced him to accelerate the programme and he decided to take the initiative to make appropriate major changes without consulting his superiors in Israel. Whereas the initial proposal had been to set up a temporary facility for the training—perhaps in a Works Brigade Camp elsewhere—while the permanent training school was being constructed over a year, Ellazari asked Pak Thoe if he could put up the absolute minimum facilities required (in line with the proposed permanent structures) for the first batch of trainees in three months at Pasir Laba itself. Pak Thoe apparently said without hesitation that it would be tight but he would do it. This positive response persuaded Ellazari to work on the idea that the permanent structures would be built concurrently in phases with the training of the first intake, the advantage being, among others, that the training area would be at the doorstep. Pak Thoe's response was all the more remarkable because at the time he

made it, there could not even have been a site survey at hand, let alone an architect's plan. Ellazari and Pak Thoe appeared to have struck a close bond with daily meetings where Pak Thoe acted unhesitatingly on the conclusions they arrived at.

But, a delay did occur and was used to good effect to do the paper work. Nothing could be done on the ground for about another two months while owners of several estates who were living in London were contacted. In fact, there were instances when training for the preparatory course for instructors was held up because clearance to enter the private estate grounds had not been obtained. Yet, SAFTI was officially opened on 18th June, 1966, 18 days after the first intake reported for their course.⁸

III. MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Some calculated deliberations went into the proposition to set up SAFTI. The over-riding consideration was that Advisors would not run the show in the SAF. They could be co-instructors in the first course or courses at different levels, arms and services and then step back for Singaporeans to take over, the idea being that Singaporeans had to be responsible for the work and learn on the job. Only this way could the real needs of Singapore surface to be addressed and Singaporean incumbents grow into their professional responsibilities.

A second consideration was that MID must accept the military doctrines represented by the Advisors because these were the sole basis of their expertise. They were not in Singapore to promote a doctrine alien to themselves. By doctrine, they meant operating principles, battle discipline, attitude towards combat and other value systems, organisational logic and core operating procedures. Apart from the concept of commanders having to be at least competent in everything they demanded of their troops, examples covered leadership training, cross-training of troops and specialists, the extensive use of night, exploitation of difficult terrain for an unexpected approach, combined arms operations, intelligence gathering, battle drills and rehearsals of the assault phases of a mission on simulated objectives as basic operating tenets. In due course, Singaporeans could adapt the basics to better-fit local conditions or formulate their own proprietary tenets; indeed this would be the ultimate objective.

SAFTI was conceived as a central school for commanders, including NCOs and not officer cadets alone. In 1965 and until mid-1966, the broad plan for the development of the SAF was based on creating six regular battalions and six reserve battalions (one of several takes on Dr. Goh's 12 battalions) for which SAFTI would supply the command elements.⁹ It was a radical departure from initial notions of sending selected officer candidates abroad to UK or other countries, a natural reflex of the experience so far in Singapore. The impracticality of this idea aside, in terms of the numbers envisaged, it was argued that a local training establishment would help crystallise Singaporean objectives.

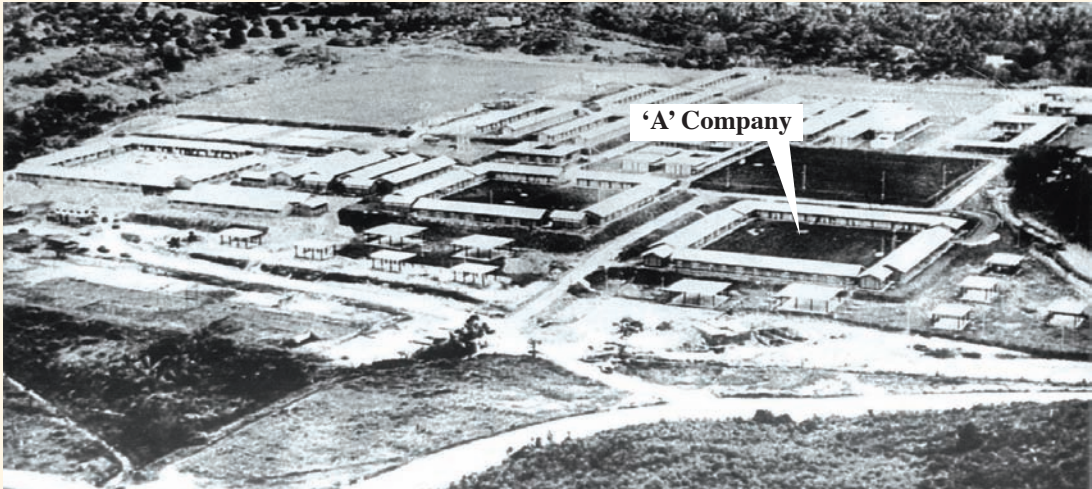
At SAFTI's inception, the focus was on Infantry, which was seen to be the core element of the SAF—where the heart of battle would be—and the foundation of a commission, regardless of whatever an officer specialised in eventually. Only by appreciating the needs of the Infantry, would supporting forces be able to direct their efforts effectively.

When the first intake was enlisted, all enlistees assumed that they would be trained from the beginning for a commission, but the Advisors saw the award of a commission as a process of sifting out the best through a recruit, section leader and officer cadet training phase, respectively. Their concept was that an officer cadet was selected from the ground up. It turned out that MID had kept its options open and somehow neglected to make that known to the enlistees, as it were, but developments in SAFTI with the first intake suggested that MID had not subscribed wholeheartedly to this purist approach anyway.

But what was odd was that either MID or SAFTI appeared to have pre-classified the recruits into potential officer cadets and 'the rest' and assigned them to 'A' and 'B' companies, respectively. The basis for the pre-classification is now lost and none of the possible criteria pans out. Assignment to 'B' Company could not have been based on performance for the selection test since the only really quantifiable one was the run and there were many in 'B' Company who had out-run many in 'A' Company. In any case, there were several who had had difficulties during the obstacle course phase of the selection in 'A' Company. Interviews with NCO staff of 'B' Company confirmed that they were left with no doubt on 1st June, 1966 that 'A' Company was an officer cadet company while 'B' was initially seen as a pool of future NCOs, from which some might be creamed off for the first officer cadet course.¹⁰ This was to result in an awkward development on the first weekend after the first intake was sent to SAFTI.

IV. VITAL GROUND

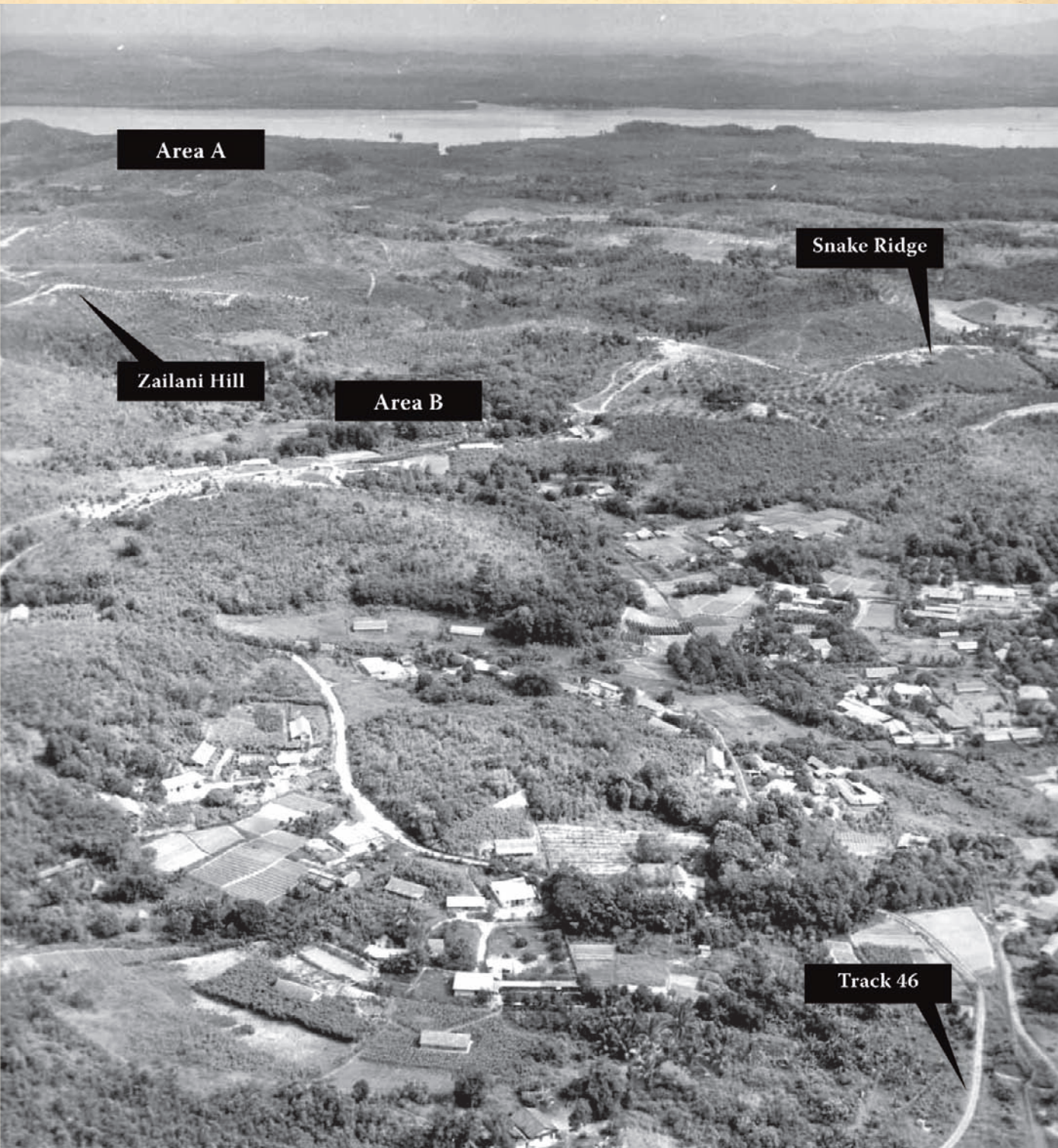
Pasir Laba Road, between the 16th and 17th milestone (Singapore was not officially metric then) Upper Jurong Road, was one of the few metalled roads in the locality and the only one in the core training area. It ran north for about five miles, twisting and turning along the contours of the hills and re-entrants. When taken over by MID, it was potholed and overgrown with irregular borders. Probably, British military engineers constructed it before WWII because it was the route to the bunkers that housed the 44th Indian Brigade, searchlight batteries, 6-inch gun emplacements and the boatshed that was occasionally used by the pre-SAF military establishments as a training camp. The other metalled roads were Choa Chu Kang Road, Lim Chu Kang Road, Jalan Bahar, Nanyang Avenue (leading to Nanyang University which was about three thousand yards east of Pasir Laba) the roads in the campus and the roads serving a small enclave of quarters at the 15th milestone of Upper Jurong Road. The entrance to the proposed camp was about 150 metres from the intersection of Pasir Laba Road with Upper Jurong Road. Opposite the entrance, on a spur of Peng Kang Hill (Spot Height 201) was a large shed on stilts with a corrugated iron roof that had been used to hold Chinese 'wayangs' (opera shows) during the Hungry Ghost month of August. It proved a boon as a changing



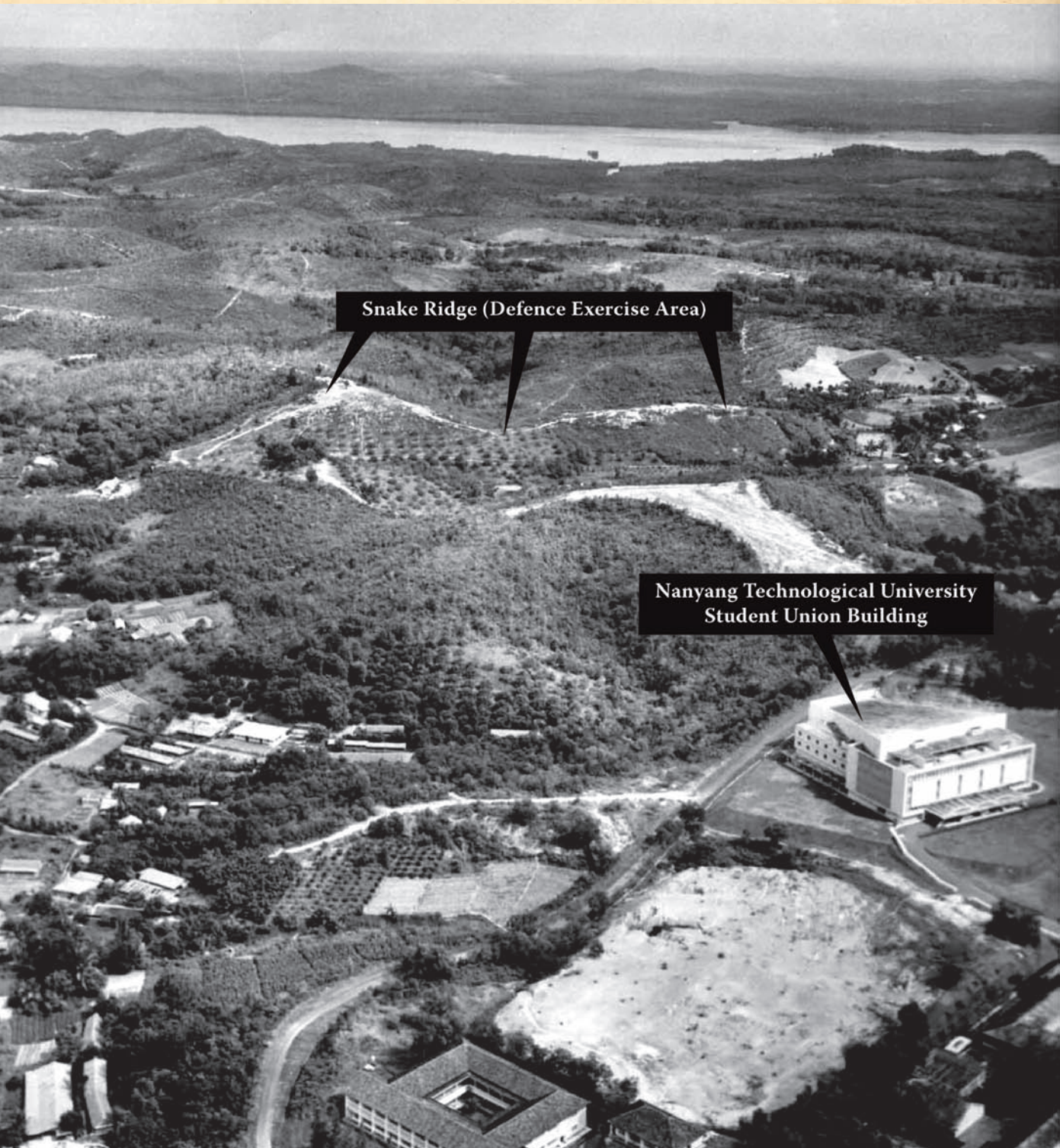
SAFTI in June 1966, showing 'A' Company at the extreme right.

room from military uniform to civilian (or civvies) on the outbound and vice versa on the inbound as soldiers had to be in uniform with jockey cap when leaving or entering the camp. After SAFTI opened, it sprouted a makeshift soft-drinks stall as well. Throughout the training of the first intake and several years thereafter, there was private property across the road from the entrance to SAFTI going down to Upper Jurong Road. At the main gate, a modest guardroom was installed at the start of training, beside what had been a pigsty. The pigs were gone but when it rained in the morning, their legacy would waft through the guardroom and greet the trainees as the Duty Officer led them out to the main road for the 5 BX (basic exercises) jogs. Running this gauntlet lent wings to their feet in either direction. Neither guard duty nor detention in the guardroom for minor offences was a happy prospect. To everyone's relief, during the second phase of SAFTI's development, the whole area was built over into what became the School of Section Leaders, which also incorporated SAFTI's main parade square, and SAFTI's new main entrance and guardroom.

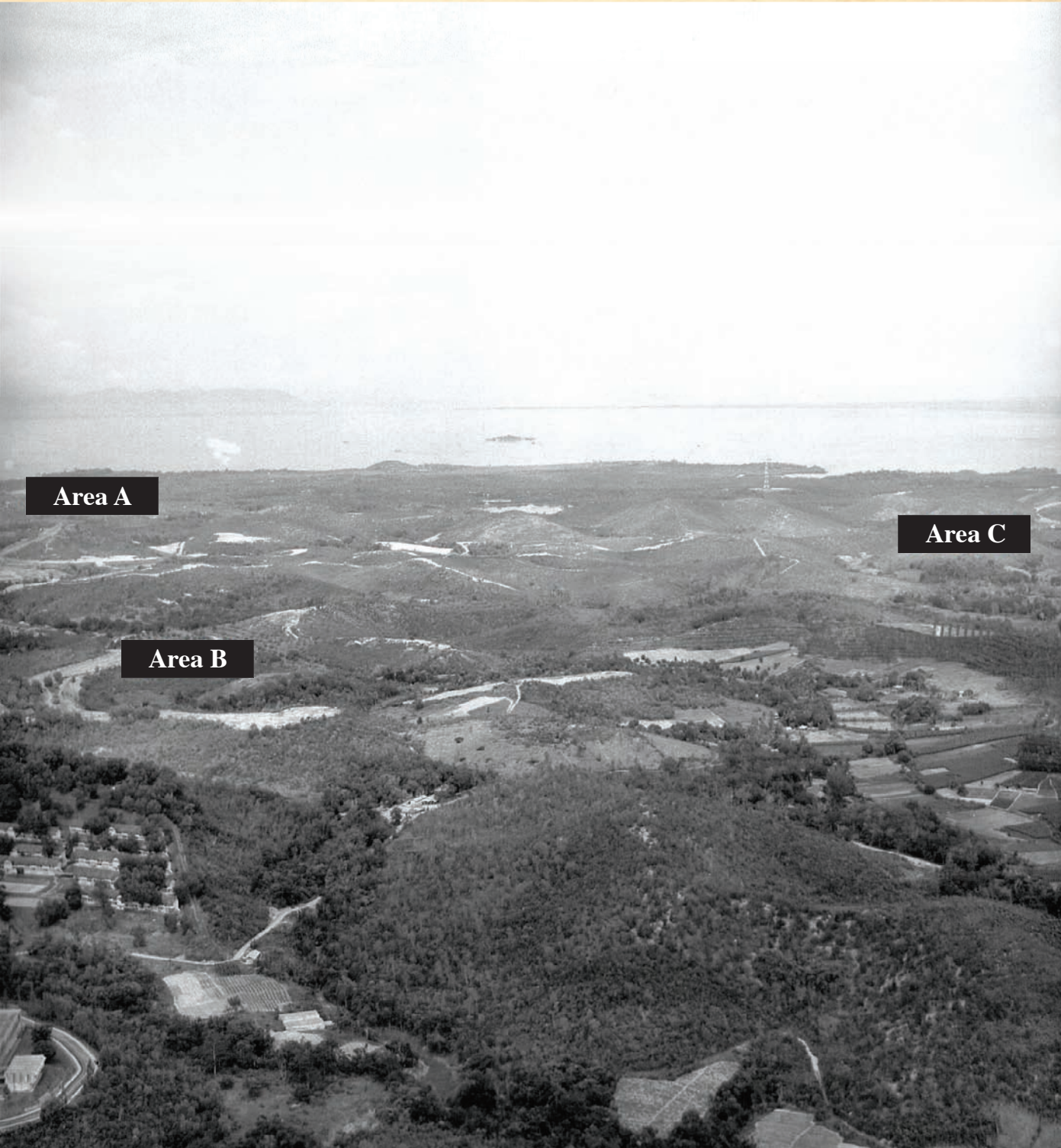
Brigadier Kirpa Ram Vij, the first Director, SAFTI, recounted in the SAFTI Silver Jubilee commemorative publication that the initial appreciation of the situation (a term which would prove the bane of many a first intake cadet) had tended to favour the boatshed end of Pasir Laba for the SAFTI campsite.¹¹ Notions of yachting, fishing and seaside sunsets with a 'stengah' may have induced this fantasy among the more anglophile SMF representatives, but the Advisors, who knew a thing or two about installation security, pointed out that it would be a good idea to control the training area from the front end and train inward.¹² It was not that they did not appreciate the finer things in life. For the first intake, they did not discourage the spit and polish associated with British military training and especially the grooming of gentlemen-to-be by Act of Parliament. These were luxuries that Singapore need not yet abandon. But, on operational matters there was this about them: the ability to cut through the waffle and clobber the nail on the head.



SAFTI Training Grounds at Pasir Laba



SAFTI Training Grounds at Pasir Laba



Area A

Area C

Area B

SAFTI Training Grounds at Pasir Laba

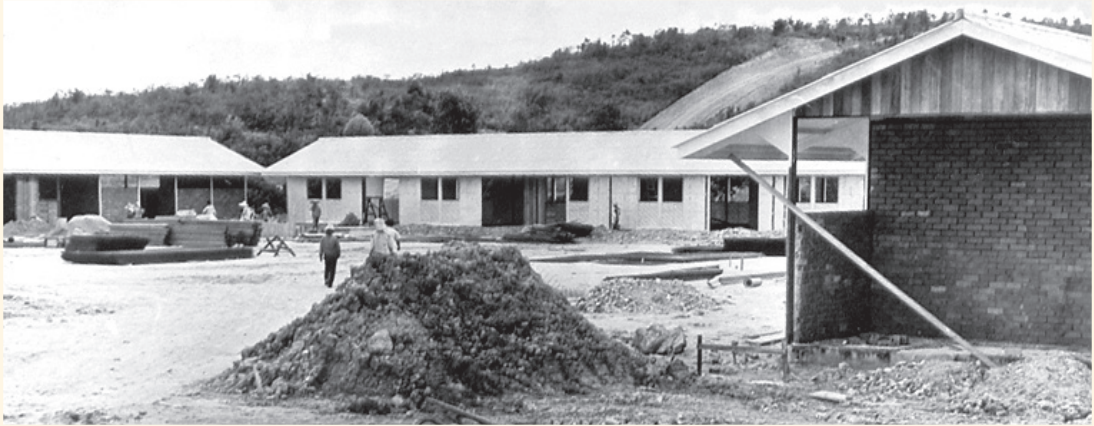
V. FIRST AND FOREMOST

The construction of the first phase of SAFTI by the PWD began in February/March 1966. When Ho Pak Thoe undertook to complete the bare essentials to facilitate the training of the first intake in three months, his strategy had clearly been to make extensive use of wood. Specifications for the complex had been broad-brush to begin with, because they had been offered as a basis for discussion and the Chief Advisor had further modified them when he sensed Dr. Goh's urgency. It is possible that Pak Thoe had received his own briefing by Dr. Goh or Mr. Bogaars before leaving for Pasir Laba for the first site meeting with Ellazari but more likely, he simply reciprocated the latter's display of initiative, did his sums in his head on the spot and took personal responsibility, something that Dr. Goh famously made a corporate value of MID staff. Dr. Goh's personal touch is also evident from the photographic records of numerous site visits by himself and the senior officials of MID and PWD.

Subsequent phases were more methodical: PWD reverted to brick and mortar and it was possible to identify the phases in the original SAFTI complex according to the finished plan. But in 1966, the landmark Institute HQ building was about five years away and the HQ offices were two single storey blocks (like all buildings in SAFTI then, except for two blocks of two-storey barracks for HQ Staff behind the Medical Centre) in what later became the rear (north) of the Institute HQ building. SAFTI kept growing year by year to incorporate



The site visits typically included a high power delegation. Present here are Mr. George Bogaars, Permanent Secretary MID (third from left) and Mr. Howe Yoon Chong, Chairman, HDB and later Minister for Defence (second from right). Pak Thoe is second from the left, Thiruchelvarayan fourth from the left.



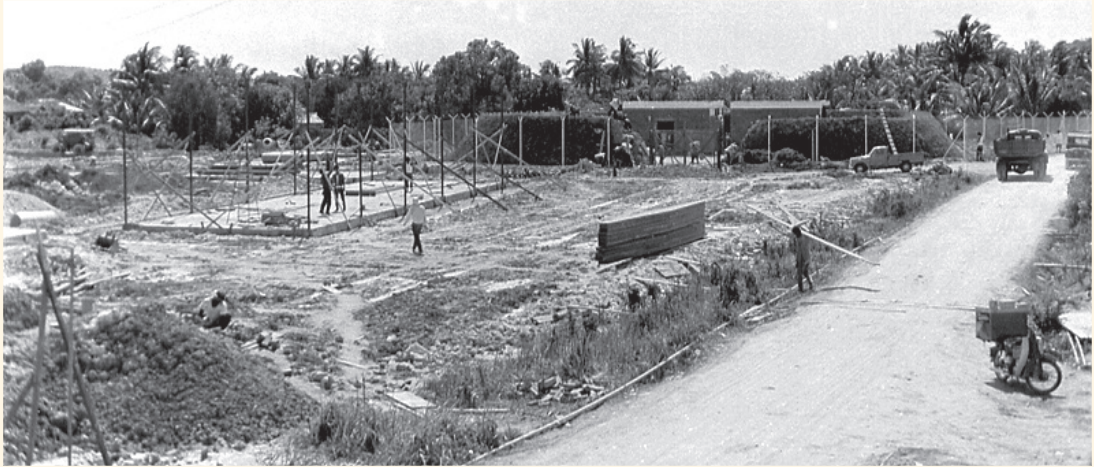
Works beginning on the site of 'A' Company barrack lines.

the School of Signals, the School of Section Leaders, the School of Support Weapons, the SAF Commando School, the School of Military Intelligence, the School of Military Medicine, the School of Advanced Training for Officers, the School of Physical Training, the Officer Cadet School and an Olympic-size swimming pool, to mention a few. In the 1990s, when the new SAFTI Military Institute (SAFTI MI) was being built in the adjoining Track 48 area, these in turn gave way to a completely different layout and design to house various new facilities associated first with Infantry HQ and later the Training and Doctrine Command for which even more dramatic modifications were made.

In 1966, the first facilities that came up were those indispensable to training the first intake—'A' and 'B' Company barracks and their office blocks, each around a parade ground; the Medical Centre and sickbay; the first main parade ground, the Quartermaster complex including the motor transport (MT) park and fuel pumps; the provisional ammunition magazines (which



A view of the first Institute HQ buildings from the MT Lines.



The first ammunition store in SAFTI surrounded by bunds at the southern perimeter fence. Before long, it proved too modest by far and a full-scale magazine complex had to be constructed.

were later replaced by a huge magazine dug into Peng Kang Hill), the dining halls, a cookhouse, a canteen and a sundries shop; blocks to house the administrative facilities and camp HQ; platoon and company auditoriums; messes and bunks for officers and NCOs and barracks for other ranks and supporting staff; and the guardroom (with detention cells whose comforts a couple of first intake enlistees were to briefly experience in their recruit phase). All these were closely packed together just off Pasir Laba Road at the foot of Peng Kang Hill, with the HQ staff accommodations spilling over to the east.

In those frugal days, the platoon and company auditoriums were air-conditioned, a budgetary apostasy then. Ellazari took credit for persuading Dr. Goh that it was the only way the trainees would be able to stay awake for lectures, especially in the afternoons, given the intensity of the field training and the loss of sleep they could expect. This was wishful



A good shot showing the 25m, 100m and part of the 300m (far left) ranges.

thinking because all lectures were open licenses to sleep. Many first intake pensioners will swear that during field exercises, they mastered the art of sleepwalking, frequently nodding off during long advances on foot to objectives and it used to be a joke that they needed to prop up their eyelids with matchsticks during sentry duty for field camps. It is also recorded, but not independently verified, that at the time, the company auditorium (which was also the Institute Auditorium then) was probably the largest wooden building in Singapore. In any case it must have been the largest bedroom in Singapore, especially during the chalk-and-talk administration lectures among which the Officers' Mess Accounts book-keeping class stands out.

Separately, key training facilities were also being addressed: a 25-metre, a 100-metre and a 300-metre range (in anticipation of the adoption of metric system); an obstacle course; and 16 training sheds, each no more than a square cement floor with a roof, in which the trainees learned to sit with their knees drawn up with nothing to lean back on except their steel helmets, or to become adept at the yoga lotus position.

VI. FREEDOM TO MANOEUVRE

When the first SAFTI course began, there was practically unlimited freedom to train with blanks and thunder flashes in the area bounded by Upper Jurong Road in the south and Jalan Bahar/Lim Chu Kang Road in the east up to the Straits of Johor, notwithstanding the civilian habitations. The present day Sarimbun, Murai, Poyan and Tengeh reservoirs, the Raffles Country Club and the industrial gridwork of Pioneer Road, Tuas Road and Jalan Ahmad Ibrahim were not even a gleam in the eye of the Ministry of National Development; likewise, the Kranji Reservoir complex to the east of Lim Chu Kang Road. The banks of the rivers were brackish swamps and Sungei Tengah and Sungei Jurong provided handy venues for training in improvised river crossing, while the Neo Tiew Road area provided good terrain for week-long platoon versus platoon patrolling exercises.

As any land-based training that the British forces still based in Singapore did was in Brunei and Malaysia, there were no competing demands from other military formations for the manoeuvring areas. Indeed, the form and scale of military training for the SAF were to be defined by what the first intake was doing and most of the current military formations of the SAF had not even been conceived. Daily television and newspaper notices warned the public of areas that were to be used by SAFTI trainees. Manoeuvring was also extended to parts of Jurong towards Tuas, south of the Jurong Road where 6 SIR would be built beside some old British bunkers and MAJ (RET) Naranjan Singh, then Lieutenant, would discover what an aggrieved python could do to his right pinky if he teased it long enough. Manoeuvring areas were extended by gazette and training, especially raids, map-reading exercises and advance-to-contact day or night, were also conducted in just about every part of Singapore, from Sungei Poyan to Pulau Tekong and Seletar River to Pulau Senang. Not even the nature

reserves around the existing major reservoirs, MacRitchie, Pierce and Murnane (since merged with Seletar Reservoir), and the manicured links of the Island Country Club (still referred to reflexively as the Royal Island Country Club) were sacrosanct. Fighting in built-up areas took the cadets from unoccupied Housing Development Board blocks in Jurong to Stamford Road and Bugis Street in the heart of town, to the consternation of the jagas enjoying their sleep outside the establishment they were guarding in the former and the thriving gay nightlife in the latter. The benchmark Exercise Red Beret was first conducted from Tampines and Changi back to Pasir Laba. Machette-wielding farmers, who seriously believed they were enemy infiltrators from a neighbouring country, chased many cadets when they were found in the vicinity of their farms. While it was heartening proof of the vigilance of the populace against Indonesian confrontation, it is anybody's guess what would have happened to the cadets if they had been caught. It had not been factored into the exercise control.

In those days, Singapore had a total population of about two and a half million. There were few high-rise housing estates then and those that existed, if they could be called such, were only of a modest three stories or four without lifts. Furthermore, Singapore was transitioning from the Singapore Improvement Trust to the Housing Development Board. The urban and suburban population concentration was a big irregular blob enclosing the Singapore River. The city-centre could be roughly defined as the waterfront area bounded by Outram Road, Tiong Bahru, Bukit Ho Swee, River Valley Road, Dhoby Ghaut, Serangoon Road, Balestier Road, Lavender Street and the Kallang Basin. There were residential satellites such as Pasir Panjang, Alexandra, Queenstown, Holland Road, Clementi Road, Farrer Road, Woodlands, Bukit Panjang, Thomson Road, Braddell Road, Serangoon Gardens, Ponggol, Nee Soon (Yishun) Sembawang, Seletar and Changi, many associated with British military establishments. Enclaves of discrete low density upper class housing were tucked away off Bukit Timah Road and Dunearn Road, Pasir Panjang Road, Nassim Road, the Grange Road/Tanglin Road/Napier Road/ Holland Road and Orchard Road localities and Mountbatten Road. Malay kampongs dotted the coastline all round Singapore and the offshore islands, with the major Malay neighbourhood being Geylang. The Arab community was around Jalan Sultan and Arab Street. Apart from the Chinatown concentration there was also a predominantly Chinese slum in every nook and cranny, mostly within the suburbs. Indians labourers packed together like sardines in Selegie Road, Race Course Road and Sembawang, or the Harbour Board quarters and Indian retail businesses in what is now Little India.

The rest of Singapore was rural: coconut and rubber plantations, smallholdings of market gardens (okra, brinjals, chillies, mustard and spinach, cucumbers, tapioca and sweet potato, tomatoes, bitter gourd), chicken runs, pigsties and duck farms, fish ponds, both commercial and recreational, sand and granite quarries, cemeteries, miniscule fruit orchards, nature reserves, swamps and marshes. There were buffalo and cattle sheds in Potong Pasir and Chua Chu Kang run by dairy farmers from Bihar or Uttar Pradesh to supply fresh milk to Hindu families. This rural economy was served by dirt tracks and overhead electric cables though off the main arteries, the usual sources of lighting were kerosene pressure lamps or

the naked carbide flare. Telephones were few and far between and many rural people had never used one. Toilets were outhouses with a hole in the floor and a wire hook with a sheaf of strategically cut newsprint, usually over a pond which may or may not have been used to rear commercial tilapia and very plump ones at that. Water supply in the rural areas was often from wells that trainees sometimes discovered dramatically at night, or community standpipes. Bicycles, motor cycles and Datsun (Nissan) pickup trucks were the ubiquitous modes of transportation while private bus companies—Tay Koh Yat, Ponggol, Green Bus and Changi—plied the lonely radial roads to the outskirts. Every habitation had its six-pack of mongrels, which would take up station to announce invasion forces that unequivocally included the SAF. There was also an all-pervading smell of chemical fertiliser stored in small open trackside sheds with zinc roofs. However, when a Singapore farmer grew organic vegetable produce those days, it was an uncompromisingly organic family project supported by pigs and chickens.

But there were also the inevitable village grocery stall and coffee shop which supplied the desperate single stick of Players Gold Leaf, Rothmans, Marlboro or Dunhill, sour kana (dried plum), a bottle of Green Spot or Sinalco and a delicious non-tactical lunch or supper of fried rice for a ridiculous couple of bucks. SAFTI Instructors somehow failed to find any tactical rendezvous (RV) points more suitable than track junctions, the sites of choice for village shops.

VII. THE DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

When they were delivered over several days in April 1966 into Pasir Laba for their obstacle course and three-mile run tests, the yet-to-be-selected first intake at SAFTI had no inkling that they were being introduced to their future home of 13 interminable months. Curiously, they completely missed the significance of both the location and the ongoing construction. Nor did those conducting the tests volunteer to enlighten them. MID Logistics Division was sending to SAFTI truckloads of Temasek Green fatigues, drawers (muslin), leather-soled combat boots, toggle ropes, military jack-knives, belts, webbing and kitbags, field dressing, and housewives (sewing kits) and right-angled military torchlights, ponchos, ground-sheets, canvas shoes, jungle boots, US GI pattern steel helmets and liners, gas masks, mess tins, water bottles and hexamine cookers and the other odds and ends that festoon a soldier in his operational mode. Separately, there were metal bedsteads, sponge mattresses, pillows, mosquito nets, bed sheets and blankets, lockers, collapsible tables (GS), brooms, brushes, buckets and other tiresome house-keeping items to be delivered. There was much tentage to be laid on. Then there were military stores with hay-boxes, barbed wire, iron pickets, monkey rams, wire cutters and jerry cans. Hessian bags played a big role, as the trainees discovered during defence exercises. The Training Aids Section would make training stores, but Figure 11 and Figure 12 targets had to be printed and fixed on plywood backings. The cookhouses and messes would be instructed to save condensed milk tins and beer cans

to provide ‘Yehudi’ (corrupted to ‘Joudi’ (Jew)) lamps to light up targets at night. Local contractors supplied many of these items and the contracts were very welcome in those bleak days, thank you. Quality control was not always so hot, though.

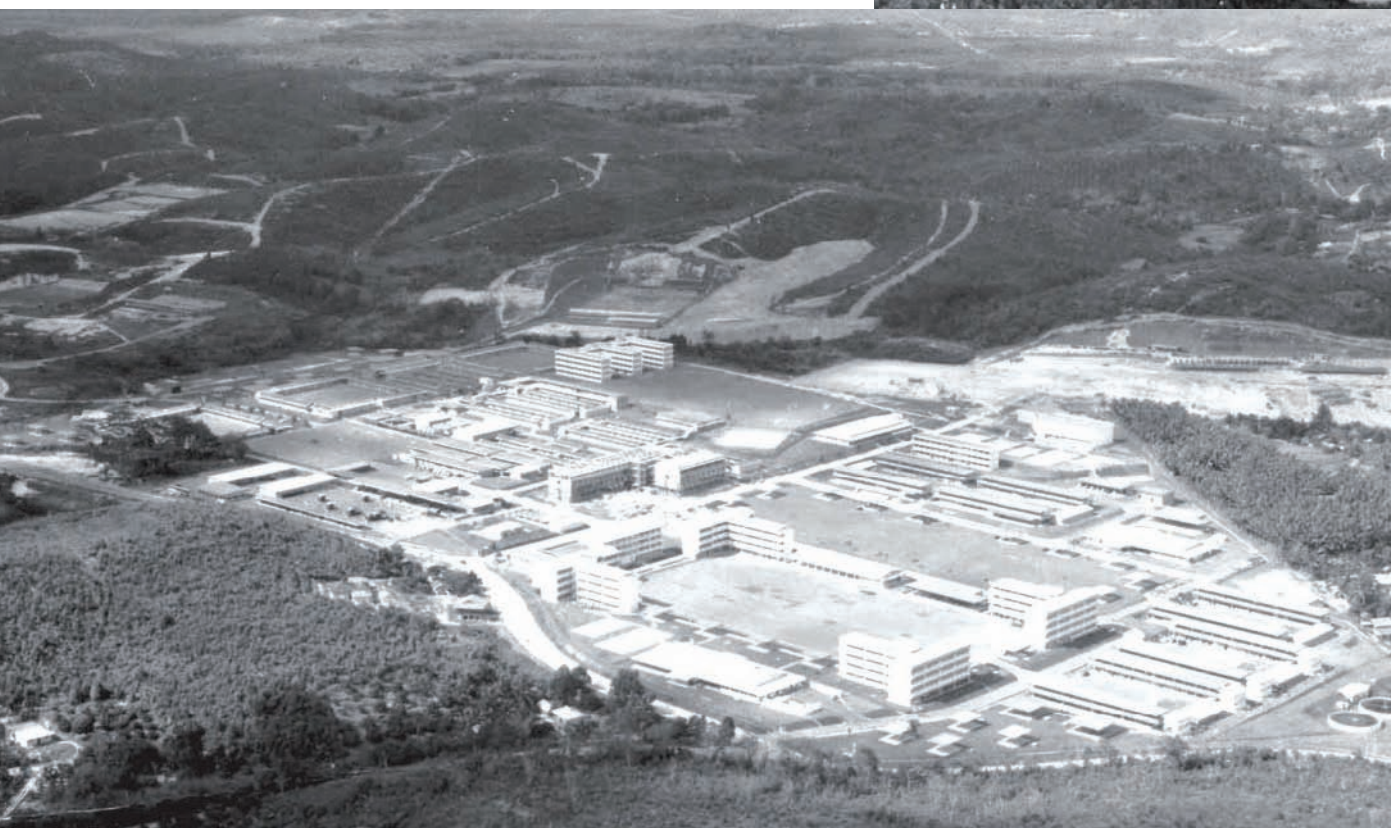
Controlled combat equipment (CCE) was an altogether different proposition. As the local forces were then using the Belgian Fabrique Nasional Self Loading Rifle (SLR) in 7.62 calibre, SAFTI was initially supplied with these weapons (and its Heavy Barrel version as a section support weapon) and their bayonets. The basic high trajectory platoon support weapon at the time was the WWII British handheld 52mm mortar and its antique stocks of rounds that were, thankfully, soon replaced by a 60mm mortar. Other CCE included the militarised prismatic compass, ammunition magazines, D10 cables, field telephones, the parang golok (machete), hand grenades, Verey pistols, pen flares, trip flares and a whole variety of demolitions and explosives. Behind the scenes, assault boats, PRC 6 walkie-talkies, PRC 25 radio sets, GRC 46 vehicular sets and the General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMG) were being ‘procured’. Among the first structures to be built in Pasir Laba were the ammunition magazines to store the enormous quantity of ammunition and explosives that defined the training orientation of the SAF compared to the SMF, namely, a very high degree of familiarity with firepower.

Then there were the Land Rovers and the Bedford and Austin three-ton trucks, the Volkswagen ambulances and administrative vehicles, motorcycles for despatch riders and staff cars to be assigned to SAFTI. Midway through the year, the Australian Military Assistance Programme (a generous \$2 million a year in those days) provided a fleet of International Harvester three-ton trucks that practically required the diminutive Singaporean drivers to let go of the steering wheel to change gears, to the considerable alarm of vehicle commanders. There was also that most important of logistics arrangements to be made: the feeding of the troops. Cook Sergeants were hijacked to the embryonic SAFTI to supervise enlisted cooks’ preparation of daily meals of fresh rations. For field training, fresh rations were delivered in hay boxes (insulated outer containers) to prearranged RVs. The preparations were seldom appetising, being done *en masse* under tight schedules, until relieved somewhat by the introduction of a full spectrum of popular spices and condiments. Fortunately, for the first few intakes, there was a canteen in SAFTI run by Mr. Teng Chai Foo, who had won the tender for the canteen and the sundries shop.

There was a lot of administration to look into. The complex was huge and needed endless daily upkeep by a large HQ staff. The Medical Centre would be a busy place. The Training Department, the Publications and Photo Section (with Gestetner mimeograph machines), and the Training Aids Section would be working round the clock to organise the lessons that were finalised just one step ahead of the last. Being such an unprecedented high-visibility project, there was plenty of record keeping and co-ordination to do. The concurrent expansion of the camp also needed to be tracked. It was not by chance that an Organisation and Method expert from the Ministry of Finance who also happened to have



A view of SAFTI circa 1971 looking northwest.



*Another view of SAFTI circa 1971.
To the right, land is being cleared for the new Officer Cadet School.*

been a Volunteer officer had been appointed Director, SAFTI. At no time in the history of the local military forces, under local leadership, had there been such a hectic pace of work. But all had to be in working order, more or less, by 1st June, 1966, at Pasir Laba when the first contingent of trainees arrived.

VIII. TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

The name 'Singapore Armed Force Training Institute' had not been coined while the bare essentials of the camp were being put in place. The original proposal had been Jurong Military School (as though there could also have been, in the future, a Siglap Military School or a Tanah Merah Military School). But, that may have been a codename. Other formal proposals were 'Singapore Army Training Institute,' 'Singapore Army School,' and 'National Defence School.'¹³ Finally, on 6th June, 1966, General Staff announced that the name selected was the 'Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute.'¹⁴ and the acronym SAFTI was born. Together with the name came the famous formation sign of the crossed scimitar and torch enclosed by two laurels. The theme of a torch to signify education and a weapon to signify military training was proposed by Dr. Goh at a brainstorming session with Mr. George Bogaars, Mr. Tan Teck Khim, Director, General Staff and LTC Vij, now formally Director, SAFTI.¹⁵ Though the scimitar and torch caused much spoofing initially because of their resemblance to the logos of, respectively, a well-known brand of cooking oil (Lam Soon) and a biscuit manufacturer (Thye Hong) who may or may not have contributed to a military fund, those assigned to SAFTI, led by the graduates of the First Instructors' Preparatory Course, developed an inordinate pride in wearing the formation sign on their sleeves together with the trademark bright yellow double-braided lanyard.



newest nation state on 9th August, 1965, had to marshal its defensive options without ado. The starting point was inevitably the creation of a military command element in sufficient proportion to the anticipated troop expansion. The Government's decision to make the creation of a viable defence force at least a co-equal priority with economic development—despite at least one well-meant recommendation to forego military defence—and the looming financial burden it entailed, was both pragmatic and courageous, while the creation of SAFTI practically overnight was a demonstration of dynamic political leadership. SAFTI was literally Singapore's first force multiplier.

SAFTI's potency also stemmed from the fact that the Advisors proved to be of exceptional professional integrity. While they themselves had initiated the offer to help for their own political objectives and had been accepted only after more compatible alternatives had turned aside, they did not come solely with a foreign policy agenda, though diplomatic acceptance was important to them. They brought with them an ethos that remains the hallmark of the SAF. They customised their tutelage from the ground up not only to suit an environment alien to themselves, but also to ensure that the SAF was launched on the right trajectory. They passed on profound hard-earned lessons without hesitation.

For all who participated, the creation of SAFTI also represented a leap of faith in Singapore's ability to hold its own.

Endnotes

1. *Interview with Captain (Ret) Steven Ng, 14 February 2006.*
2. *Interview with Chelliah Tiruchelvarayan on 10 August 2005.*
3. *Memorandum D. 00501/63/3 dated 6 August 1963 from Permanent Secretary, Home Affairs, to State Advocate General.*
4. *Ng Eng Hua, et al, SAFTI Silver Jubilee 1966-1991, Singapore: Viva, 1991, p. 74.*
5. *Lee Kuan Yew, From Third World To First, Singapore: Times Media Private Limited, 2000, pp.30-31.*
6. *The historic details of the construction of SAFTI and the concepts underlying the training philosophy are from a transcript of an interview between the Chief Advisor and an official from Security and Intelligence Division over 18, 22 and 26 July 1977.*
7. *The Chief Advisor was referring to then LTC Ronald Wee Soon Whatt, later Colonel and Director, SAFTI, and MAJ Richard Jambu who went on to command a division as a Colonel.*
8. *Ng Eng Hua, et. al., 1991, p. 34.*
9. *Our Security. Keselamatan Kita, Singapore: Ministry of Interior and Defence, 1969, p.21.*
10. *Interview with Captain (Ret) Hong Seng Mak, then Warrant Officer 1, Company Warrant Officer 'A' Company, SAFTI, on 23 March 2005.*
11. *Ng Eng Hua, et. al., 1991, p.19.*
12. *Malay for "half", referring to two fingers of Scotch in a shot glass, a favourite after-duty pastime in officers' messes and social clubs in colonial days.*
13. *Minutes of the Weekly Conference, General Staff Division, Ministry of Interior and Defence, 9 May 1966.*
14. *Minutes of the Weekly Conference, General Staff Division, Ministry of Interior and Defence, 6 June 1966.*
15. *Ng Eng Hua, et. al., 1991, p. 4.*
16. *ibid., loc. cit.*

TRAINING THE TRAINERS

I. HIT THE ROAD RUNNING

Looking back to 1966, when the SAF was being launched, one cannot help but feel that bold and decisive steps were routine to the Singapore Government. The record of newly independent nations after colonialism was rolled back, tended to show an accelerated descent into chaos, corruption and cronyism, with little visionary perspective by the ruling elite left in place by the process of independence. Though the subject of this book is the collective diary of the first formalised mass training of officers to staff a national military organisation, similar characteristics—boldness and decisiveness—could be identified in those days in other fields in Singapore: infrastructure development, housing, education and legislation. The annual yearbooks of the period immediately following separation reported an almost obsessive disposition to develop a sound base for self-reliance. The Cabinet was made up of a highly intellectual group often referred to in somewhat hyperbolic terms as a ‘Cabinet of University Dons’.

The creative process for the SAF was deceptively simple, like the flowcharts of a later generation: the SAF would mean a massive injection of officers and NCOs into the current establishment of the SMF, so start recruiting and training; that would in turn require a



*Classroom session for the First Instructors' Preparatory Course.
Chief Israeli Advisor standing at the back (right).*

super-efficient training institution, so clear out the people in about one tenth of the total land area of the country and build one; many trainers would be required, so strip the existing military establishments of their best and brightest, mobilise and second others and train them to be trainers. These decisions were not recorded elsewhere as historically significant, but they were: the pieces fell into place with remarkable cohesion—might one say, with military precision? The auguries must have been good as no major developments derailed the process and also seemed to validate the soundness of several key principles of war: unity of command; concentration of force; maintenance of the aim. The only problem might have been how all these activities were to be funded and that was a secret between the doorpost and the Minister for Interior and Defence, who had just vacated the job of Minister of Finance. But a budget policy was put in place shortly after the SAF was launched that up to 6% of Singapore's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be reserved for defence expenditure each year and that the details of such expenditure would not be debated openly in Parliament.

II. 'RAW' MATERIAL

Of all the elements at the creation of the SAF, the key one was the mindset and qualification of the trainers. The pedigree of local SMF officers was mixed. There were Volunteers who had been mobilised to staff 1 SIR when it was raised in 1957, (including some who had served in WWII) and 2 SIR in 1963, (like the late COL (RET) Ronald Wee Soon Huat): two graduates of the Officer Cadet School at Portsea, Australia (Brigadier General (Ret) Patrick Sim Hak Kng and COL (RET) Peter Lim Poh Weng); graduates of the full two-year course at the Federation Military College (FMC) at Sungei Besi, Malaysia (30); graduates of the six-month Short Service Commission course also at the FMC (16);¹ graduates of a special six-



SAFTI's temporary home called Jurong School in 1966.



First Instructors' Preparatory Course, 15 February – May 1966.

— Sitting —

Lt Desker, Lt Robson, Lt Kleinman, A/ASP Skimmer, L/Capt Chan, Capt J. Singh, Capt D. Singh, Capt Chia, Capt Seth, DSP. Ricketts, Capt Morrice, Capt Ramachandra (Adj.), Maj John Tan (2IC), Lt Col Kirpa Ram Vij (Director), Advisor, Advisor, Advisor, Advisor, Advisor, Advisor, Capt Teo, Capt Yong, Capt A. Tan, Lt Fong (QM), Lt Kesavan Soon, Lt Goh, Lt Heng, Lt Rajaratnam.

— Centre —

Sgt Patchimuthu, 2/Lt Wee, 2/Lt Teo, 2/Lt Tan, 2/Lt Yusoff Talib, 2/Lt N. Singh, 2/Lt Ho, 2/Lt Yap, 2/Lt Chan, Lt R. Tan, Lt Soaidy, Insp Chin, 2/Lt Ghani, 2/Lt Looi, 2/Lt Syed Ibrahim, 2/Lt Shari, 2/Lt Tan, 2/Lt S. Singh, WOII Sng, WOII Moktar, WOII Ali, WOII Hong, WOII Ong, WOII Zaman, S/Sgt Abbas, WOII Kuitlib.

— Standing —

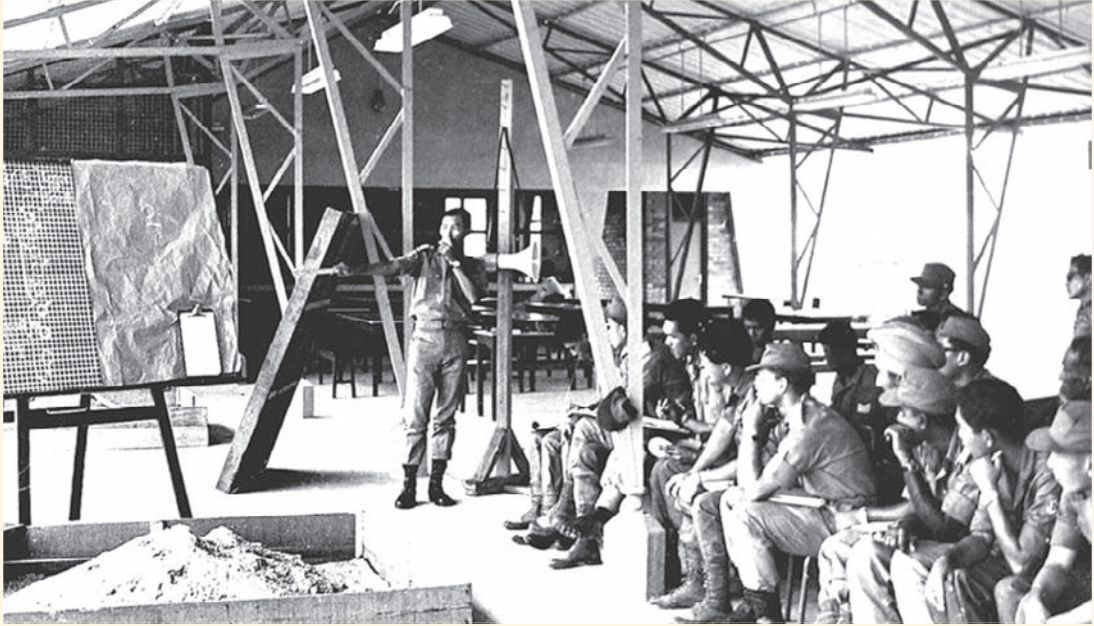
Sgt Chia, S/Sgt Rashid, WOII Baba, Sgt Rahim, Sgt Rosli, Sgt Shafie, Sgt Lee, Sgt Rashid, Sgt Koh, Sgt Mak, Sgt Yacob, Sgt Majid, Sgt Ahmad, WOII R. Ong, WOII Alias, Sgt Tay, Sgt Rahman, Cpl Wan, S/Sgt Ng, Sgt Ahmad, Sgt Tan, Sgt Idris, S/Sgt Omar.



Some of the participants of the Senior Officers' Familiarisation Course conducted in September 1967, including then LTC Kirpa Ram Vij and MAJ Winston Choo who retired the service as Lieutenant-General and Chief of Defence Force. General Choo succeeded Brigadier Kip (as Vij was called) as Director, General Staff in 1974.

month commission course conducted at Ulu Pandan Camp for a single batch selected by the Public Services Commission; and two officers from the Malaysian Home Guard, absorbed into the SMF when 1 SIR was formed, who had opted to stay with Singapore, (COL (RET) Richard Jambu, whom the Chief Advisor had called 'Jumbo' and COL (RET) Peter Molineaux Stuart, deceased); Volunteers mobilised during the confrontation with Indonesia; Volunteers who had switched from their civilian careers to one in the SMF; officers commissioned into the Malaysian Armed Forces who had opted to stay with the SMF; and seconded Singapore Police Force officers.² Many of the Volunteers and the Police officers had been enticed, perhaps even pressured, into joining the SAF through the efforts of the first Director of Manpower, Herman Hochstadt. In preparation for the staffing of SAFTI (except that it was not then called SAFTI), he had also culled the best and brightest NCOs from 1 and 2 SIR and other SMF units, much to the ire of their respective Commanding Officers.

These were the resources for the First Instructors' Preparatory Course which would produce the core of the training cadre charged to interface with the Advisors to mould the first 'made-in-Singapore' regular officers of the SAF and set the tone for its future command elements.³ 60 hand-picked officers and NCOs reported on Tuesday, 15th February, 1966, to the yet unopened premises of Jurong Town Primary School (about six miles southeast of Pasir Laba) to begin a 12-week course conducted by five Advisors led by a Lieutenant-Colonel from the IDF.⁴ Though LTC Kirpa Ram Vij oversaw the course in his capacity as Director, SAFTI, no one was formally appointed Course Commander, a traditional practice



Captain James Chia briefs his fellow students.

in military courses. WO1 Sng Cheng Chye of 1 SIR, who would become the Regimental Sergeant Major of SAFTI, was informally the course Sergeant Major.⁵

It has been frequently averred by commentators that the training for the first intakes of SAFTI must have been horrendously tough as they received training from Israeli Advisors. That assessment is partly based on the stunning successes of the Israeli Defence Forces in the Six Day and Yom Kippur wars and, is in fact, retrospective. The very first intake in SAFTI was trained before the Six Day War. It is true that the training was highly demanding. However, the first intakes at SAFTI were trained primarily by Singaporeans. The Israelis guided both the preparatory training of the local instructors and the training of the first intakes. They formulated most of the syllabus and the thematic issues for the syllabus and laid the doctrinal groundwork. They certainly contributed to the lessons. But, they never directly conducted lessons during the training of the first intakes in SAFTI. They were also very few in number, though they made their presence felt in all the establishments they initiated until they finally left for good in 1974.

The Advisors set the tenor of the First Instructors' Preparatory Course by insisting that before they could teach, trainers must personally master their subject, or, at least, have practical experience of it. The Advisors were also adamant that the preparatory courses would be the only ones in which they would contribute directly to the instruction (in subjects they were introducing for the first time, while those that were already part of the knowledge



Range during the Preparatory Course. The SAFTI ranges were only just being completed at the time. The firers were wearing the old British pattern steel helmets and webbing.

base of the local forces such as trainfire or fieldcraft would be peer-learning) on the grounds that instruction by the locals thereafter was the only way the SAF would develop self-reliance. Subsequently, they would guide instruction by local officers, a process that they observed throughout their services in Singapore, following the inaugural courses in several key training institutions such as the School of Artillery, the School of Armour, the School of Advanced Training for Officers and the Command and Staff College, several years after SAFTI was off and running.⁶

III. WALKING THE WALK

It was traditional in SMF days for training to be segregated according to the actual status of officers and NCOs. The Advisors, who came from a country with a conscript military, had somewhat more egalitarian ideas. All trainees attended every lesson and when the field exercises began, role-play was distributed without discrimination to rank or appointment, though within reason. Every trainee was required to carry a rifle and not a carbine, sub-machine gun or sidearm. Each trainee was also required to wear skeleton battle order for field exercises.⁷ The Advisors introduced highly efficient and systematic conscript training teaching methods that closely resembled assembly-line production. Lessons were modular and progressive. Lesson objectives and sub-objectives were stringently defined, time was allocated for demonstration without explanation, demonstration with explanation, practise of sub-routines, practise of complete routines, confirmation and, before the next related lesson, revision of the last. For weapons, trainees had to pass Technical Handling Tests before practical application. The theory of instruction was based on the idea of ‘must know’, ‘should know’ and ‘could know’ depending on available time. Much of the field training was done in the Pasir Laba training area. Tactical exercises were predicated on theory and taught through practice. There were no locally produced tactical reference handbooks then.

The Advisors were the font of all knowledge, which was based on combat experiences at home. At the sub-unit level, tactics were reduced to drills that were then subjected to typical anticipated enemy reactions and counter-actions by own forces, by way of enemy simulators or verbal inputs to the role-play appointees. Perhaps the most important lessons of all were to approach an objective from an unexpected direction and that night is a pretty good time to fight.

However, it was to turn out that while the Advisors had developed the process of military instruction to a pretty fine art, many of the basic concepts were still closely related to British field manuals, which was not surprising, considering the participation of Israelis in WWII under the British in the Middle East. This came to light when the Doctrine Department in SAFTI began to write training formats under the supervision of the Advisors, although the British field manuals were broad-brush and left much to the imagination of the trainer.⁸

IV. FRICTION IGNITOR

Not everything went smoothly during the First Instructors' Preparatory Course. There was already some latent friction between the Advisors and the local career officers arising from the suddenness of the changes that they introduced and the occasional personality clashes. One thing that kicked off resentment was an IQ test the Advisors conducted for the selection of students as part of the preparatory course. One of the most senior of the career officers walked out in high dudgeon after turning in a blank paper. A second was that it became clear that the Advisors, who had an important say in assignments in SAFTI in the initial stages, would not be respecting seniority in key posts, a problem already aggravated by the absorption and amalgamation of personnel from many different sources into the commissioned ranks. Things took a dramatic turn when the Advisors started the preparatory course with the raw basics of stripping and assembling of weapons and fieldcraft. Their reasoning was sound: coming from such a variety of backgrounds including the Police Force, and ranging from Sergeants to Captains, trainees had to be levelled up or down to a common baseline.⁹ But, they may have cut too close to the bone. After two weeks of this the trainees appealed through LTC Vij. The Permanent Secretary of MID, Mr. George Bogaars was believed to have stepped in. The course was halted for two weeks for a review of the syllabus, which resulted in a programme that was structured around some of the key modules of the proposed course for the first intake to the up and coming training institute less several local specialties like Internal Security and basics that were to be taught during the recruit, section and officer cadet training stages of that course. Several graduates of the First Instructors' Preparatory Course had the impression that they were, in fact, going through a compressed version of the whole course conducted for the first intake at SAFTI, including the officer cadet stage.¹⁰ Given that the preparatory course was only 12 weeks, of which two were suspended, this was unlikely. Even allowing for the fact that the officer cadet phase of

the first intake training had to be staggered among three platoons in terms of training facilities and included considerable amounts of drill and administrative subjects, it still lasted nearly eight months. There is also evidence that while the officer cadet phase for the first intake was being conducted, fresh lessons were being developed and introduced into the syllabus.

V. TALKING THE TALK

In all probability, the misunderstandings between the Advisors and the instructor-trainees in the preparatory course were literally a communications breakdown. For some time after they first arrived, the Advisors were described pejoratively as speaking ‘Hebrish.’ As the process was still in its early days, some aspects of the planned training of the first intake for SAFTI were still tentative and the Advisors were still busy preparing the package; consequently, they let the preparatory course proceed on basic assumptions. In the British system, it was traditionally the role of the NCO to train recruits in weapon handling, field craft, physical fitness and drill. To the Advisors, the preparatory course was, among other things, to learn to teach, and it made sense that all concerned should be exposed to a teaching methodology, the best way being to re-learn, if necessary, what they might have already known, with the advantage of a common teaching format. What came out instead was the impression that the trainees were being treated as raw recruits learning baby steps. In fact, in later discussions with the Chief Advisor, it was noted that the Advisors had felt that the SMF had many competent officers who should have advanced up the ranks by then.¹¹ They had had the confidence that in three months, they could mould a strong team to staff SAFTI from among those selected for the First Instructors’ Preparatory Course.



James Chia, Jagrup Singh, Naranjan Singh, Omar Alsagoff, Rajaratnam and Micheal Seth.



Dr. Goh addressing the graduation ceremony of the First Instructors' Preparatory Course.

Be that as it may, after the initial contratemps, there were few hiccups. There were the typical frictions between the trainees and trainers that are characteristic of every peer training programme, with the added incongruity of the trainers being strangers to the local terrain and weather conditions, compared to those who had already had considerable exposure to operations during the Indonesian confrontation and even some anti-terrorist operations during the communist terrorist insurgency days of Malaya. Some unhappiness also surfaced after the course when the Advisors determined the assignments of those trainees who were to staff SAFTI, especially where the plum appointments such as Company Commanders and Platoon Commanders were concerned. In theory, however, performance during the course was the selection criteria. Those who were strong in military knowledge and staff work, for example, would be Doctrine Officers or man the Chief Instructor's offices. Those who showed a bent for fieldwork would be the Platoon Commanders and Section Instructors, with the more senior of them becoming the Company Commanders and Company Seconds-in-Command.

VI. GRADUATION CEREMONY

The course ended with a graduation ceremony in one of the completed auditoriums in the future SAFTI on Saturday, 7th May, 1966. A camp quarter guard greeted Dr. Goh Keng Swee, who officiated the ceremony. The course had been an eye-opener to all and a novel experience to the trainees who had hitherto been trained in a far more casual British style. The culture shock had generated some antipathy towards the implacable Advisors and there had been a tendency to make wry remarks about their methodology, or snipe at their inexperience with the close and marshy local terrain. Bazaar Malay, which was a Singaporean patois in those



Guests at the graduation ceremony.

days, allowed the local officers to express their views freely to one another; the Advisors on their part spoke their own language among themselves and no one will ever know what they had to say of their local charges. But, there was no denying their pedagogic expertise or the promise of the greater military professionalism that they offered. The SAF personnel recognised that the course had fundamentally changed their outlook and the old ways would be transformed. They knew that the training they were getting would have a major impact on the whole structure and lifestyle of the SAF, which would far exceed the scale and capability of the existing two regular infantry battalions and another two battalions' worth of Volunteers. It was not entirely unwelcome as it also offered the prospect of advancement to ranks that had been hitherto regarded as unattainable.

Endnotes

1. *Terh, Leslie, Sons and Officers. Life At Prestigious Military College, Singapore: Sea Sky Books Enterprise, 2000, pp. 141-149.*
2. *Interviews with LTC (RET) Daljeet Singh (10 February 2004), and LTC (RET) Kesavan Soon (24 February 2004). The former was the first Second-in-Command of "A" Company, SAFTI, while the latter was a senior staff officer in the Training Department in SAFTI when the first intake was enlisted, and later became Head Training Department.*
3. *It is frequently observed in various publications that there were two instructors' preparatory courses. In fact there was only one. But in September 1967, a "familiarisation course" was conducted for several officers so that they would be aware of the new training methodology and doctrine. The mistake is partly due to the fact that the course photograph for the single full-fledged preparatory course is captioned "1st Instructors Prep-Course".*
4. *The Advisor had a background as an armour officer. He was, however, very focused on infantry operations as well. Following the Instructors Preparatory Course he helped develop training in SAFTI.*
5. *Interview with COL (RET) John Morrice, trainee on the course and the first Officer Commanding "A" Company, SAFTI, on 1 August 2005.*
6. *Mindef records.*
7. *"Skeleton Battle Order" (SBO) excludes the backpack (with its standard contents), entrenching tool and ground-sheet that would be required of the full battle order (FBO) dress-code.*
8. *Interview with LTC (RET) Kesavan Soon, op. cit.*
9. *Interview with COL (RET) John Morrice, op. cit.*
10. *Interview with LTC (RET) Daljeet Singh, op. cit.*
11. *Transcript of interview with the Chief IDF Advisor over 18, 22 and 26 July 1977.*

JUMPING IN WITH BOTH FEET

I. APPLYING FOR THE COURSE

600740 Lance Corporal Abdul Samad s/o Athambava, Signals Platoon, HQ Coy, 2nd Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment proactively wrote through his Commanding Officer, LTC J.P. Durken to the Ministry of the Interior and Defence on 3rd February to be considered as a candidate in the course. Samad, as he has always been known, had joined the army against his father's wishes to begin with. His father had come to Tanah Merah Camp, then home of 2 SIR, with his hard-earned savings of \$150 to buy out Samad. In the meantime, Samad had approached his company 2 I/C Lieutenant Henry Velge and begged him to persuade his father that the army was okay, and at worst, turn his father away. Samad may have also been seriously affected by the picture of handsome Lieutenant Clarence Tan, lately Malaysian Special Service Unit (psst! commando, paratrooper, stealth fighter, etc.) inside his shiny red MG Midget (Registration Number SP 7008) in the enlistment promotional brochure *SERVE WITH PRIDE* widely distributed by the MID.

Swee Boon Chai had also been in the Army before applying for the course. Having enjoyed his school cadet corps, he had enlisted earlier as a Volunteer with the 14th Malaysian Signal Squadron. He had been mobilised as a Lance Corporal to work with then MAJ Seah Peng Yong (later Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret)), Commanding Officer HQ PDF, in Pearl's Hill where he was assigned to the office of Director, Manpower to help with the recruitment of the first intake. MAJ Seah had strongly urged Boon Chai to apply. Boon Chai had by now seriously begun to think of the army as a career anyway, and so he readily complied.

The plotters behind the misgivings experienced by the hapless trainees who were all but shanghaied to SAFTI on 1st June, 1966, were Boon Chai's boss, Inspector of Police, Lim Choon Mong and *his* boss Herman Hochstadt, then Director, Manpower, MID. They were tasked with recruiting at least 300 male Singaporeans for regular service for 12 years (10 years Colour Service and 2 years Reserve in the jargon of those by-gone days). Notifications of acceptance in early May 1966 made reference to Section 86 of the Singapore Army Act, 1965, which provided that if a recruit was prepared to cough up "not more than \$150" within 3 months after the date of his attestation, he could be discharged "with all convenient speed" provided that the President of Singapore, then Inche Yusof Ishak, had not proclaimed a national mobilisation. For those who were already in service and wished to upgrade themselves to officer status, the reference was to Part VI of the Singapore Army Act 1965 which highlighted that "if (an enlistee was) already a serving regular member of the Singapore Armed Forces (he would) continue to serve the remainder of the un-expired portion of (his) present period of enlistment" (which was presumably the 10 years of Colour Service plus 2 years of Reserve).

FROM: 600740 W/C ABDUL SAMAD % A.S. ATHAMBAVA
HQ COY 2ND BN SINGAPORE INFANTRY REGIMENT

TO: MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND DEFENCE
SINGAPORE

THROUGH: THE COMMANDING OFFICER
2ND BN SINGAPORE INFANTRY REGIMENT SINGAPORE

Sir,

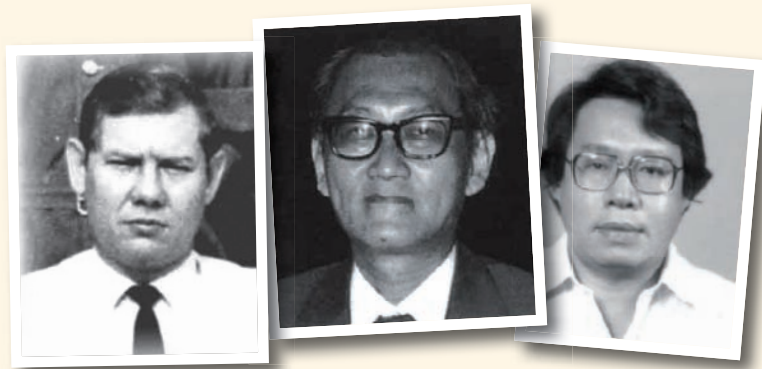
I have the honour to request that I be considered as a candidate for a ^{Regular} ~~Short Service~~ Commission.

I am a Singapore Citizen of 23 years of age and have passed the Federation of Malaya Certificate of Education Grade 3 with credits in English and History.

I have been serving with the 2ND BN SINGAPORE INFANTRY REGIMENT for the past 3 years and ^{am} ~~is~~ at present a W/CPT in the Signals Platoon.

Your Obedient Servant
A. Samad 0740

3. FEB 1966



Mr. Herman Hochstadt, Mr. Ong Kah Kok and Mr. Lim Choon Mong.

For the period of training, according to the promotion brochure, the basic salary was a lordly \$60.00 a month, plus an educational allowance of:

- \$140 per month for possession of the School Certificate or its equivalent.
- \$210 per month for possession of the full General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level or its equivalent.
- \$240 per month for possession of the full Higher School Certificate or its equivalent.
- \$430 per month for possession of an acceptable (sic) Diploma from Singapore Polytechnic, a degree from Nanyang University or a General Degree from a recognised University or its equivalent.
- \$540 per month for possession of an Honours Degree from a recognised University.

**delete whichever does not apply*



SERVE WITH PRIDE



	BASIC SALARY PLUS EDUCATION ALLOWANCE		BASIC SALARY PLUS QUALIFICATION ALLOWANCE			
	Recruits	Officer Cadet	2nd Lt.	Lt.	Captain	Major
Present Basic Salary	\$ 60	\$270	\$360	\$400	\$545	\$700
<i>School Certificate - Dec. 4</i> + \$140 (Edu. + Inducement)	\$200	\$270	\$360	\$400	\$545	\$700
GCE (Advanced level)	+ \$210 \$270	\$270	\$360	\$400	\$545	\$700
H.S.C.	+ \$240 \$300	+ \$ 50 \$320	\$360	\$400	\$545	\$700
General Degree (including graduates of Nanyang University and Polytechnic)	+ \$430 \$490	+ \$220 \$490	+ \$182 (Inducement + Edu.) \$542	+ \$212 \$612	+ \$137 \$682	+ \$ 51 \$751
Honours Degree	+ \$540 \$600	+ \$330 \$600	+ \$290 (Inducement + Edu.) \$650	+ \$300 \$700	+ \$205 \$750	+ \$102 \$802

NOTE:—In addition to the above officers are eligible for a number of allowances. These include marriage, ration and servants allowance. The total takehome pay can go up by more than 50% of the basic.

	Recruit	Cpls.	Sgt.	S/Sgt.	W.O. II	W.O. II (Q.M.)	W.O. I
Present Basic	\$ 60	\$100	\$158	\$180	\$205	\$230	\$263
<i>Dec. 4 Senior-Cambridge</i> + \$160 (Inducement and Edu. Allow.)	\$220	\$235	\$250	\$260	\$275	\$290	+ \$310
GEC (Advanced level)	+ \$210 \$270	+ \$185 \$285	+ \$142 \$300	+ \$130 \$310	+ \$120 \$325	+ \$110 \$340	+ \$ 87 \$350
H.S.C.	+ \$260 \$320	+ \$235 \$335	\$192 \$350	\$180 \$360	\$170 \$375	\$160 \$390	+ \$137 \$400

NOTE:—In addition to the above Non-Commissioned Officers are eligible for a number of allowances.

THE ARMY OFFERS YOU A CAREER

The plot is hatched!

II. HATCHING THE PLOT

The plot had been hatched in a couple of rooms in Empress Place, where the Ministry of Interior and Defence had been squatting. After the separation of Singapore from Malaysia Dr. Goh Keng Swee, the Singapore Minister of Finance under Malaysia, had promptly offered his services as the Minister of Defence to the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. Dr. Goh had been a Volunteer NCO Stretcher Bearer during WWII and behind his back, was frequently referred to as ‘The Corporal’ in his capacity of Minister, the reference being to Napoleon’s sobriquet on account of his strategic vision. As Singapore’s inheritance of military assets comprised two battalion’s worth of Volunteer Infantry, a Volunteer Artillery company and a motley collection of Armoured Car troopers, Volunteer Signallers, medics, transport elements and camp followers, plus two full-time regular Infantry battalions depleted by the exodus of Malaysian personnel (who had been absorbed when they came under the Federal Government), it was decided to incorporate the Police Force and the Vigilante Corps under the Ministry. Therefore, it was named the Ministry of Interior and Defence (which lives on to this day as the prefix “MID” of MINDEF registered vehicles). Besides, the most urgent security threats Singapore faced in those days were politically motivated riots, the primary purview of the Police Riot Squad. There was also some vague notion of a Police Field Force like that of Malaysia.



Captain Albert Tan and the promise of a happy, fulfilling and rewarding career.

Clarence and his Midget, supported by a glowing invitation signed by no less a personage than Mr. G. E. Bogaars, Permanent Secretary, MID, to school-leavers, university graduates, Government and statutory boards' employees and staff of quasi-Government organisations like the People's Association, corralled between 2,500 and 3,000 unsuspecting juveniles and young adults. 'Unsuspecting' is a fair description of the state of mind of the applicants because even MID did not, at that point, know exactly what the applicants would have to go through: the training programme was being formulated with foreign advisors even as the recruitment proceeded. But times were hard and Government jobs offered some security. Singapore was mostly low-rise and slum and backbreaking labour, hawking and daily-rated employment. Two hundred dollars plus keep was big money and if an MG Midget was thrown in, what more could one ask? Not that it was assumed by all to be an army issue, mind you—just the possibility of being able to afford one, like young Clarence.

But, something else was in the air. Hitherto, Singapore's military security had been either a British affair or, after 16th September, 1963, the Malaysian Federal Government's. In both circumstances, the military had been highly visible, too visible perhaps. About 15% of Singapore's land area comprised military installations occupied by the British, even after 9th August, 1965, and whose activities accounted for between 20-40% of Singapore's GDP. The first local military unit had been the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps, formed in 1854, an expatriate force created to safeguard the expatriate community against the 'native' population. In WWI, the Volunteers had played a big part in routing mutineers from the Indian Army garrison stationed in Singapore who had been misled into believing that they were being shipped out to fight their fellow Muslims in Asia Minor and executing 22 of the 41 through a court martial by firing squad with considerable relish. After WWI, as relations with defence treaty partner Japan soured irrevocably, the British Government undertook, though in fits and starts, a massive build-up of Singapore as a bastion of the Empire, with special emphasis on the Naval Base in Woodlands. It was ultimately to little avail. The defence of Singapore against the Japanese in WWII had been a British/Dominions (British Indian Army/Australia and New Zealand) business, while after the war, some of the British troops garrisoned in Singapore had been deployed to suppress local rioting, in between operations against the communist terrorists in peninsular Malaya. Even the two regular Singapore Infantry Regiment battalions, the 1st and 2nd, made up of Singaporeans, had been commanded by the British before Malaysia. Under Malaysia, the two battalions and the significantly indigenised Singapore Volunteer Corps had been subsumed under the Malaysian Armed Forces and, they too had been deployed to suppress Singaporean rioters. Now, Singapore was a separate state: booted out, yes, but to those who responded to the call to join the SAF, Singapore was truly their own now. Sovereign independence; no foreign allegiance; national military forces; not a Malaysian or British supreme headquarters; motherland under threat; manning the ramparts; protecting their homes; paths of glory, etc.

III. ALL AND SUNDRY

No one recalls now if there had been an advertisement in the English and vernacular papers, but the brochure was widely distributed in Government offices, secondary schools, the two universities and the Singapore Polytechnic. Hwee Man Lok, a poetry-spouting Arts graduate of 23 and mini-Godfather from Ah Hood Road, duly reported to Inspector Lim Choon Mong sometime in early March 1966 at the Lower Barracks of the Police Headquarters in Pearl's Hill, to which MID had moved by now. He had come to fill up the *ENROLMENT FORM FOR OFFICERS' TRAINING* (which, with the characteristic military accountability for details, had already been given the official number 0431-5,000-3/66 meaning 5,000 had been printed in March 1966). Mr. Lim, who was a staff officer to the Officer-in-Charge, Procedure & Selection, Manpower Division, MID, with his trademark unflappable self-confidence, told Man Lok that, being a graduate, "You no problem, sure make it to officer—sign!" Unbeknownst, as they say, to either at the time, a lifelong friendship had begun. A matter of fact Choon Mong knew Mun Lok's father who was a senior NCO in the police.

William Law, at age 17 years and six months, probably had no business to be there because applicants were supposed to have been 18 years old on enlistment. But MID appears to have been rather easy about specifications, as they were to demonstrate repeatedly through casual unilateral abrogation of terms and conditions that had been mutually agreed earlier between enlistees and enlisters. William Law eventually graduated as the youngest officer ever in the SAF.

For Gurcharan Singh, the call had come through while he was getting ready to start work on Malaysia's Subang Airport in Kuala Lumpur after graduating as an Engineer from the University of Malaya's Kuala Lumpur campus. Being an avid and talented hockey and rugby player, he was known to Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. Tan Teck Khim, another sports aficionado, who alerted him to the good prospects of a graduate entering the SAF on the ground floor. Being a member of a martial race and Mr. Tan being designated the first Director, General Staff, Gurcharan obligingly applied. 'Guru' as he came to be called, may have been the oldest cadet, but he became Chief of Engineers three years after commission with the lofty rank of Captain.

Ng Jui Ping had been grinding away fitfully with his studies as a private candidate for the Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) after completing his Cambridge School Certificate examinations in Raffles Institution. While his father had thrived in business, he himself had little relish for it at the time. So, he too took the fateful plunge that would eventually lead to the three stars of a Lieutenant-General—the only one from the First Batch—with his appointment as Chief of Defence Force in 1993.

Ng Seng Chan was also doing his HSC, but chafing under the regime of studies as a private candidate. He decided to defer studies when he saw the offer and enlisted. To his credit, he remained on the part-time ticket for his HSC, which he, together with Jui Ping, took in

November 1966 and passed. Being inclined to shoot from the hip when he ran into anything that he thought was dodgy, he hit several stone walls during his career, leaving the service as a Lieutenant-Colonel; but he also acquired a law degree on a part-time basis and went on to a successful practice in New Zealand.

After separation from Malaysia, about a third of the strength of Singapore's two full-time infantry battalions, mostly from Malaysia, had chosen to either resign or be repatriated to Malaysia. The Singapore Government urgently sought to fill up the ranks and had mounted two recruitment drives code named 'Boxer I' and 'Boxer II'. Ajit Singh Nagpal had been one of those with a School Certificate who were selected. Either his Officer Commanding or his Platoon Commander had been looking out for him; the Boxer intake had not been the best of society, being made up of many who had had scrapes with the law. So Ajit was advised to apply for the officer cadet programme and was selected. He was to enjoy a satisfying career in the Armour and specialise in logistics, which on his retirement, led to further prospects with a major trading firm in Singapore.

Chan Seck Sung had already finished his HSC and was working with the People's Association as its Organising Secretary, putting in 14 hours a day. Mornings were spent undergoing leadership and organisational skills training and evenings on duty at Community Centres until 10.00 pm. He jumped at a chance for a commission in the SAF and was the first among the First Batch to be picked for Ranger training. Together with his hero in the brochure who owned the red sports car, he was sent off one month before the course ended to Fort Georgia in the US as a Second Lieutenant, thereby being the first graduate of SAFTI to be commissioned.

The People's Association also lost at least two other valuable staff to the SAF. Chan Jwee Kay and Tan Lai Hock, both good friends of Seck Sung, also signed up. Jwee Kay would end up as Colonel, Chief of Artillery, and Division Commander while Lai Hock joined Armour and retired as a Lieutenant-Colonel following a number of senior posts in the Armour formation.

Kwan Yue Yeong too, was at something of a loose end after his HSC at Raffles Institution where he had enjoyed all manner of sports, excelling in rugby in which he captained the combined schools fifteen. So, he applied casually, without ruling out a university education were he to change his mind. He didn't. Laid back, clean of cut, firm of jaw, with an ever-present grin, he became a contender for the Sword of Honour, but only from the beginning of the officer cadet phase. He duly claimed it from under the noses of Gurcharan Singh (Best Officer Cadet in the Course), gymnast and graduate Lee Song Chong, hot favourite Timothy James De Souza and his own platoon mate Hee Kam Yong. He also attained a Master's degree in history from Duke University, North Carolina, courtesy of an SAF scholarship later in his career, together with Ng Jui Ping and then Major General (MG) Winston Choo, Director, General Staff.

FOR SPEED -
THE SINGAPORE
DISTRICT
IS
- ESSENTIAL

SINGAPORE
8 APR
12 APR
1966
M1

Director, Manpower,
Ministry of Interior & Defence,
Pearl's Hill,
SINGAPORE 2.

Tel: 95321 Extn 17.

12 April 1966

Mr. Seng Phang Khoo
253-A, Selegie Road
S'pore 141

Dear Sir,

SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES

With reference to your application to join the Singapore
Armed Forces you are required to report to Capt H.M. SETHI at
Camp Beach Road on the 18 Apr 66 at 1330 hours.

You will be required to participate in a number of
selection tests which will be conducted over a period of approx-
imately 5 hours. Please bring with you your WRIC, sports
shorts and rubber shoes.

This letter should be brought along to enable you to
enter Beach Road Camp.

H. R. Hochstadt
(H. R. Hochstadt)
Director, Manpower
Ministry of Interior & Defence,
SINGAPORE.

lt/

Martin Choo Kok Kye had been messing around Serangoon Gardens near his home in Yio Chu Kang Road after a less than sterling performance in his School Certificate examinations. He decided that the SAF would do him good and ended up as a recruit in No 4 Platoon, 'B' Company. To his utter horror, six days into the course he found his English Language teacher from Beatty Secondary School in the bunk next to him. Being well brought up, he started addressing the teacher 'Sir', but was roundly told off by the section instructor, Staff Sergeant Tan Cheng Bong, who had strong views about who was entitled to be 'Sir-ed' in the army. So he started calling the ex-teacher 'Mamak', which is a slightly derisive form of 'Uncle' for Indians in Singapore. It was an object lesson taken to heart by Low Yong Heng, Nadarajan Anthony and Ng Jui Ping, all of whom had occasion to be taught by this particular 'Mamak' at some point in their schooling.

Lionel Stanley Thomas thought he saw an advertisement in the newspapers (possibly a trick of a still active imagination), and the salary offered was okay at about \$200, including the educational allowance. He applied without worrying about whether he would end up an officer, NCO or buck private and was completely satisfied when accepted. He was even more euphoric when he arrived at SAFTI:

“Army from day one was beautiful heaven. The food, the accommodation, everything, my highest expectation; after lunch: fruit—never heard of tea-break—after breakfast! The Army was there for me...”

But Ram Janam Misir was duped wholesale. He was teaching in Cambridge Primary School, a Government school in Cambridge Road, when he received an official-looking notification from MID to report to a location for a selection test. He had asked his knowledgeable cousin O.P. Rai who told him confidently that he was being mobilised (presumably to fight Indonesian guerrillas involved in 'Konfrontasi'). He went for the selection test and was told that strictly speaking he did not qualify because he would only be 18 on 13th July, but since he was above 5' 2" (therefore taller than the rifle, perhaps) and fit, he would be accepted if he passed the medical examination. When informed that if he did not make officer, he would be appointed Sergeant, Ram was happy enough. He told his mother about it and she did not raise objections. Instead she gave him some sage advice: when sleeping in tents avoid the areas near the flaps as rain might come in; and be careful about barbed wire, because he could get tetanus. After he had been commissioned, he met up with a fellow teacher from Cambridge Primary School who confessed that he had secretly submitted Ram Janam's name on receiving the promotional brochure himself. Ram Janam had the satisfaction of detecting a marked note of envy in the confession.

In the campus of the University of Singapore, several bored young men were languishing in the lacklustre academic environment of foreigner-dominated faculties who occupied the higher reaches of their ivory towers. These included Richmond De Souza, Anthony Lim Poh Cheng and Raymond Soh Nang Poh. As soon as they saw the recruitment brochure, all

of them made a beeline for Beach Road Camp in Nang Poh's car to collect the application forms and a few days later, turned up at Inspector Lim Choon Mong's recruiting office. When they passed the selection tests and were offered a place, their soul-searching about missing out on a university education was but brief. For Nang Poh, SAFTI proved to be a homecoming of sorts because his family owned the famous Hill 160 (Spot Height 160), better known as Red House Hill.

Ibrahim Bulat's father was a Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) in the Singapore Volunteer Corps and a much-feared one at that. In 1963 after Singapore had joined Malaysia, Ibrahim, who had initially toyed around with the idea of being a teacher, applied to join the Federal Police Force and was waiting to board the 9.00 pm train to Kuala Lumpur at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station. Suddenly, he found the RSM standing next to him, shortly after which he was a pillion rider on the latter's motorcycle on his way home. The next day, RSM Bulat as he was known, pulled his son 'by the ear' to the recruiting officer for the SVC and asked him to sign up as a Volunteer. Ibrahim, to keep a healthy distance from the RSM, signed up in the Artillery instead of the Infantry. He reported for his training faithfully while keeping his day job as an interpreter in the Marine Department. On 28th August, 1964, he was mobilised and was deployed with units participating in anti-riot operations in Geylang and later against Indonesian Confrontation, with the rank of Lance Bombardier, Signaller. Ibrahim recalls that he frequently took flak from officers, including his battery commander, Lieutenant Kwek Boon Yong, (later Lieutenant-Colonel and Chief Artillery Officer), for his father's strictness in dealing with errant subalterns. He had begun to feel that he was being denied a chance for a commission in the Volunteers even though several others who were quite 'lopong' were selected for the course. When the opportunity for officer cadet training in SAFTI came up, he did not hesitate for a moment. He promised his Battery Commander that whether it took him one year or three, he would be back as a commissioned officer.

Soldiering could not have been further from Yeow Yew Tong's mind as a career when he fatefully returned to Singapore in the first week of June 1966 from a Colombo Plan scholarship with a First Class Honours in Electrical Engineering. Together with a stable-mate who is remembered only as Foo or Fong, he found himself persuaded to go (some would say bundled-off) to SAFTI six days after the course began, together with 25-year old graduate teacher Ramachandran Menon, who for some unaccountable reason had been held back working in MID HQ after reporting to Beach Road Camp instead of being sent directly to SAFTI with the majority of the selected candidates. Yew Tong's consolation was that even if he had proceeded to an Administrative Service appointment to serve his bond, he would have been enlisted under the National Service Act one year later, under either the compulsory active service scheme for new civil servants (Compulsory Active Service) or the Institutions of Higher Learning category. As it was, he did not do too badly in the order of merit, gamely taking everything that was dished out to cadets, his steel helmet wobbling alarmingly on his head. On being commissioned, he served in the Signals, before migrating overseas. Foo-Fong, on the other hand, dropped out early during recruit training and is untraceable through available records. He may have got away by successfully challenging the

high-handed tactics used by MID to enlist graduates in 1966 before the actual promulgation of the national service legislation.

Also shunted to MID after reporting to Beach Road Camp on 1st June, 1966, were Chen Yew Ping and Hee Kam Yong. The latter became the Best Cadet of Platoon 3. The former, having got a ‘so-so’ HSC grade, was facing the glum prospect of teacher-training. When he came across the invitation to join the SAF, life took on a new shine. His mother was horrified but he stuck to his choice. He became well known to the officers and NCOs as a trainee because he kept birds for a hobby, which seemed to have been a craze among the instructors then. But shortly after being promoted Captain, Yew Ping decided to leave what he saw as the strait jacket of military authoritarianism and went on to a very successful career in the business world.

Mukhtiar Singh had long made up his mind to join one of the uniformed services and had actually completed basic training in the Singapore Police Force. He had joined the SPF after being denied an opportunity to attend the FMC when Singapore was in Malaysia. He applied for the SAF course when it came along. As the Police was also under MID, he suddenly found himself having to report to SAF TI for another recruit training programme. After commissioning, he was immediately sent for further training as an Artillery Officer, where he remained until he retired as a Lieutenant-Colonel. He had the longest period of continuous basic training among the First Batch.

Don Seow Hock Ann was also another aspirant to the FMC who had been rejected for less than convincing reasons. But the Singapore Volunteer Corps also rejected him, inexplicably. The SAF officer’s training course was a godsend for the 19 year old and he went through the training as coolly as James Coburn—whom he resembled—in *The Magnificent Seven*.

Harry Wee Bak Wah literally ran away from home to join the army so that he could fight for the country (don’t laugh, Harry would say). He was a qualified teacher earning \$312 in 1966, a big sum. As a trainee in the SAF, he would only draw \$270 including his educational allowance. He enjoyed his training days although he was ‘shagged and blur’ most of the time, and was commissioned with the First Batch. Harry was handpicked for some tough ‘kick-ass’ assignments, the most memorable being Officer Commanding, Boat Company, which before his arrival on the scene, was a disaster at sea waiting to happen. Harry was also almost single-handedly responsible for relocating MINDEF from Police Headquarters at Upper Barracks, Pearl’s Hill to Tanglin Camp in 1972 as a staff officer in Planning Department. Thereafter, the call of the wild, the race course and probably the absence of any sign that there would be some fighting for the country to be done in the near future, tempted him to seek his fortune outside the SAF.

Jai Singh gravely disappointed his teacher, Miss Vaz, when she polled her class for her students' ambitions. The others mostly opted for careers as doctors, teachers, businessmen and the usual fantasies that may or may not have been realistic, given their performance so far. But to her horror Jai, her favourite, told her he wanted to be a soldier, whom she apparently took to mean that he wanted go around killing people. The chance of a commission was too good to refuse, so Jai got the application form. Being slightly under-aged he had to get his father's endorsement, which was flatly refused. But Jai's elder brother told him he would sort it out and when Jai returned home that night, the form was signed. He still did not know whether his father had signed it or his brother had forged the signature but Jai was not about to look a gift horse in the mouth. Besides, his cousin, then Lieutenant Naranjan Singh was an FMC graduate in the SAF and Naranjan's brother, Pritam was also applying. When Jai got his commission he went to pay his respects to Miss Vaz, who quietly told him how proud she was of him.

Victor Lam, whose father was an Assistant Superintendent in the Singapore Police Force, was working in a bank in Batu Pahat but is sure it was not his father who sent him details of the recruitment and is equally sure he did not read of it in any Singapore newspaper. Probably some friend of his or a family member may have brought it to his attention knowing that he had shown an interest in the services, though decidedly not in the Singapore Police Force. A keen sportsman who had represented the Singapore Under-23s in rugby and both fit and physically tough, he sailed through the selection process, dumped his Batu Pahat job and without even letting his father know, arrived in Pasir Laba on 1st June, 1966.

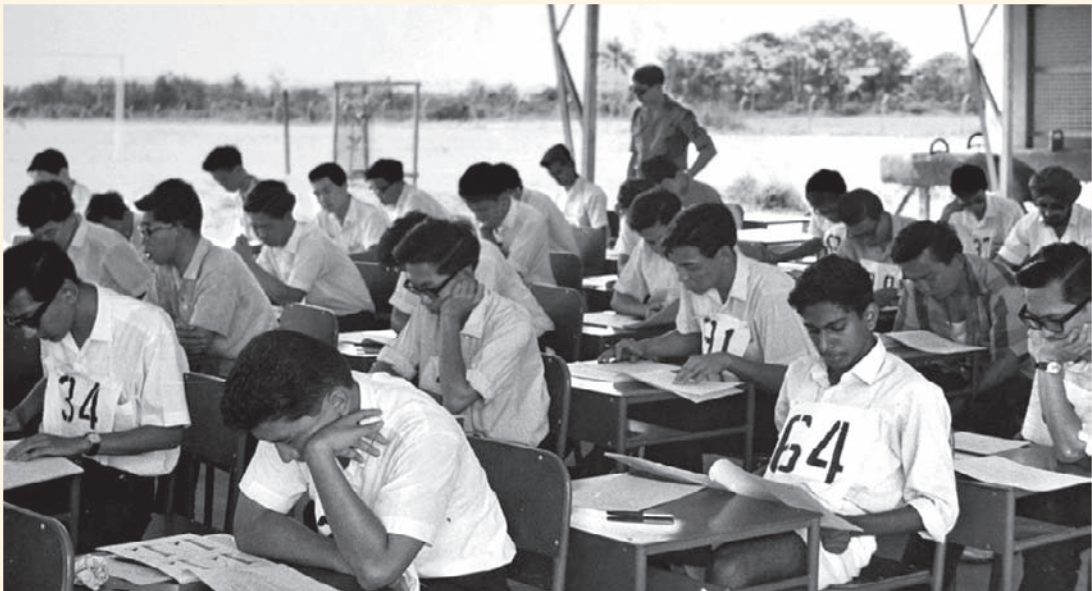
Errol Neubronner probably had the most frivolous reason for joining the SAF. He had happened to see a movie called *The Thin Grey Line* a short time before running into the promotion brochure. He now recalls it as a story about life in West Point and was much taken up with what officer candidates there went through. So he applied. What he got was not life in West Point by any stretch of the imagination. Even so, with his easygoing, ever smiling personality he actually enjoyed the SAFTI course, eventually retiring from service as a Lieutenant-Colonel and now manages a successful IT company.

Thus, across the board, voluntary and involuntary responses merged into a congregation of some 300 expectant, nervous and clueless military recruits who reported on Wednesday, 1st June, 1966 to Beach Road Camp, for the onward journey to Pasir Laba Camp. They were dressed variously, carrying the stipulated authorised personal items in a bewildering variety of carrier bags and looking, for all the world, like illegal immigrants who had been rounded up by the authorities. As individuals, they sought adventure, a living wage, a desperate bid to fend for their impoverished families, an escape from the squalor of their homes and surroundings, insulation from some premature travail of life or a throw of the dice for fame and fortune. Some would rather have not been there, but were trapped by their circumstances. And some, having the wit to realise early enough that they were on the wrong track, would vote with their feet in good time to escape the sweeping National Service net that MID would shortly throw.

IV. GATHERING THE HARVEST

The mosaic of activities that would eventually lead to this mixed bag of about 300 young and not so young newly-minted Singapore citizens to be laagered behind the chain link fence of SAFTI at Pasir Laba was handled—in the best tradition of the services—concurrently and in phases, with considerable finesse by an equally new ministry. Between 9th August, 1965 and 1st June, 1966, a momentous decision to accept the guidance of a controversial non-traditional source of military expertise had been boldly made; the prospective senior managers of the project to set up an armed forces almost from scratch had been earmarked and key personnel despatched to study that expertise; a broad-brush proposal for the training concept and force structure had been agreed; the relevant legislations had been enacted in Parliament; the selection and enlistment of the first cohort had been initiated; a crack team of trainers had been picked and their preparatory training launched; relative to Singapore's total land area, a vast site had been earmarked, acquired and evacuated for the training; construction, equipping and staffing of a new camp had begun against an unrealistic deadline; and a date—1st June, 1966—had been set for calling up the selected candidates. Total elapsed time: 296 days from independence.

Applications for the selection for officer training were invited at the beginning of February 1966. The application form was explicitly for officers' training, but the final selection notification in early May 1966, provided for those who failed to get a commission, an opportunity to be appointed as a Non-Commissioned Officer—a welcome enough prospect



Captain Jimmy Yap invigilating IQ test for the first intake, SAFTI.

MANPOWER DIVISION,
MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR AND DEFENCE,
PEARL'S HILL,
SINGAPORE.

ENROLMENT FORM FOR OFFICERS' TRAINING

I, _____ (As on Identity Card) _____ (Chinese Characters)
wish to enrol for Officers' Training in the Singapore Armed Forces.

A. PERSONAL PARTICULARS

Address (Residence) _____ Date of Birth _____
_____ Place _____
_____ Age _____
Tel. No. _____ If born outside Singapore, Citizenship Certificate
Identity Card No. _____ No.: _____
Height _____ Race _____
Weight _____ Religion _____
Written Spoken

Languages: _____

Marital Status:— *Single/Married

B. PRESENT EMPLOYMENT

Name of Employer: (if any) _____ Appointment _____
Address (for correspondence) _____
Tel. No. _____

C. PARTICULARS OF SCHOOLS/COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES ATTENDED

Academic Qualifications:

Name(s) of School(s)/University attended:	Year
_____	From _____ To _____
_____	From _____ To _____
_____	From _____ To _____

Highest Standard passed: _____

Were you a member of Boys Scout, Cadet Corps? _____ From _____ To _____

Other extra-curricular activities: _____

*Delete whichever does not apply.

D. PREVIOUS MILITARY EXPERIENCE

Any Previous Military Experience? (Yes or No) _____

Units and Ranks held	From _____	To _____
	From _____	To _____
	From _____	To _____
	From _____	To _____

DETAILS OF MEMBERSHIP OF ANY CLUBS OR ASSOCIATIONS

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/REMARKS

I declare that the above particulars are correct.

Date: _____

(Signature of Applicant)

FOR OFFICIAL USE

Registration No. _____ Remarks _____

Category _____

Vetting Results _____

Medical Results _____

Manpower Division,
Ministry of the Interior and Defence.

Director, Manpower,
Ministry of the Interior & Defence,
Pearl's Hill,
SINGAPORE 2.

Tel: 95321 Extn 19.

MID (MP) 5/66

11 April, 1966.

Sir,

SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES
OFFICER TRAINING

You are requested to present yourself for an interview and medical examination in connection with your application to undergo officer training in the Singapore Armed Forces.

2. Report at Lecture Room at the Police Training School, Thomson Road, on 22 APR 1966 at *0845 hrs*

bringing the originals of your birth certificate, citizenship certificate and educational certificates, diplomas or degrees. Where the originals of these documents are not available, you should bring certified copies with you.

3. You should bring this letter together with your BRIC when you report.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully,

Capt. C.M. Cardozo
(Capt. C.M. Cardozo) *Capt*
for Director, Manpower,
Ministry of the Interior and Defence,
Singapore.

CMC/lt



The high balance was intimidating to some.

for some, but not all. This should not have come as a surprise, however: the promotional brochure *SERVE WITH PRIDE* had clearly mentioned that “Those who do not qualify to be officers will become Non-Commissioned Officers”, except that it was not seen in direct relation to the recruitment drive for the first intake of officer trainees at SAF TI. In the end, it did not matter: with the passage of the National Service Act in February 1967, all who were enlisted for the training in SAF TI and remained beyond section training were administratively deemed liable for reserve service in the SAF, even though many would not have qualified for National Service according to their date of birth.

The entries in the application form indicated a premium for university education, Boy Scout and Cadet Corps background and a record of extra-curricular activities in school. That ‘graduate’ business suggested a novel, highbrow angle to an avocation hitherto the stomping ground of outdoorsy, knuckle-dragging, athletic school-leavers. But, the received wisdom was that the new SAF would be an up-market activity, going a good way to counter the traditional Chinese belief that only bad sons join the army and only poor steel is used to make nails. Given the intrusive trawling of Government and quasi-Government organisations for candidates, it was not surprising that between 2,500 and 3,000 applications were received very quickly, while also facilitating speedy processing because essential personal and security data were already captured in respective employment records. In point of fact however, the final cut comprised of a broad cross-section of Singaporeans from many walks of life and educational levels, with physical fitness and a disposition towards outdoor life being determining factors.



Over to Pasir Laba after IQ test. Briefing on sit-ups by WO2 Khutalib. Lieutenant Kesavan Soon supervising.

V. CHOOSING THE BEST

Applicants were subjected to a number of relatively rudimentary selection tests. Reflecting the simpler life of those by-gone days, the performance in the three-mile run became critical, since it presented an objective cut-off. This criterion was set by LTC Kirpa Ram Vij, Director, SAFTI, as the obvious way to shortlist the most suitable candidates from the more than 2,500 applicants for 300-odd places. Applicants were notified to report to Captain H. M. Seth over the week ending 24th April “to participate in a number of selection tests which will be conducted over a period of approximately five hours.” They were required to bring their National Registration Identity Cards (NRIC), sports shorts and ‘rubber’ shoes, as well as the notification letter for admission into Beach Road Camp from where they would be trucked out to the test sites.

The tests were conducted in batches of around 60 at a time. The applicants were taken in Bedford and Austin military trucks (later to be universally referred to as three-tonners) from Beach Road Camp to Jurong Town Primary School. After pinning on a number to the front and back of their shirts or vests, they sat for an IQ test lasting 30 minutes. They were closely scrutinised by several future SAFTI instructors whose own training in the First Instructors’ Preparatory Course was also being conducted at the same location and which



WO2 Hong Seng Mak supervising the beginning of the 3-mile run.



Exhausted but certainly relieved to have finally crossed the finishing line.



Participants trying to put themselves together again after what was, to quite a few, a long and gruelling run.

had been briefly interrupted for a review of the programme. After changing to shorts and canvas shoes, the applicants were then trucked to Pasir Laba Camp where SAFTI was being built from the ground up. Already in place, were some items of the famous standard obstacle course, notably the notorious six-foot wall, Jacob's Ladder, the high balance, the swinging bridge and the ramp. Officers and NCOs, including some in white T-shirts, white shorts, white socks and white canvas shoes who would later be recognised as Physical Training Instructors or PTI, were standing by. The applicants were paired for sit-ups, one holding down the legs of the other. Fading memories suggest that different groups were subjected to different obstacles. Ajit Singh recalls having to do the swing bridge, the 'window' and the ramp; others, the high balance, Jacob's Ladder, the Tarzan Swing and the 6-foot wall. But, the last was unlikely because the six-foot wall would have required formal instructions before a first attempt. Probably, every group was in fact made to take the same obstacles. Finally, everyone was formed up at a start-line just beyond the obstacle course and flagged off for the three-mile run to the boatshed at the end of Pasir Laba Road. Along the snake-like route, some remember signs showing remaining distances. At a hairpin bend skirting Spot Height 175, later christened Mast Hill, several, either through desperation or initiative, tried to cut across the re-entrant only to find themselves, to their deep chagrin, stranded in dense undergrowth. At the finish line, timings were recorded and a water-point was available.

The military personnel in charge of the tests gave nothing away, however. It was probably a policy decision aimed at keeping options open and avoiding awkward questions later on, given the large number of applicants and confidential selection criteria priorities. No one was told how he had performed or even that the structures coming up at Pasir Laba would be the training site, but the groups were trucked back to Beach Road Camp from where they dispersed.

If there were medical casualties during the physical fitness tests involving the 2,500 odd applicants, there is no record of such. There was certainly no evidence of ambulances and medical orderlies or intermediate water points for the run which was conducted around 11.00 a.m. or 4.00 p.m., depending on the schedule for the batch. Those who could not keep up merely stopped running and walked to the end-point. No one had been told in advance of the three-mile run, so they could not have prepared for it. Oddly enough, many took it in their stride, as it were and the temptation was to conclude that the basic level of physical fitness among youths at that time in Singapore, when physical fitness was not the craze it is today, was quite high. It may have been due to the fact that lifestyle was naturally less sedentary. But for others, it was a challenge to beat, as Tony Seng remembers:

"I started at the obstacle course and ran towards the boatshed. I remember there were distance signs along the way denoting how far more to go. Well, it was sheer determination to struggle to the end then... legs "lembek" (meaning weak) and whatever food taken at the Jurong Town Primary School was all thrown out at the boatshed..."

By the fourth week of April 1966, letters were sent out by Captain C. M. Cardoza for Director, Manpower, for the short-listed applicants to report, again in batches, over a number of days, to the Police Training School at Thomson Road for a medical examination and interview, with the originals of their educational certificates, birth certificate, citizenship certificate and NRIC. Stripped to their under-shorts, with one Second Lieutenant Moorthy from the People's Defence Force (Medical Corps) presiding, they went through the British model PULHEEMS test (Physical characteristics; Upper limbs; Lower limbs; Hearing; right Eye; left Eye; Mental status; emotional Stability) all of which could presumably be discerned from the medical examination, which included pulling down the under-shorts while coughing to demonstrate a satisfactory jiggle of manhood (or whatever) and supplying a container of urine. Properly dressed once more, they appeared before one of several panels of officers including LTC Kirpa Ram Vij, to answer simple questions mostly centred on the motivation to join the military as a career and the determination to stay the course.

It must be presumed that those who did not make it were duly notified by MID and that they were for the most part disappointed. On the other hand, some may have made it and had second thoughts, opting in the end to reject the offer. For these two groups, as the word got around about what was happening in SAFTI when the course started, there must surely have been a moment of gratification, eventually perhaps turning to a little envy when the commissioning of the First Batch was splashed in the newspapers thirteen months later. Some—had they been less than comfortable with military life—were luckier than they knew, because if they had been selected and failed, they would automatically have been liable, in theory until age 50, for reserve service in the SAF under the National Service Act passed in March 1967.

But, slightly more than 300, with possibly as many as 500, received a letter dated 9th May, 1966, signed by Mr. Lim Choon Mong for the Officer-in-Charge, Procedure & Selection, Manpower Division, MID, informing them that they had been “selected to undergo an officers’ training course” whereby they would be required to enlist in the SAF for an initial period of 12 years with effect from 1st June, 1966. Again, recipients must have experienced mixed emotions, but those who had seen no prospects in their current jobs, or had no jobs to talk of, or had nursed romantic notions of soldiering with a red MG Midget in the offing, must have seen that letter as a new lease of life.

Little did they suspect how that lease would begin.

Endnotes

- 1. Abdul Samad's SIR regimental number was changed from 600740 to 10547 as a trainee in SAFTI, so a decision must have been made at MID to introduce a new series starting with the enlistees of the first intake. Several years later, regimental numbers were replaced by National Registration Identity Card numbers and servicemen were given a (green) military version of the NRIC which were exchanged for their civilian versions at the end of their service.*

Ref: MID(MR)5/66/847

Ministry of the Interior,
Pearl's Hill,
Singapore 2.

Tel: 95321 Extn.19

9th May, 1966.

Sir,

Singapore Armed Forces
Officer Training

With reference to your application to serve in the Singapore Armed Forces, you have been selected to undergo an officers' training course.

2. You will be required to enlist in the Singapore Armed Forces for an initial period of 12 years with effect from 1st June, 1966. On successful completion of the officers' training course you will be commissioned as an officer. However, should you not be successful in the course you will be appointed as a non-commissioned officer.

3. For your information, under sect.86 of the Singapore Army Act, 1965,

"86. If a recruit within three months after the date of his attestation pays for the use of the Government a sum not exceeding one hundred and fifty dollars, he shall be discharged with all convenient speed, unless he claims such discharge during a period when soldiers in service with the Singapore armed forces, who otherwise, would be transferred to the reserve, are required by a proclamation of the President under this Act to continue in service with the Singapore armed forces, in which case he may be retained in such service during the period, and at the termination thereof shall, if he so required it, on the payment then of the said sum be discharged."

4. If you are prepared to be enlisted into the Singapore armed forces as indicated above with effect from 1st June, 1966, call at this office at ...11:00... hours on ...4.7.66. May, 1966, bringing the originals of your educational certificates with you to sign the Letter of Appointment.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully,


(LIM CHOON MONG)

f. Officer-in-charge,
Procedure & Selection,
Manpower Division,
Ministry of the Interior & Defence.

cc. Dir., Jurong School.

DAY ONE AND THE FIRST SIX WEEKS

I. THE BIG SIGN-UP

Only in the course of compiling this record of the training of the First Batch of graduates from SAFTI and by referring to the documents sent out by MID, which a few members presciently kept, has it been possible to get an overview of the state of affairs that prevailed during the enlistment process. No material evidence has turned up to confirm how the selected candidates were brought together for the trip to SAFTI on Wednesday, 1st June, 1966. But, between the first week of May and 1st June, some received a note referenced MID/(MP) 5/66 with a further backslash and another number. Seng Peng Khoon's letter was MID/(MP) 5/66/920 dated 9th May. It was entitled 'Singapore Armed Forces Officer Training' and signed by Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), Lim Choon Mong, (recently promoted from Inspector) and it stated that Peng Khoon had been selected. If he was prepared to enlist, he was asked to call at the Procedure & Selection (Branch?) of Manpower Division at noon on 17th May. The letter was copied to 'Dir., Jurong School' which was the tentative name of the training school that was to be raised at Pasir Laba. Peng Khoon also had a letter with the same reference dated 16th May signed by CPT C.M. Cardoza, Officer-in-Charge, Procedure and Selection, (copied to 'Army Paymaster, M.I.D.'), that among other things, stipulated his salary and reminded him that if he did not complete his officer training satisfactorily, he 'may' be appointed an NCO or discharged. There was a 'Form of Acceptance' at the bottom that Peng Khoon signed and it was dated 17th May. None of the parties involved can quite remember what actually happened, but the most likely explanation was that when Peng Khoon reported to MID on 17th May as directed by ASP Lim, he was seen by CPT Cardoza who briefed him on the circumstances of his enlistment and witnessed his acceptance on a pre-prepared document dated 16th May.

This process must have been reiterated about 500 times over the week as that was roughly the number of applicants finally selected from the overall response to the recruitment drive. As there is no record of any further notification, it is also likely that the 300 or so who were told at the signing to report to Beach Road Camp around 0800 hrs on 1st June to begin the training, were the first cut of that 500. Furthermore, although the 300 were not aware of it then, there is evidence that another group was sent for training at Simon Road Camp under then-MAJ Donald Richard Jambu, although they appear to have been earmarked for a later officer cadet course, if they made the grade during the recruit and section leader phases. It is not known, however, when this group was processed but, it could have been the second cut of the 500. The complication is: what basis was adopted to differentiate the two groups? It would have been a blunder to select all the best performers in the selection tests/interviews and lump them together in one batch and all the rest in the subsequent batches.



Dr. Goh visiting Simon Road Camp. Oddly, the Commanding Officer (CO), then-MAJ Richard Jambu (extreme right) is wearing the SAFTI formation sign.

This would be inviting all sorts of complex dynamics in performance, motivation and peer support. MID was obviously looking downstream at the first intake at SAFTI as plans for the SAF were being batted around. It would have wanted a broader spread of talent, ability and educational qualifications over several cohorts. Therefore, it must have been consciously decided to distribute acceptable candidates accordingly and ignore the issue of whether the candidates themselves would have been agreeable to a deferment in beginning their officer cadet phase. The times being what they were, MID must have decided to brazen things out because available resources would only support one officer cadet training frame at a time.

II. RENDEZVOUS AT BEACH ROAD

The 300 or so who turned up at Beach Road Camp were gathered in the large hall on the first floor, which was a beehive of activity. They were dressed in every fashion imaginable of the mid-1960s and several sported long hair and sunglasses. Among them were those who had come in uniform as they were already in service, such as Samad Athambava and Ibrahim Bulat. Samad remembers that he had, like a good soldier, come with the regulation 4x2 haircut (a four-inch width close crop at the back and two above the ears), as well as the \$5 that he had been advanced on his next pay to buy sundries like tooth paste and toothbrush. On the other hand, Ajit Singh felt out of place in uniform because all those who had come before him were in civvies; so he found a restroom and changed out of his uniform. When he returned to the drill hall, Officers and NCOs were busily checking nominal rolls. One

enlistee remembers how, on seeing a 'handsome' individual in uniform, he decided that he must be an officer, an indication not only of serious personal prejudices but also of the ignorance of the trappings of authority on military uniforms that generally prevails to this day, because Michael Seth would have been wearing his Captain's insignia on his epaulettes.

It seemed as though, recognising that military punctuality was expected of them, nearly all the selected enlistees turned up on time and a roll-call was made. Responses varied with each enlistee's view of what was expected in the military, but all were sufficiently intimidated by the uniformed personnel and anxious to please. Yet, many of them also had a sense that they were destined for higher things and were only playing the part presently expected of them as trainee officers. Inevitably, those who were from the full-time or volunteer service tended to demonstrate their familiarity with the organisation in the promptitude and smartness of their responses and no doubt saw themselves as having a competitive edge over the raw civilians. But as nothing more was asked of anybody, other than to get into various vehicles drawn up in the parade square below in batches according to a further roll-call, the issue was soon dismissed by the rest.

The majority of the enlistees were briefed that they would be transported to a camp, where they would be confined for the first six weeks of training. Though both the location and the confinement were news to them, there were no provisions for each enlistee to inform



Beach Road Camp to which the first intake for the officer training course in the yet-to-be-named SAFTI gathered on 1st June, 1966. A view of Beach Road as it was on that day and before the reclamation. The Drill Hall of the SVC is the double storey building in the centre foreground.

his family from Beach Road Camp; it was a time when public phones hardly existed and in any case, very few homes had telephones. As no send-off arrangements by family members had been catered for at Beach Road Camp, there was nobody to pass the details to, such as they were. So, it was left to the enlistees to send home messages by post or phone after they had reached the camp. No one recalls if any postcards with some details of the location and perhaps a guide map were distributed to simplify and standardise the process and it probably wasn't.

There was a small group among those who reported in the same batch who were not sent to the same destination and they discovered later that they were going to MID HQ. They were apparently dispersed around MID in civilian clothing doing odd clerical and messenger jobs. No one cared to explain the situation to them and 40 years on, no one remembers what the arrangement was all about. As far as one enlistee was concerned, it meant that he would be going home every night until told otherwise, which was quite all right with him. But, it suggested that there were subtext arrangements going on regarding those who had been enlisted and it would seem from snippets of information picked up from various sources that later in the day, or perhaps in the days immediately following, Beach Road Camp was visited by a further batch that was transported to Simon Road Camp, off Parry Avenue, near Yio Chu Kang and apparently another lot in Haig Road Camp. One possible explanation for the group sent to MID was that MID wanted to keep a reserve card up its sleeve for dropouts from Pasir Laba because the enlistment documents had offered the recruits the prospect of quitting within the first three to six weeks if they could not take the training. Another was that their records had been mislaid in the confusion. Or both.

III. IT'S A LONG, LONG WAY TO PASIR LABA

As all the enlistees who were earmarked for Pasir Laba had already experienced military 3-ton trucks when they were ferried there for the physical fitness tests during the selection process, the experience of a ride in one was not new, but that did not make this trip any more comfortable. On that occasion, the break at Jurong Town Primary School for the IQ test had given the enlistees the impression of a shorter distance from the heart of town. Given the anxieties each privately harboured about what they were in for, it was practically interminable this time round: down Bras Basah Road, Selegie Road, Bukit Timah Road, into Jurong Road and then Upper Jurong Road (all then two-way). As it turned out, the enlistees had been embussed in the 3-tonners in two distinct groups though they did not know it then: the lead vehicles carried those meant for 'A' Company and the rest 'B' Company, with the latter taking a long detour to arrive after 'A' Company had been in-processed at Pasir Laba. In either case, for most, it was their longest trip to the 'ulus' at one go and around Upper Jurong Road, the sense that they were not going to see civilisation for the next six weeks began to filter through. Also for many, it was only when they reached Pasir Laba Road that they realised that this was where they had come for the physical fitness test.

IV. THE WELCOMING COMMITTEES

From various recollections, though many clearly faulty, it has been possible to cull the events that marked the first day of the first intake in Pasir Laba. Enlistees designated for 'A' Company arrived at around 1100 hrs and debussed with their baggage, mental and material, at or beside the then main square, next to the QM/MT complex. They were greeted by Company Warrant Officer (CWO) WO1 Mokhtar with several NCOs, all except one in the peak caps of the SIR; the odd one out had a green beret and was as rugged looking as they came. One of the NCOs began to call out names and enlistees fell in before respective NCOs, although those who had to fall in before 'Green Beret' did so with great trepidation because a rumour began to go round that the green beret represented 'Marine Commando' which was immediately assumed to portend hellish training conditions. WO2 Mohd Mizah bin Ahmad was meanwhile blissfully oblivious of his fearsome credentials and carried on organising his contingent into three lines. He was to prove a kindly, if quixotic, Platoon Sergeant of Platoon 3. He once fell in the whole platoon, asked one trainee to report to the platoon office and fell out the rest. On another occasion, just before lunch, he fell in the platoon and asked those who played musical instruments to put their hands up. Several did and Inche Mizah, as he was commonly known, fell out the rest. The musicians were then instructed to report to the Officers' Mess to help shift a piano. Some profound principles of man-management may well have been lost with him. But the incident also demonstrated the lack of communication between those whose enlistment had been solicited for an officer's commission and the establishment on what they were in for, since obviously some were made to feel that there would be further re-grouping without their prior consent into all sorts of sub-categories of trainees. At the time, the SAF probably operated on the notion that once an enlistee signed the dotted line, he had no choice but to accept what was dished out to him. Presumably if a soldier had been required to have an opinion, he would have been issued one by the Regimental Quartermaster.¹

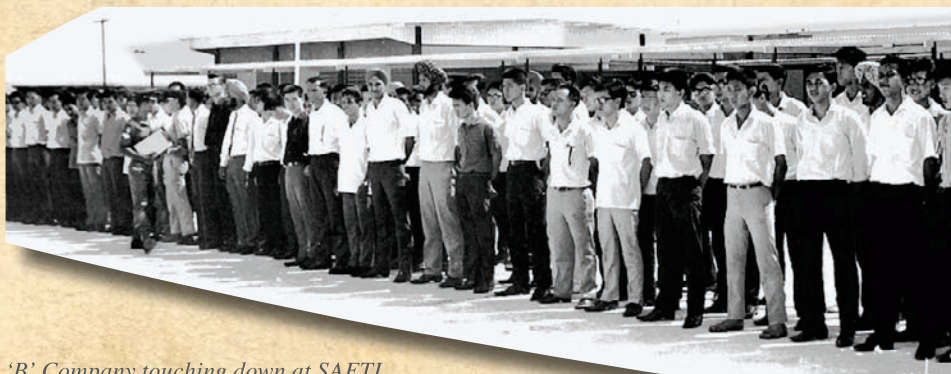
The three platoons were led off in a loose order of march to their respective barrack blocks in 'A' Company lines and divided into sections. Each section was allocated its separate room and the enlistees were either assigned to, or selected their cots. Bed sheets, pillow cases, a mosquito net, a blanket, webbing, a steel helmet, its inner liner, a water-bottle, socks, mess-tins, a field dressing, a military jack-knife, a housewife (sewing kit), a cutlery set and an enamel mug were laid out on each cot, beside which stood a two-door locker. An itemised list of what had been issued was handed out for each to acknowledge.² The enlistees were then told to collect their mugs and eating implements and form up in platoon groups on the parade ground (or 'square' as it was commonly called) as it was nearly lunch hour. The three platoons were led to a dining hall designated 'A' Company Dining Hall where, according to the majority of accounts, they were served rice, chicken, some vegetables and soup, with syrup water and an apple for dessert. For quite a few enlistees it was a more substantial meal than they had ever got at home and the Instructors went around enquiring tenderly



The First Intake arrives at SAFTI, clearly unaware of what laid in wait for them.



Still very civilian soldiers on a loose order of march to the barracks.



'B' Company touching down at SAFTI, with some degree of apprehension showing on worried faces.



*Waiting
in queue to be
initiated into the army's
infamous culinary tradition.*

if everything was all right. The tenderness would not last and soon the true standard of cooking, which was supplied by army cooks for a fairly long time, became evident. The food would be made palatable only by the sauce of ravenous hunger due to training and there would be plenty of that.

After lunch, all the enlistees were herded on to the parade square and back to the company lines. Platoon instructors then came to the respective barracks and told each platoon to proceed, section by section to the main quartermaster store area. Here, they were required to participate in two time-honoured traditions of military recruits the world over: get their military haircuts and collect their uniform items from the clothing store.

Four phlegmatic Indian barbers, one or two wearing the traditional dhoti in lieu of pants, were waiting for them at the barbershop. Some of the trainees, with limited situational awareness, trustingly specified the kind of haircut they wanted, which the barbers duly acknowledged. Except that it took about one minute flat to complete one haircut. As each trainee came out of the shop, those who were queuing up watched in stunned disbelief at the final product: there was an apron of stubble from ear to ear around the back of the head almost up to the crown and a short tuft of hair at the top. Meanwhile an ever-increasing pile of black locks, lately part of many a well-coiffured head, was accumulating on the floor of the barber shop. It was the first of many reality checks for the trainees. They could hardly recognise what stared out at them in the mirror. The only thing that could be said in favour of the experience was that it was a free haircut. But the Sikhs got away with it, as they also would with the steel helmet or helmet liner.

The enlistees did not fare much better at the clothing store, where they were kitted out with uniforms, combat boots, jungle boots, canvas shoes, Physical Training (PT) shorts, green T-shirts, jockey caps and muslin drawers. Everyone had to settle for what the Regimental Quartermaster

Sergeant (RQMS) and the storeman decided for them as there were some 150 personnel to be cleared within a very short time. The snap judgement of these aloof personages was only part of the problem. The other part was that the contractors who supplied the items had their own liberal interpretations of quality control. And, in one case, even they were defeated. For a while, it looked as if Recruit Malcolm Alphonso, measuring 6' 4" was condemned to do recruit training in Temasek Green bermuda shorts and his civilian shoes. Not until the confinement was over did anyone get a chance for proper alterations. Although the tailor shop in the QM complex could have remedied the worst faults; combined with the regimental haircut, sartorial elegance was not exactly what the first intake represented in their military wardrobe.

When everybody had been kitted out, it was time for dinner at the dining hall. Dinner varied marginally from lunch, since some remember a slice of watermelon for dessert instead of an apple. There was also an opportunity to visit the sundry shop, which was operated by a civilian contractor, for essentials like toothbrushes, soap and other items of personal grooming, comfort foods like sour kana and mentholated sweets, or Tiger Balm and liniments. Back at the barracks, Section Instructors briefed each section on their equipment, how to make the bed, how to stow away the mosquito net, how to organise their lockers and what was expected of them in keeping the company and barrack areas inspection-ready every morning or whenever called for. The briefing included the routine they had to observe, how to address officers and NCOs, the whole nine yards of army life and the dire consequences of not observing any stipulation. One of the first tasks ordered was for each enlistee to convert his brown canvas PT shoes into black using the tin of black Kiwi polish supplied, presumably as a waterproofing measure. (The canvas shoes with khaki-coloured socks, blue PT shorts and green round-neck vests were the standard attire for general duties or for early morning exercises). Each trainee was also given a five-figure regimental number. (This was followed in about two months with



Recruits of one section acknowledging their military issue items in the barrack room on day one.

one round and one oval dog tag on a nylon string necklace, each imprinted with the enlistee's name, regimental number, religion and blood group. One of the tags, they were solicitously informed, was for placing in the mouth in case they were killed and the other, to be passed back to unit HQ for record in that regrettable but not unlikely circumstance). All this took up to lights out the first night, leaving quite a few wondering what they had got themselves into. More than one warrior-chief-to-be was heard sobbing in his bunk.

V. OF SENIOR AND JUNIOR RECRUITS

Those enlistees destined for 'B' Company had very much the same experiences, except that greeting them were WO2 Hong Seng Mak, CWO of 'B' Company, the Platoon Sergeants and the NCO Section Instructors. So, presumably the in-processing of the enlistees had been standardised and coordinated at the HQ level. Where things began to get dodgy was when 'B' Company realised by the second day that they were being differentiated from 'A' Company. When the enlistees met in the canteen or in the dining hall area—'B' Company had its own dining hall—it became evident that 'A' Company personnel were dressed differently. They wore a blue band on each epaulette, while 'B' Company personnel had nothing other than the brass shoulder title 'Singapura.' A member of 'A' Company precipitated a crisis when he confronted someone from 'B' Company in the canteen and insisted that 'A' Company personnel were 'senior' to those of 'B' Company because 'A' Company was "obviously the officer cadet company," whatever 'B' Company might be. The fight that nearly broke out got the attention of the HQ.

As a matter of fact, the 'senior' from 'A' Company was not far off the mark. Actually, there were three other significant differences between 'A' and 'B' companies. All the Section Instructors in 'A' Company were officers while those in 'B' were Staff Sergeants; all the graduate enlistees were in 'A' Company; and, not then evident to any of the recruits until much later, if at all, 'A' Company barrack lines were about a third larger than 'B' Company. The evidence points to MID's uncertainty at this stage about the disposal of the enlistees: the separate training camp at Simon Road and Haig Road camps; the handful sent to MID HQ; the different management configuration of the two companies in SAFTI. 'B' Company enlistees' demand for a clarification of their status appeared to have forced MID to take a decisive position, namely to treat both companies as equal. 'A' Company' got to keep its blue bands but 'B' Company got green ones, as company identification. On the Monday following the arrival of the bulk of the enlistees at SAFTI, a graduate from among the enlistees assigned to MID and one of two others who had just returned to Singapore after graduating through a Colombo Plan scholarship were sent to 'B' Company. Nothing was done about the instructors in 'B' Company. On a lighter note, the blue epaulette bands in 'A' Company soon bleached to white while the green ones in 'B' Company stayed colourfast. At some point thereafter, they were all done away with.

Apparently, the resident Israeli Advisor at SAFTI, who had been the Chief Instructor for the First Instructors' Preparatory Course had been the source of the differentiation. He had determined that the cadets posted to 'A' Company should be the first 150 or so in rank order based on the consolidated physical fitness test results and other selection criteria, but inclusive of those with tertiary education. He vastly over-estimated the diligence with which records of the selection test were kept to believe that the breakdown into 'A' and 'B' Company contingents would stand scrutiny. COL (RET) John Morrice, then Major and the first OC 'A' Company and his counterpart MAJ T.E. Ricketts (later Lieutenant-Colonel (RET)) of 'B' Company had been briefed of this. COL Morrice himself had specified the design of the epaulette band based on the Federation Military College model, though his proposal had included a white sleeve over the epaulettes. The IDF Advisor had also told Colonel Morrice that after the section-level training, the top 20% or so of 'B' Company would be transferred to 'A' Company, replacing, presumably those who had not measured up in the latter.³

MID must have acquiesced. It is possible that Manpower Division had been trying from the very beginning to concurrently provide for an adequate supply of NCOs, based on the rationale that if the SAF was to be as big as was anticipated in the preliminary planning, for every Platoon Commander, four NCOs or thereabouts, would be the rule of thumb with an Infantry platoon as the basis.

There seems to have been some muddy thinking here. But, more serious was the arbitrary distribution of enlistees into separate training templates that would have denied them a level playing field in qualifying for the first cohort for the officer cadet phase and thereby their seniority in rank and earlier access to an officer's salary scale. This was especially so as 'B' Company personnel had not been informed of the distinction between themselves and 'A' Company personnel.



Getting to know you, getting to know me...one-on-one interview with the Platoon Commander.

VI. A WORM'S EYE VIEW OF EARLY DAYS

Notwithstanding that it is wasted on the young as George Bernard Shaw famously noted, youth is infinitely adaptable. To many, the first few days in SAFTI must have seemed excruciating. But, the majority coped, as indeed they needed to, if they aspired to have a military commission. A worm's eye view of the first few weeks at SAFTI was recorded in the first issue of "*THE SAFTIRIAN*", which was published by the first intake officer cadets. The report, written within a year of the events, is probably the most reliable recollection of the experience available at this point, though it still leaves out much. It was submitted by Khoo Kong Ngian, who did his recruit training in 'B' Company and became the supernumerary Platoon Commander of Platoon 1 for the Commissioning Parade on 16th July, 1967.

"I was a Probationary Station Officer in the Singapore Fire Brigade. One day, as I was going home from work, I met my friend, Announcer Cheong, at Capitol. Being old friends and as we had not seen each other for quite some time, we settled ourselves at the Capitol Milk-bar. The name really suits him well; he told me a lot of things while we were having a drink. Then, finally, we came to the topic of enlistment in the Army. He said he had heard that Singapore was going to have an Officer-Training College just like the one in Kuala Lumpur. I was fascinated by his talk after a while. We agreed to go the Ministry of Interior and Defence the following day to obtain the application forms to join the College.

That day was my first day off after Day Duties. I went with him and obtained not only the forms but the pamphlets about the Army. About a month later, we both received letters calling on us to sit for the qualifying tests. Ten days after the test, I received another letter. I was to go for a medical check-up. Announcer Cheong did not receive any and was very disappointed. A few days later, I was called up to sign a 12-year bond at the Ministry. I wrote a letter to my Boss requesting for a transfer. I was granted the transfer and so on 1st of June 1966, I was enlisted in the Singapore Armed Forces.

Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute as it was called in Pasir Laba was the place at which was born my Army Career. On the very first day, some of us were ignorant of the fact that we have to answer "Sir" in return or "Double" to the place pointed, when our names were called to sort us into platoons.

In the barracks, we were shown our beds and lockers. Staff Sergeants came round and checked to see that everyone had his own things and taught us how to fix up our equipment and so on. During the first few days, we received very good treatment because we did not actually start work until the following Monday. We were

introduced to the hills round Pasir Laba by one of the Staff Sergeants. Meanwhile, we spent the rest of the time polishing our boots.

That Monday, everyone got up extra early in the morning and prepared everything for the OC's inspection. At 0730 hrs sharp, the OC came round with the CSM, CQMS, Platoon Commander, Platoon Sergeant and Section Instructors, the Staff Sergeants. "Still not good enough, there is room for improvement," commented the OC. He pointed out the fault of some individuals. Everything was quite pleasant while the OC was there. Once he had left, the Staff Sergeants went round and inspected again. This time there was the scene you can never imagine. Unfortunately, it is beyond my ability to describe everything in detail. Things were flying from one corner to another. Neatly folded beddings with a bit of unnoticeable dirt were shaken and overturned. All this time within the barrack occupied by about 20 trainees, not a single noise was heard except for the 'Flying saucers' and the 'Roaring of two lions.'

From then on, we had Stand-by-bed, Dress Parades and Show Parades at night—the time as desired by the Instructors themselves. Doubling was also the favourite means of movement in and out of company lines, to and from meals. Some platoons had even worse treatment. Immediately after lunch at mid-day we dressed in 'Full Battle Order' and had 'Short and Sharp.' At this time of day, marching at 160 paces a minute was pretty tough. We had this for a whole week. The Staff Sergeant taking drill changed from day to day. Every Staff Sergeant usually had a sore throat after this drill. Next, we also had another type of punishment—'Change Parade', that is, the whole platoon had to fall in dressed in full uniform. When the Staff Sergeant said "I want you to change into civilian clothes in three minutes. MOVE!" everyone rushed into the barrack room, changed and had to be back again in ranks in civilian clothes. At first, many of us could not do it in such a short time. "Well," said the Staff Sergeant, "Now, I want you to get back again and change into full uniform with combat boots in three minutes. MOVE!" This went on and on, until surprising to say, everyone could do it even faster than in the time given.

There were many other favourite sports of the Section Instructors, like kissing, climbing or saying to the lamp posts "I am stupid", "I am an idiot" or something of the sort and many other punishments no civilian can ever think of. At the end of the first week's training, of the 300 trainees selected from over 2,000 applicants, some of them sent in their letters of resignation. Talks were given by the OCs of both A

and B Companies and even by a representative from MID. After the talk, still more than 50% of the trainees who sent in their letters of resignation wanted to leave. As a result, the reserves working in MID were brought in for training. The final number of trainees undergoing the recruits' course was less than the original.

Training went on as usual. During the first six weeks of confinement, we were pushed around really hard, until we were more or less 'brain washed'. We did what we were told without question. To tell you the truth, many of us writing letters home to our parents, could not even spell some words we wanted without the help of dictionaries. We had to help each other as more brains can think better.

Those who received letters during the week, knowing that their parents or loved ones were going to see them, were very happy. The reverse happened to those who did not receive any. But, since living together, eating together and doing almost everything together, we got to know one another's characters and those who had visitors during the weekends asked the lonely ones to join them.

We helped each other, not only in field work or lessons, but also in personal problems. Each day, the training got tougher and tougher but we did not feel it, because at that stage, we found ourselves quite fit to take whatever they gave us. Sooner or later, we stopped feeling homesick. Six weeks of 'square bashing' soon came to an end.

On the first weekend home, we had military transport to take us to and from camp. Our neighbours could not recognise us when we smiled at them, because of our funny haircuts, which was 4 by 2 inches—regimentally registered and the dark brown skin the training gave us.

Weeks passed. Then came our recruits Passing Out Parade (POP). The basic training days were over. We still had a long way to go before the day of Commissioning which is our objective and I am keeping my fingers crossed and hoping I can pass the NCO's course which began the following Monday and was to take another six months."

VII. OATHS AND PLEDGES

During the brief hiatus between reporting to SAFTI and the first inspection by the OCs on Monday, the enlistees went through two significant ceremonies. These required that they be



Taking the oath of allegiance on 2nd June, 1966. Second from right is the late Edward Chan, then Captain and Platoon Commander of Platoon 5, 'B' Company and the magistrate administering the oath is Mr. George Sandosham.

in uniform. The first was taking the oath of allegiance (attestation) conducted by magistrates in the presence of respective Platoon Commanders in batches of ten or so on the second day in SAFTI. The magistrates, recently appointed to the Singapore Legal Service included Mr. Toh Weng Cheong, Mr. George Sandosham, and Mr. Ibrahim Burhan, all of whom went on to successful careers in private practice. The second ceremony—weapon presentation—was designed to leave a lasting impression and it was the first time it would be done in the SAF in the prescribed format. It too was conducted on 2nd June, as a joint function combining 'A' and 'B' companies in the main parade ground beside the QM complex. VIP guests from MID, senior Advisors and the magistrates were present, to lend legal formality as witnesses to the recruits signing against the serial numbers of the Self Loading Rifles (SLR) they were assigned and would be totally responsible for thereafter. The weapon presentation was meant to impress upon the recruit the sacred duty he bore in the defence of his country as well as his obligation to safeguard the weapon lest it fall into the hands of an enemy or someone unauthorised to handle it. The ceremony included a solemn collective pledge and was conducted in the light of Yehudi lamps. The platoons in each company lined up in company blocks and as each recruit's name was called, he would step up to receive his rifle from the OC or the Company 2I/C and return it to another table. The term Yehudi lamp was a name coined to describe a lamp made of empty beer cans or milk tins packed with kerosene-soaked sand with their lids almost ripped out but with a hole in the centre for a wick. The beer cans were readily available from the messes while milk tins came from the copious amounts of tea that was supplied about three times a day to trainees. The design of the can openers used in the cookhouse conveniently left the cans ready to be used once they were emptied. Apparently the Advisors were responsible for the introduction of the Yehudi lamps into the SAF (hence the



The Yehudi lamps being lighted to initiate the ceremony.

Falling in for the rifle presentation ceremony on 2nd June by the light of hurricane lanterns and Yehudi lamps. Platoon 6 under WO2 Richard Ong. The platoon in the background is Platoon 1, with recruit Gurcharan Singh very much in evidence.



OC 'A' Company Major Morrice presenting a rifle to one of the recruits.



Recruit Malcolm Alphonso stooping low to sign the armskote book acknowledging his rifle. The officer is CPT Cedric Kleinman and the civilian is Mr. Ibrahim Burhan, magistrate.

name, which was corrupted to 'Joudi' and they became indispensable for lighting targets for night firing exercises).

The possession of their 'own' rifles fired the imagination of every recruit and left him fantasising about what a deadly shot he would prove to be. Many were to demonstrate a natural aptitude and become Marksman First Class while others would never really get the hang of it. Several would even become 'gun-shy'. To some extent, those who were inept owed it to poor instruction with the instructors themselves not really having internalised the requirements of marksmanship training. On the night of the presentation however, the recruits could hardly wait to draw the weapons and play with them. But before long, the reality of cleaning and maintaining the weapons and lugging them around would set in and they would be desperate at the end of each day to check them in at the armskote. But, the love of firearms was typically life-long.

VIII. ROUGH ORIENTATION

Notwithstanding Khoo Kong Ngian's account, until the first Monday following their arrival in SAFTI, the enlistees were going through what could be termed halcyon days, relatively speaking. The formal training programme had not started. They were picking up the rules of engagement between themselves and the establishment, the tenor of life in a military camp, the rudiments of drill, adapting to their kit and uniform and getting to know one another. Instructors came around frequently at night to see how they were doing and to get

to know the individuals in their sections, sometimes indulging in a bit of ragging, all practices which the graduates of the initial courses in SAFTI adopted in their turn with National Servicemen. Hwee Man Lok remembers being interdicted by then Lieutenant (LTA) Robert Wee and being ordered to shimmy up a lamppost for sporting a five o'clock shadow (at ten in the morning if truth be told). And as Kong Ngian mentions in his recollections, it was common for instructors to pick up on innocuous acts by the enlistees and demand forfeits like doubling up to some point and back. The evenings were mostly free and, if anything, the enlistees were hard put to pass time. In 'A' Company, some hit upon an interesting diversion: 'horse' racing. Fit enlistees piggybacked their colleagues around the company square or raced with one another and punters placed bets. Recruit Rajagopal Murugian was the hot favourite and had to be appropriately handicapped. It appeared to have been the natural outcome of the presence of a number of enlistees who had already cultivated an interest in the ponies in their now rapidly receding civilian lives, including one Mohammed Aslam who had been a jockey and would return to that profession when he did not qualify for a commission with the First Batch. But, many enlistees were desperately homesick that first weekend and were ready to throw in the towel.

There was a serious side to some of the hassling that all the enlistees—now officially recruits—received. Doubling to do anything inculcated immediate compliance as an imperative of military discipline and contributed to physical fitness; the change parades underlined having all one's personal kit well organised and accounted for and discouraged dilly-dallying; the savage criticism of the results of the initial attempts at being ready for a barrack room inspection set the minimum standards that would be tolerated, not only within the barrack rooms but for any other end product demanded. Being the military, the honeymoon was brief. It was to be strictly business from day one. In accordance with the received wisdom of the time, it was also the official policy to allow the trainers the latitude to break down the individual recruit to a common base level and re-constitute him in the then accepted image of a soldier. The 4x2 haircut, sometimes romantically compared with the enfeeblement of Samson, was not only hygienic but also an identity tag, while the calls to abuse oneself—"I am stupid" and its equivalents—pre-empted adrenaline build-up that could result in retaliation against tormentors.

The dominant concern at SAFTI in the first phase with the first intake was physical fitness. Whether this had been so in the regular units is not clear. The few Advisors who were observed around SAFTI hardly represented the level that seemed to have been expected of the first intake. It may have been foresight by the Instructors arising from the training programme that was being developed and possibly the view from MID because in the forthcoming months, Dr. Goh frequently alluded to the Spartan model of military training and the 'rugged society' that was envisaged for Singaporeans as a whole. Deliberately or otherwise, to stress the physical fitness standards, within the first five days after their arrival in SAFTI, the recruits from both companies were led out—separately—on a 3-mile route march in full battle order. They were grouped into their respective platoons in three parallel

columns, the standard 'fall in' format and while it was in the morning, it was also the hottest time of the year. Unaccustomed to steel helmets and full backpacks, carrying a ten lb rifle, wearing brand new boots and new fatigues and obliged to keep pace in a platoon formation, it was to prove an epiphany to the majority. When they eventually staggered back to their company lines, about one third of each company could not wait to quit the programme on the spot. They wanted to exercise the option in their enlistment contract that said that they could do so without penalty within the first three to six weeks.

The numbers seem to have taken SAFTI by surprise also. Attempts to persuade the quitters to stay were less than successful. It had proved one cultural shock too many. SAFTI notified MID and no less than Mr. George Boggars, the Permanent Secretary, with the help of Mr. Phua Bah Lee, Parliamentary Secretary, MID, had to intervene with a personal appeal to those who wanted to resign. Several First Batch graduates recall that in effect, he said that MID would not accept the resignations though he couched it in words of an appeal for them to defer their decision. All the same, several of the most insistent applicants were apparently let go.

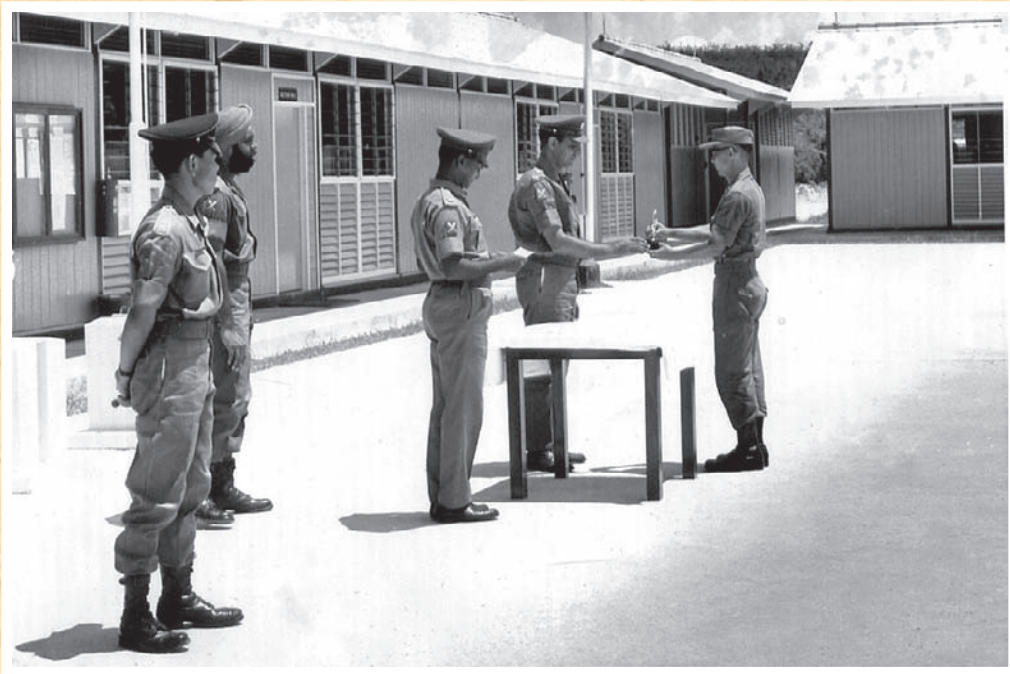
For those who stayed, things did not get much better for quite a while. One dreaded activity was the obstacle course of which the six-foot wall, the ropes and the parallel bars were the most challenging. It was also frequently followed by a stint of 'duck-walking' which required the recruits to advance several metres at a squat up the slight incline to the back gate, and could prove both exhausting and excruciating. Another aggravation was 5 Basic Exercises (5 BX): starting with the first morning in SAFTI, it was a morning ritual taken by the duty officer who would turn up at 0530 hrs and chase everybody out of bed for callisthenics followed by a run. Serious foot and arms drill was also introduced and it could be conducted for an hour at a time and route marches, more accurately described as forced marches, were by no means over. Inconspicuously however, the recruits were breaking in their helmets, combat boots and stiff uniforms, becoming more supple, developing their stamina, learning to close out stress and fatigue and beginning to gel with one another, drawing on the collective strength of an emerging brotherhood. The routine became incrementally more bearable: thoughts of quitting were replaced by prospects of overcoming a challenge and the prize at the end.

IX. CONFINEMENT TO CAMP

Where the idea came from is not known, but the Advisors must have strongly endorsed it because it was practised in the IDF. Some of the Instructors said that it had been a practice in the regular battalions to confine new recruits to camp totally for the duration of their basic training. In any case, it had been decided that all the recruits would be confined to camp for the first six weeks, the intention apparently being to expose them to the frequent



V formation. Recruit Swee Boon Chai's contribution for a productive Sunday during the six weeks' confinement: as an ex-Volunteer he conducted classes on tactical formations and firing positions with the SLR.



Recruit Lee Song Chong of 'A' Company receiving a prize (presumably as a team captain) from LTC Vij following a volleyball competition during the six weeks in which the recruits were confined. It was a time when everybody was fleshing out the scope of the training regime in the new institute.

prospects in the army of being on operational deployment for days on end, out of contact with civilisation (in the jungle?). Once again, the proposition did not bear close scrutiny. True, it did provide a separation for many of the younger recruits from the comfort of family and home and initiated greater self-reliance once homesickness was overcome. It may even have forced all the recruits to pick up on the military regime more quickly. But the 5 BX runs, albeit along little-used (in those days) Upper Jurong Road, with civilian habitation on either side and the frenetic building activity going on inside SAFTI itself, reminded the recruits that they were still in the midst of civilisation. The outcome of the confinement was mainly to intensify the nostalgia for the bygone days of civvy Street, with discretionary use of time, comfortable clothes, freedom of movement, freedom from oppression and most of all, access to the female who, began to look increasingly delectable as each day passed. And, they were not difficult to encounter in the shape of farmers' daughters (or wives for that matter) and sellers of refreshments in strategic locations that they soon identified as habitual debussing and RV points in the training area.

There was no permission to leave camp even on evenings without night training, not even to go to the laundry at the 15½ milestone on Upper Jurong Road as all military issue including bed sheets and pillowcases, were collected weekly and sent to the Prisons for laundering (to what eventually became SCORE, the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises). Such evenings could only be spent in the canteen that was run by a civilian contractor, with duty-free beer and duty-paid cigarettes and the wildest things one could get was to acquire a mild case of inebriation. The stresses may have induced quite a few recruits to pick up a taste for alcohol and tobacco. Although there is no record of any of the recruits getting into trouble for being drunk, smoking was pretty widespread. There were no taboos about smoking, other than that nobody could smoke in the auditorium when a lecture was going on, or when being addressed by an instructor other than during a smoke-break, not to mention when on parade. Smoking became a form of escapism and associated with a temporary relaxation of pressure. Bumming cigarettes from mates became so endemic that many hardcore smokers resorted to some bizarre practices to discourage their friends, which are best left to the imagination. One was quite common: a smoker would pretend that he had taken the last cigarette in the pack and discard it, only to pick it up again when the scrounger was out of sight. But, this had its obvious dangers when dealing with the street-wise.

Such was the urge for civilian life that when on the second weekend, Lieutenant Kesavan Soon of Training Department, a devout Catholic, who was on duty that Sunday, enquired if any of the recruits wanted to attend church service, many who had probably not stepped into a church for years suddenly developed the urge to do so. Lieutenant Soon wisely withdrew his offer when he realised that non-Christians were also involved.

In their desperation at the confinement, two recruits got into potentially serious trouble, from which they were saved only by the kindness of the Duty Officer of the day. They plotted a bit

of AWOL (absent without leave) one free evening during the period of confinement. One of them later claimed that he had been informed that his mother was unwell and wanted to ask for permission to see her.⁴ The other had persuaded him that there was a smarter way around the problem than asking for official leave which would have required convincing the Company HQ that his claim was valid. Being an impressionable 19-year old, the first recruit was persuaded by the other, who was much older and an ex-teacher. Noticing that the guards assumed that only officers had cars, they also managed to book out at the Guard Room using the older recruit's car. The first recruit got to see his mother but then they decided—it being a weekend and all—to take in the town and ended up at the Lido Theatre in Orchard Road to watch a movie. Second Lieutenant (2LT) Abdullah Ghani who was also enjoying the movie, spotted them in the theatre and recognised them as 'A' Company recruits. 2LT Abdullah either phoned up SAFTI or returned ahead of them and left instructions for them to be apprehended at the Guard Room on their return. The two recruits were duly locked up and left to cool their heels in a cell for the entire weekend until the Duty Officer came and released them during the staff parade on Sunday. Needless to say, they did several armskote duties more than their colleagues, but got away without anything worse.

Another recruit was more successful and was able to get out of camp repeatedly. He owned a sports car and was already a man of the world, able to carry himself with panache. He would merely put on a tie with his long-sleeved shirt and drive out through the main gate. The guards would smartly salute him and wave him through the gate. And, they would do the same on his return. Nobody in his company or platoon snitched on him, but he failed the officer cadet phase and quit soon after, perhaps as he should have, considering a more serious incident in which he was involved during that phase.

X. SAFTI OPENING CEREMONY

On Saturday, 18th June, SAFTI officially got its name. There would be no parade because the enlistees were still raw recruits who did not quite know their right foot from their left on the parade ground, the military metaphor to describe this malady referred to other parts of the anatomy. But, it was really significant in that SAFTI was the first dedicated military camp created by the independent Singapore Government. All other camps had their roots in colonial days. The officiating officer was to be Dr. Goh Keng Swee, but there was a surprise in store. While there was no parade, a programme of activities, at which the recruits would also be spectators, had been laid on to commence at 1000 hrs. It included a firepower demonstration with the M16 rifle; its heavy barrel version; the offensive, phosphorous, fragmentation and smoke grenades; the Infantry Rocket Launcher; and the 52mm mortar. This would be followed by a demonstration of explosive devices comprising the bangalore torpedo, a side charge, an improvised flame mine, a jerry can of gasoline and motor oil activated by a primer and igniter. The highlight was a platoon attack demonstration on Good Morning Hill by the Instructors.



Dr. Goh's arrival for SAFTI opening.



*The unheralded arrival of Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, for the SAFTI opening ceremony.
Mr. Lee is received by Dr. Goh and Lieutenant-Colonel Vij.*

PLATOON ATTACK AREA

6 GRENADE AREA

7

DEMOLITION AREA

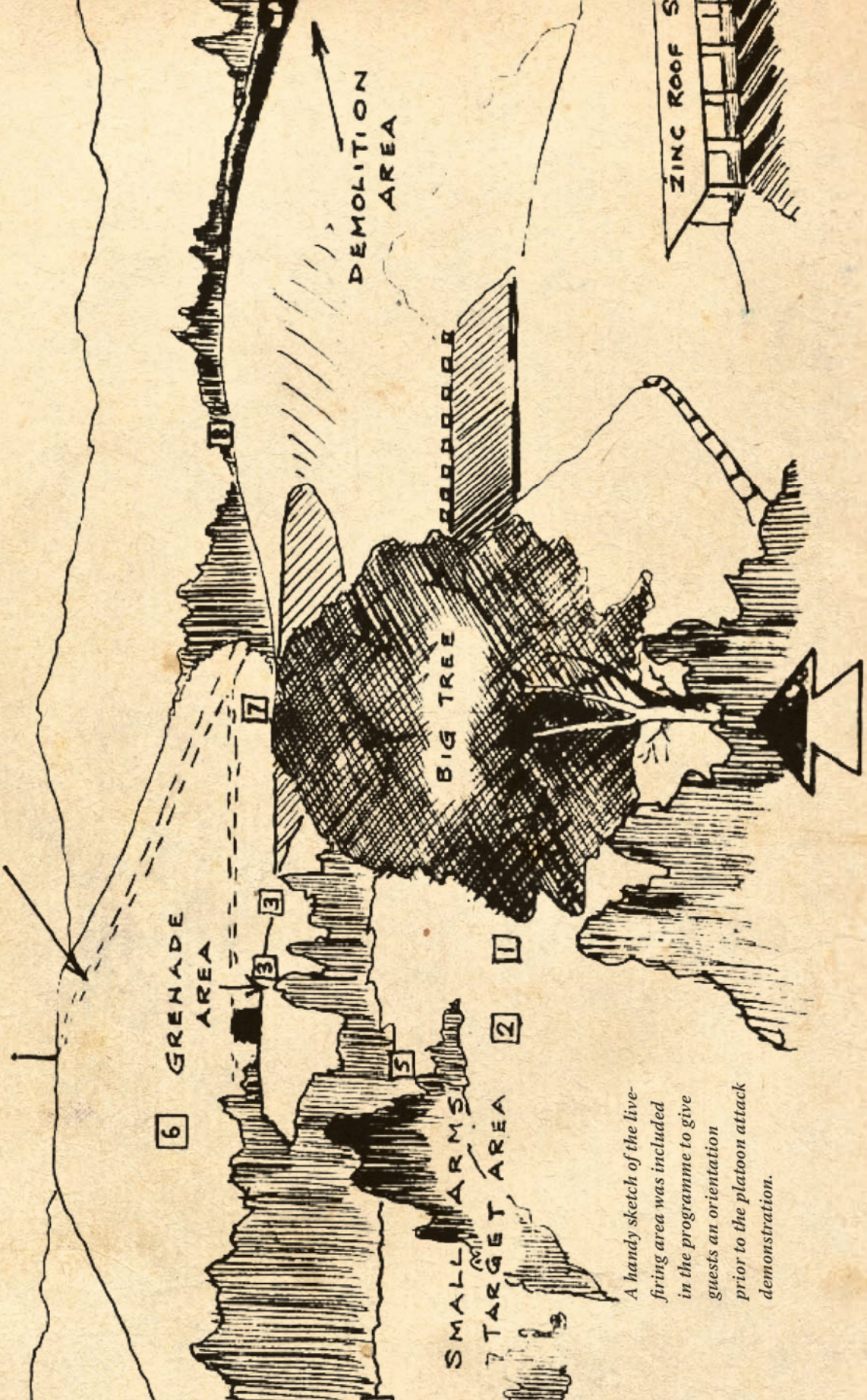
BIG TREE

SMALL TARGET AREA

1 2

ZINC ROOF S

A handy sketch of the live-firing area was included in the programme to give guests an orientation prior to the platoon attack demonstration.





The Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Goh Keng Swee watching the live-firing demonstrations.

The scenario was of a platoon in advance contacting a strong enemy section, the conduct of a quick battle procedure, the breaching of a wire obstacle and an assault with live ammunition.

On the morning itself, SAFTI was abuzz with excitement. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, sprucing up and double-checking of everything. Something out of the ordinary, beyond even that of the impending presence of Dr. Goh, was clearly about to occur. Before Dr. Goh arrived, there was a full turn out from MID: the Minister of State, Mr. Wee Toon Boon, the Permanent Secretary, Mr. George Bogaars, Director, General Staff, Mr. Tan Teck Khim, the Chief Israeli Advisor, several senior Directors of MID Divisions and the redoubtable Mr. Ho Pak Thoe from PWD. Director, SAFTI received Dr. Goh when he arrived a little earlier than initially provided for, but all the guests still remained in the holding area. Then came another official state car and everybody perked up. It turned out to be the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, although nothing had been mentioned of his presence in the official programme that had been distributed.

It was truly a red-letter day for SAFTI, with both the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister attending its opening ceremony. The guests were taken by Land Rover to a covered viewing stand on a hill feature overlooking what was to be known as Four-Track Junction and Good Morning Hill, the demonstration area.



Dr. Goh pins the new SAFTI formation sign on Director, SAFTI's uniform as MAJ Richard Jambu and the Adjutant, CPT R. Ramachandra (back to camera) look on.



Prime Minister giving his very first official address in the newly created SAFTI.

The demonstrations went off well and the Instructors gave a good account of themselves as they charged uphill, shooting live rounds. There was a tea break before the official opening ceremony in the Institute Auditorium which also doubled as the company auditorium in SAFTI, and was air-conditioned. The key personnel of SAFTI, the Instructors and trainees had already assembled there. The programme was kept simple. All the guests were seated on a raised stage at the front of the auditorium. On the wall above their heads hung a Singapore flag and rolled up next to it was the newly created SAFTI banner. Director, SAFTI's introductory remarks were a summary of the steps taken to set up SAFTI, covering the hard work of the PWD, the selection and training of the Instructors and the selection and distribution of the first intake of recruits. He gave due credit to the staff of MID and warmly acknowledged the sacrifices all had put in. He then ushered Dr. Goh to the lectern. It was clear that Dr. Goh had done some serious research in the characteristics of armed forces historically and in current times. He talked about those in Europe, without naming them, in medieval times that had descended to hilarious ritual battles instead of actual combat. He referred to the period before the warring states in China when chivalrous warlords would not allow their generals to engage opponents at their most vulnerable, but wait for them to be fully prepared. Alarming, for the new recruits, he recounted how all male Spartans were automatically enrolled in the regular army and slaves were responsible for economic activity. The alarming part was when he said that the coming-of-age ritual for a Spartan male was a public flogging and to be put to death if he showed the slightest anguish. To the recruits' relief, he rejected all these models and talked of tough training and intelligent generalship as the preferred hallmark of the SAF. Director, SAFTI then moved to the floor of the auditorium and Dr. Goh joined him. Captain R. Ramachandra, Adjutant, SAFTI, marched up to Dr. Goh, saluted and handed him a pair of the newly designed SAFTI formation sign, saluted again and stepped aside. Director, SAFTI removed his existing formation signs depicting the crescent and five stars used by the SMF and MID from his sleeves and handed them over to Captain Ramachandra. Dr. Goh then pinned on the sleeves of Director, SAFTI the crossed torch and scimitar device that all service personnel posted to SAFTI would be required to wear henceforth. The rolled up banner of the first SAFTI flag was unfurled on the auditorium wall behind the guests on the stage. It depicted the SAFTI crest in colour, which comprised the crossed torch and scimitar framed by two laurels and a scroll emblazoned with the acronym SAFTI. Dr. Goh then proceeded to unveil the plaque commemorating his official opening of the institute. And so, SAFTI was born.

Director, SAFTI then invited Mr. Lee to the lectern to address the audience. His off-the-cuff speech was brief and to the point. He acknowledged that his presence had been unplanned but that he was pleased to be present at such a historic occasion. He had wanted to see for himself how things were going in SAFTI. What mainly motivated his visit seemed to have been reports on the lack of resolution by recruits. Mr. Lee had been apprised of the agitated responses of the recruits to their initiation into military life and the larger than expected numbers who wanted to back out of the programme. He addressed this obliquely when he mapped out the demands of the profession and the importance the Government placed on Singapore's

defence. He referred to Singapore's unexpected sovereign independence, its vulnerabilities and the geopolitics of the region. Singapore had to urgently acquire the means to stand up for itself. The ringing message was that Singapore would never 'plead for peace' and it would engender friendship with its neighbours through strength, not weakness.

Nothing could have persuaded the trainees and the staff of SAFTI of the earnestness of the Singapore Government about the raising of the armed forces as much as the presence and the words of both then-Prime Minister and then-Minister of Defence within the space of two hours. Mr. Lee left immediately after the ceremony. Dr. Goh took the opportunity for a site inspection and to get an update on the progress of the on-going construction in SAFTI with Mr. Bogaars, Mr. Tan Teck Khim and Director, SAFTI.

XI. FAMILY GUEST DAYS

The recruits had been told at the end of the first week or so that they could invite their families and friends to visit them during the third Sunday, 19th June. Each company was given a time block. The visitors would be allowed into the barracks escorted by the respective recruits to show the living conditions. There would be some refreshments and the canteen would also be open. The barracks were to be made up as if for inspection.

Around 15th June, the recruits had their first pay parade, as it was a practice in the army to pay fortnightly. Each platoon fell in outside its respective barrack block before an officer from the platoon who was seated at a GS table, with a pay clerk beside him. As his name was called, each



Mr. Lee and Dr. Goh getting first-hand accounts of SAFTI's teething months at the reception.

recruit would step up to attention before the officer and slap the back of his right hand on the palm of his outstretched left hand. The cash, down to cents for half month's pay, would be plonked down on the right palm and the recruit had to shout "Pay correct, Sir!" step back, turn right smartly and fall out. No saluting, as they were in PT kit. This was the format for receiving anything due to a soldier that was personally handed out by a superior on parade, including prizes, scrolls and the like. This first pay parade was timed such that the recruit would be able to pass his salary to his family when they came at the weekend and not risk leaving large amounts of cash around the barrack rooms.

The best part of the guest day to most recruits was that the guests would be allowed to bring food and other creature comforts. For nearly everyone, this was a real treat. There were some, however, who would have no visitors because they had somehow become estranged and some, who had actually joined the army to get away from troubles outside, reminiscent of the applicants for the French Foreign Legion. There was great excitement on that weekend and many joyful reunions. For the guests, the recruits were a sight—weird haircuts, ill-fitting uniforms, jockey caps, complexions burnt black by the sun, leaner and perhaps meaner. They were also bemused by the strange practices such as saluting and coming to attention when addressing an officer. Some recruits still instinctively halted when they saluted a passing officer not yet having got the hang of saluting on the march. And, to some, the thick rubber mattresses, two pillows, mosquito nets, flush toilets, and the distinct air of order and tidiness were luxuries they could not offer at home or were alien to their lifestyle.

For the majority of the recruits, parents, relatives and girlfriends were a reminder of a saner, more congenial world out there. Apart from the comfort of their caring presence, they brought home-cooked food in thermos carriers, liniments for every imaginable muscular discomfort, 'cooling' concoctions brewed with loving care and tidbits to stash away for midnight snacks. Those without visitors of their own were generously invited to join family groups. Others were embarrassed by motherly insistence that they instantly consume the nutritious or life-sustaining potions 'smuggled' into camp, believing that their sons must by now surely be at their last gasp. For about two hours, it was practically impossible not to trip over photo groups, from the Guard Room to the barrack washrooms. And then suddenly, it was all over. After seeing off their guests at the Guard Room, each recruit, now lonelier than ever, slunk back to his bunk to review his little horde of goodies, or to share them with his barrack mates, or to wish heartily that he had never set eyes on the recruitment pamphlet with Clarence Tan's MG Midget. But then again, the next weekend was only six days away after all.

The fifth weekend brought unalloyed joy to 6 recruits—or it may have been only the three in 'B' Company—one in each platoon. It was never disclosed who mooted the idea and why. It defies rational explanation because any way one cuts it, the pieces don't fit. But the beneficiaries were certainly disinclined to worry about the equitableness of their good fortune. Each of the selected recruits was privately approached by their section instructor and told that they would be allowed to go home from 1300 hrs on Saturday 2nd July till 2359 hrs on Sunday 3rd July. They would have to be in uniform going out and coming in. It would seem that the lottery was won

by a selection of the older recruits and so the consideration may have been family matters. Yeah, right on! One nominee was put in a moral dilemma. A bachelor, he was told that the choice was between himself and another recruit from his platoon who was married and it was up to him. The nominee tossed the issue around in his mind for all of five nanoseconds and selflessly sacrificed his friend for a higher cause. He left camp that Saturday at such a clip he could not be seen for smoke. Many years later, he learned that the next day Recruit Swee Boon Chai of his platoon had volunteered to teach section patrol formations based on his Volunteer Corps training, for several hours. His disappointment at the loss of this treat was but brief.

XII. RELEASE

There was a second guest day during that fifth weekend and it was pretty much a repeat of the first. In the meantime, LTA Soon's proposition for church service had been instituted after carefully sifting through the instant converts. But, the big event was the end of the confinement at the sixth weekend. Everyone was practically frantic with the prospect of leaving camp the following Friday for the long weekend out of camp. No one wanted to run afoul of the instructors throughout that last week of confinement to be told that he had been awarded armskote duty for the weekend. Never in the history of Singapore's armed forces could there have been such well-behaved and attentive recruits.

The last few days of the fifth week in camp crawled by, hour by interminable hour. There were many threats from the instructors about whole platoons being denied the weekend break, though everyone was fairly confident that it was a policy that they would be released and nothing would be allowed to interfere with that. But, nobody wanted to tempt Providence. Finally the last parade for the week was over and at the word "Bersurai" (Dismissed) there was an explosion of activity. Nearly everybody had packed in advance, mostly the uniforms they wanted to launder or alter. Some transport had been laid on to take recruits to central dispersal points, but somehow the pirate taxis had known that there would be this exodus and there was a big queue of them waiting outside on Pasir Laba Road, all going to the junction of Jalan Jurong Kechil and Bukit Timah Road. Those who were quick on their feet were out of SAFTI a mere 15 minutes after dismissal.

It must have been some weekend, mostly with girlfriends and hawker food, home cooking and re-bonding with civilian friends who could hardly recognise the depleted waistlines, the gaunt sunburnt faces, the ugly military haircut and the glazed looks of captives temporarily released. But there were lots of war stories to be told and wild oats to be sown and many happy reunions with mothers and the weekend evaporated practically before the recruits knew they were out. By about 1900 hrs on Sunday, 10th July, the majority were back in uniform and on their way to Jalan Jurong Kechil, where prearranged groups met for a 'civilised' dinner of hawker food and got a taxi earlier rather than later so as not to run afoul of the 2359 hrs deadline to be back in camp. Many would have contemplated AWOL on the way back down Jurong Road, but then again, they would henceforth at least be able to leave camp for the weekend and even for evenings, if there were no night lessons.

Endnotes

1. *To paraphrase a report in a Times magazine article of about 30 years ago regarding a US Army Brigadier General Singlaub who misguidedly commented on a politically sensitive issue while on deployment in South Korea.*
2. *All the items issued to the recruits other than those that would be used up such as Kiwi shoe polish, Brasso and Johnson foot powder were subsequently transcribed into a document called SAF 1033, which was filed with the serviceman's personal records and would follow him wherever he was posted. Losses due to wear and tear were replaced but the serviceman had to make good those that were missing either as and when or before he was discharged from service.*
3. *Interview with COL (RET) John Morrice, first OC, 'A' Company, SAFTI, on 1st August, 2005.*
4. *Interview with CPT (RET) Rajagopal on 22nd December, 2005.*

BASIC TRAINING

I. PHASES OF TRAINING

The abiding impressions of training in the first few days at SAFTI were about 5 BX nearly every morning, learning to use the rifle, the standard obstacle course, drill and route marches, interspersed with field training. These coincided with the core objectives— physical fitness, trainfire and fieldcraft—that the SAF adopted for many years thereafter for the Basic Military Training (BMT) of National Servicemen, except that the pace for the first intake was relentless and many of the safety precautions, such as avoiding the noonday heat for runs, were not addressed. In fact, perhaps in pursuit of the Spartan lifestyle advocated for Singaporeans, the ethos in SAFTI at the time was to raise the level of tolerance to what was seen as the stresses of operating in the unforgiving conditions of tropical humidity. Moreover, the knowledge of safety precautions in military training, currently based on the experience of several hundred thousand operationally ready national servicemen, was pretty superficial in 1966.

Unlike civilian organisations, as a standing operating procedure, the military rosters servicemen for essential daily duties and notifies all personnel of all key activities in camp, in advance. There is no excuse for any serviceman or servicewoman not to have read, comprehended and acted upon the Routine Orders (RO), or any other notice that has been put up on the



A group portrait that shows the size of a typical section during the Basic and Section Training phases.

camp notice board. Unfortunately, nobody saw the significance of keeping the documents that would have given a blow-by-blow account of the development of SAFTI, though there were many that would have done the trick, such as the RO of the individual companies and SAFTI HQ the PAR (Promotions, Appointments and Relinquishments) list and the training programmes. One can only wonder at this oversight considering the historic significance of the role of SAFTI in the birth of the SAF. But, some documents are available at Ministry of Defence's (MINDEF) Centre for Heritage Services (CHS) that help to jog the memory of events during those hectic days in SAFTI, together with photographs and odd copies of programmes covering specially staged events such as the SAFTI Opening Ceremony and the Commissioning Parade of the first intake of SAFTI.

The first phase of training for the first intake of SAFTI comprised of two sub-phases, namely, basic soldiering skills (basic training) followed by training to lead a rifle section (section training). The same configuration of trainees in 'A' and 'B' Companies and the platoons and sections (by barrack room grouping) was retained for both. Basic training lasted 74 days and section training followed immediately for 97 days. For each sub-phase, there was a passing-out parade, though everyone went on from basic to section training. At the end of the second sub-phase, 254 trainees finished the course. They were the residue of the original number who had been posted to SAFTI during June, taking into account all the dropouts in the first few weeks. 218 of the 254 qualified for the officers' course and 140 were chosen for the first course starting 27th November. The remaining 78 were deferred to the second course. 22 of the 254 who went through the whole section training phase were deemed to have failed and were given the option to leave though some asked for and were offered civilian jobs in MID and other ministries. Of the 14 who qualified only as Corporals, 11 chose to leave, while three were assigned to a demonstration platoon in SAFTI. The 140 who were to make up the first intake of officer cadets went for a one-week break and those who were commissioned from that group on 16th July, 1967, became known as the First Batch.¹

II. BASIC TRAINING OBJECTIVES

Basic training is typically the prosaic part of soldiering, though a novelty to those who did not have any exposure to the military through the Volunteer Corps or school cadet corps. It is roughly equivalent to what is called Boot Camp in the United States. For the first intake at SAFTI, it was generally enlivened by either the hilarious or aggravating military approach to things. In some instances, there was anxiety over handling hazardous material (hand grenades), risking personal injury (barbed wire obstacles, live-firing) or lack of aptitude (marksmanship, obstacle course). The overall training objective was to produce a disciplined initiate into a combat team, who would respond predictably to an order and stand a good chance of survival even on his own in a battlefield. This applied to all the circumstances in which a soldier would find himself on duty, a term that was stretched to mean every minute that he was within the confines of a camp as well as when performing his operational role. The only time he was not

subject to his superiors' direct orders, or indirect orders (ROs, Standing Operating Procedure (SOP), Camp Standing Orders, etc.) was when officially on leave outside a military establishment and not in uniform.

But, there are minimum professional skills and competencies to acquire to qualify as a soldier. Basic training, in broad subjects, covered the use of personal weapons, fieldcraft, drill movements and physical fitness (including dexterity, and mobility on foot), unarmed combat, basic first aid skills and regimental duties like those of a sentry, fire picket and armskote man. In the case of the first intake, however, the objective was not to turn out a rifleman for a combat unit, but to equip the trainee for higher appointments. So, some of the basics—such as sentry duty in a unit – were not required except by way of knowing how to mount a camp quarter guard as an NCO, which was done during the section training phase. These were accordingly deferred. The combat skills that a typical private soldier had to master as a precursor to being trained as a Section Leader leading a rifle section of eight men, was packed into the first 74 days. Cramming this into 74 days was possible because 'A' and 'B' companies were training companies with dedicated trainers and training means and none of the usual regimental duties of a field unit. SAFTI's HQ Company took care of those details. Additionally, perhaps the higher calibre and the motivation of the trainees expedited the learning process.

III. DRESSING TO KILL

Understandably, there was a lot of emphasis on learning to use the rifle, which was ceremoniously presented to each trainee on the second night in Pasir Laba. At 4.45 kg, i.e., 9.81 pounds and 109 cm (3.58 ft) in length, the Belgian-designed Fabrique Nationale weapon, commonly referred to as SLR, had been adopted in 1953 as the UK rifleman's personal weapon. It was configured to fire single rounds of 7.62mm (long) ammunition but later models could be modified to 3-round bursts, though it was rather cumbersome in this mode. There was a heavy-barrel version that fired in automatic as a section support weapon on a bi-pod, the heavy barrel allowing for limited sustained fire. The magazines were bulky and each could hold only 20 rounds. A soldier carried 6 spare magazines in addition to the one on the rifle and the magazines were stuffed into the two waist pouches slung one over each hip on the belt, to which the webbing was hooked. The 7.62mm NATO round was powerful and the rifle recoiled violently, which could make a firer gun-shy, i.e. anticipate the kick and lose concentration on his holding, aiming and firing discipline. But, the SLR was hardy and un-temperamental, while its length, weight and solid wooden butt with brass butt-plate made it an excellent weapon for hand-to-hand combat and bayonet fighting. However, by 1966, it had become dated with the widespread availability of the Kalashnikov AK-47 fully automatic rifle in the Communist Bloc.

Within the first two days, depending on the Platoon Sergeants and Section Instructors, each trainee was briefed and familiarised on wearing his uniform in its various configurations such

as No. 3 (leather boots with leather soles, brass shoulder titles, lanyard, formation signs), skeleton battle order (fatigues and webbing) and full battle order. Full battle order included a large floppy backpack, a heavy rubberised poncho, an entrenching tool, the bayonet, a grenade pouch, toggle rope, aluminium water bottle fitted into an aluminium mug with folding handles, two nested mess tins with folding handles, the First Field Dressing (FFD), a change of clothing with towel, a pair of canvas shoes, a military torchlight and the military jack knife which was essential for opening the ration cans in a twenty-four hour ration pack. The steel helmet, with detachable fiberglass liner and cloth camouflage cover and either leather soled combat boots or rubber-soled canvas jungle boots completed this bulky ensemble, which could weigh about 20 kg. Those who loved their creature comforts could add several packets of cigarettes, salted dried plums (sour canna), mosquito repellent, moisturising cream, Tiger Balm and mummy's cure-all medications. In full battle order, seeing the lighter side of being entrusted with additional equipment such as the Infantry Rocket Launcher was literally impossible.

IV. FIRST AID

First aid training was rudimentary in the 1960s. It was conducted by an NCO named Corporal Zulkiflie, or Zul as he was known, from the medical centre. It dealt with the basics of blood circulation and bone fracture: how to staunch blood flow with the application of the FFD and a tourniquet and immobilise a fracture with a stick, the rifle or a sling. It was assumed that the medical orderly attached to each company or platoon would provide a more professional service and this was emphasised a lot based on the concept that confidence in medical support was key to troop morale in war. In addition, trainees were taught and practised in the medical evacuation of a mate using the fireman's lift. Being young and indestructible, it is doubtful if anybody took all this too seriously, other than to hope that the person they were paired off to evacuate with the fireman's lift during the practice sessions, was one of the skinnier ones. Not many had reason at the time to contemplate the carnage of the battlefield or the horrible damage weapons could inflict on the human body, least of all their own. On the other hand, if they did indulge in such contemplation, the first aid training offered would hardly have helped.

V. ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL FITNESS ONE: 5 BX

During the first few weeks of basic training, each of the two companies had several Duty Officers who would stay overnight in camp, with 'B' Company frequently having Duty NCOs. Barring inclement weather, one of them would come round to their own company around 0500 hrs and get everybody unceremoniously out of bed to fall in on the company parade square for the famous five basic exercises. 5 BX consisted of deep knee-bends, push-ups, sit-ups, star-jumps, torso-twists and forward bends to touch the toes. After this warm-up, the

whole company would be led at a run out of the main gate and along Upper Jurong Road towards Tuas for a distance of about two km and back. Alternatively, the Duty Officer would choose to exit by the back gate between 'A' and 'B' companies and go up to spot height 175, one of the knolls of a hill feature flanking Pasir Laba Road to the east, which came to be known as Good Morning Hill. In the former instance, passing the old pigsty that used to be sited at the main gate early morning every day, the trainees could be forgiven for thinking a lungful of that balmy air was prescribed tonic for good health in the military. During every 5 BX, there were always a few who would slip off en route to the gates and return to the barrack room to carry on with their rudely interrupted sleep, but obvious as this ploy was, and easy as it would have been to pre-empt it, the Duty Officers did not seem to have caught on. On returning to the company lines after the run, many cadets would go back for a few more priceless minutes of sleep, but others would proceed to their morning ablutions at a relatively leisurely pace without the pressure of fellow trainees milling around for the toilets and showers. Those who had been excused from 5BX on grounds of illness were expected to report sick and if found to have been feigning illness, would get extra weekend duty. One trainee whose tonsils always looked inflamed ended up having them removed surgically on the instructions of SAFTI Medical Officer, CPT (Dr) Seah Cheng Hock, when he excused himself from 5 BX one morning, though that was during the officer cadet phase. 5 BX remained with the trainees through officer cadet training except that with the frequency of late night training, the occasions were reduced.

VI. ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL FITNESS TWO: THE STANDARD OBSTACLE COURSE (SOC)

5 BX was not so much a part of physical fitness as was instilling a discipline of getting up early, un-kinking the knots in the body after heavy sleep and promoting alertness at the crack of dawn. By itself, it was a good daily aerobic workout for what is now popularly recognised as the cardio-vascular system, except that it was not conducted on the mornings after late night training. But, making the soldier physically fit requires improving muscular strength, stamina, dexterity and nimbleness when faced with battlefield obstacles or hazards. The overall programme thus included the obstacle course, which addressed these requirements, while route marches and runs built up the stamina as well as the mental toughness to carry on against an overwhelming urge to quit. The latter two activities in any case are classic infantry tradecraft.

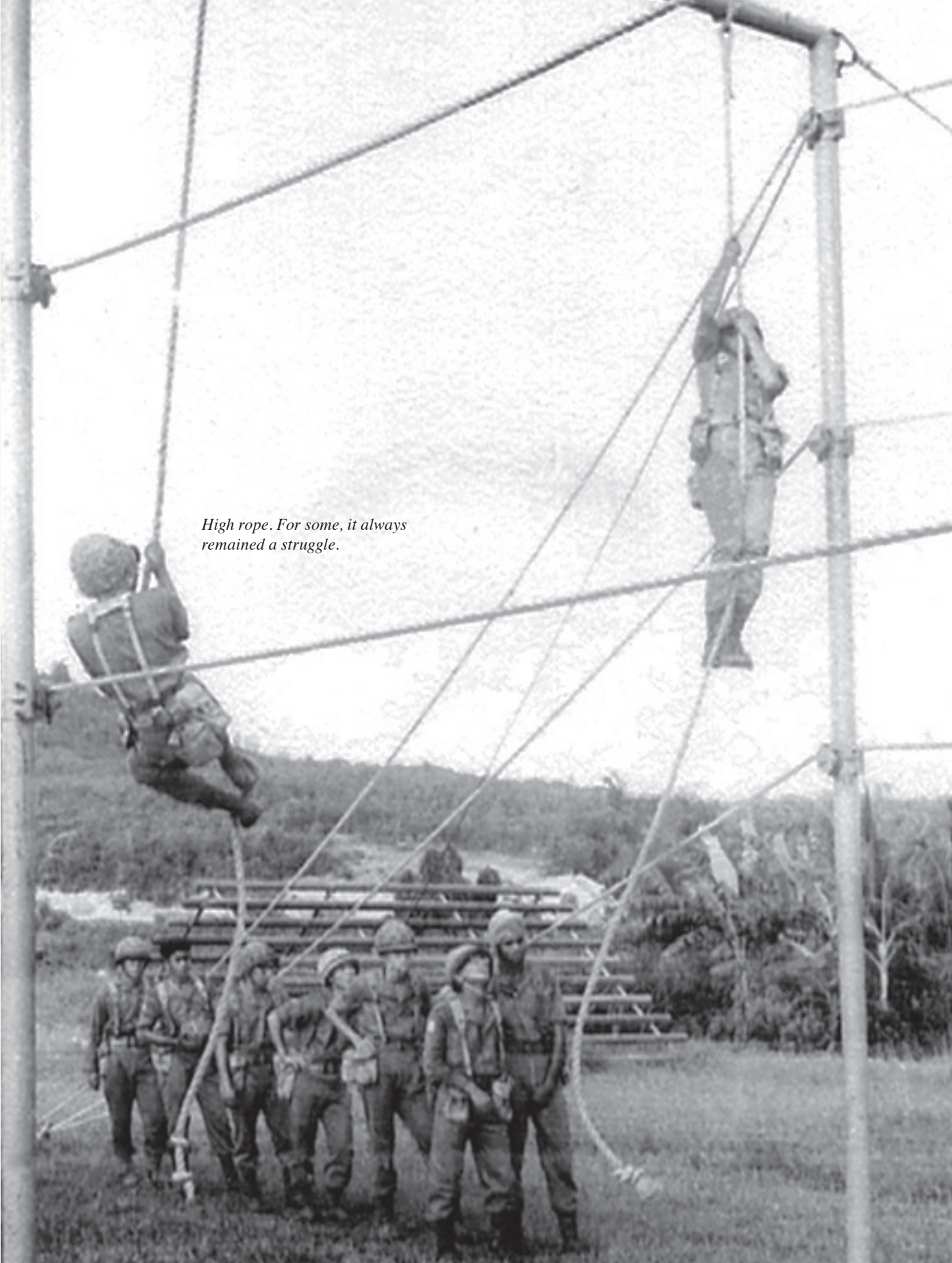
Initially, nearly every recruit dreaded the obstacle course and some throughout. That dread was manifested in the persons of WO2 Khutalib, the senior Physical Training Instructor and his henchmen, Staff Sergeant Lim Boon Chor, Sergeant Justin Hendricks, Corporal Pachimuthu and Lance Corporal Rafique bin Senan. WO2 Khutalib was a big dark man, agile, fast, inclined to risqué observations including his own prowess and he thoroughly enjoyed his work. The other four were slim, without an ounce of surplus fat on rawhide bodies. Dressed in the coveted white PT uniform, they never seemed to sweat or tire even in the heat of the noon

sun and they never let any recruit off the hook. But, there was no doubt about their passionate professionalism. At the time, there were 11 stations in the obstacle course: six-foot wall, window, swinging bridge, low vault, ‘Tarzan’ swing (over a pit), low rope, parallel bars, high rope, high balance, ‘Jacobs’ ladder and the ramp. A steel girder tower was installed later, used initially for the ‘omega’ slide (called ‘flying fox’ at the Outward Bound School) and later, for the canvas jump as well. The biggest bugbear appeared to be the six-foot wall which required the individual to sprint towards it and leap with sufficient momentum to leverage the greater part of his torso over the top and swing up one knee to seek a supporting purchase to roll over to the other side. The obstacle course was always done in skeleton battle order with steel helmet. For the wall, the rifle was slung across the back. This added to the problem for those who found the whole proposition difficult. While it is true that the strength of the arm, relative to the weight of the body, is a factor, the wall could also be cleared with the right technique. Some took the trouble to practise, since there was to be a test at some point. The PTIs were very supportive, but Section Instructors would also stay back to coach those who had difficulties.

Of the other obstacles, the 20-foot high ropes tended to present a problem for essentially the same reason as the wall: the relationship of the body-weight to the lifting power of the arms. But once again, technique could solve the problem. The official method was to entwine the rope between the arch of one foot and the instep of the other, to provide a footrest while the climber reached arm-over-arm. The climber used the same technique on the way down. In fact, it is possible to negotiate the high rope in both directions with short reaches (and drops) of about six inches at a time, quite easily without incorporating the footrest. This is the technique used to qualify for the Class 1 Rope qualification when the climb involves two parallel ropes side by side and the use of the feet for grip is awkward. It was never clear where this classification came from and the trainees were not required to do it, but one of the NCOs, then Staff Sergeant Tan Cheng Bong, once demonstrated it to No. 4 Platoon ‘B’ Company.

The other obstacles were relatively easy and most of the trainees got the hang of the obstacle course soon enough. Separately, from the standard configuration, the ‘omega’ was a lesson in itself. The popular Outward Bound School ‘flying fox’ is a derivative of it. The launch platform was about 30 feet high and the rope slide stretched to the ground about 20 metres away. A metal bar shaped like the Greek letter Ω is placed across the slide to offer a handle bar on either side. A safety rope is attached to the trainee and he simply steps off the launch platform. Some anticipation is needed at the other end to land on one’s feet. To most trainees, it was something of a treat. The other use of the tower—the canvas jump—was essentially to counter a fear of heights, but had not been introduced at the time.

A typical obstacle course lesson would include warming-up exercises, a run up Good Morning Hill and back, one more (warming-down?) assault on Good Morning Hill followed by a duck-walk up the incline through the back gate.



High rope. For some, it always remained a struggle.



PTI Sergeant Lim Boon Chor facing an occupational hazard.

There were many trips, including during officer cadet days, to the obstacle course. Speed in negotiating it was gradually built up and before the end of the basic course, a test was conducted. The circuit included a run of 400 metres from the 25 metre range, negotiating the obstacle course and back again to the start point at the 25 metre range. There may have been marginal failures but, physical fitness having short shelf life, they were probably not penalised solely on this basis.

VII. ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL FITNESS THREE: ROUTE MARCHES

The first route march was conducted within the first week of life at SAFTI. Platoons were formed up and OCs and Section Instructors participated. While the distance of three miles would seem ridiculously short a few weeks later, there were several factors which made it a near disaster for the whole programme of training because it had been provided that the trainees could opt out of the course within the first three to six weeks. The unanticipated factors were that the uniforms, and in particular, the boots were brand new; the steel helmets were heavy and an unfamiliar experience; the trainees were not yet physical toned; and the pace was not only forced but the marching was undertaken in formation and without

stop—a forced march, in short. At the end of the first route march in ‘A’ Company, the OC formed up the company and asked those who wanted to drop out of the course to step forward. According to reports, nearly half the company stepped forward. This was probably an exaggeration, but the number must have been substantial because the offer was promptly rescinded. When ‘B’ Company did its first route march, that mistake was not made.

But, the pressure did mount. The loss of personal freedom, homesickness and in particular, the demands of physical training discouraged many, and some were let go. Eventually, Mr. Bogaars, the Permanent Secretary of MID had to step in and unilaterally cancel the release agreement. He possibly only meant to discourage the waverers while privately acquiescing with those who were determined to go.

The route marches eventually increased in length, ending in one of 10 miles; but by that time, while they were still a hard grind, the trainees had also hardened. Safety precautions were rudimentary: foot inspections and checks on full water bottles. But medical knowledge on physical stress was largely based on old wives tales. The current wisdom was that soldiers should be able to go without water for fairly long periods and so a kind of water discipline conditioning element was introduced into the route march programme. It translated into only one water bottle worth of water per route march. Knowing no better, the trainees of the first intake accepted this as professional dogma, drank fully before departure and survived without serious casualties.

VIII. ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL FITNESS FOUR: ROAD RUNS

Interspersed with the route marches were runs in Skeletal Battle Order (SBO) and Full Battle Order (FBO). The former wearing only the webbing, pouches, helmet, rifle and bayonet and the usual garnishing of water bottle, FFD and toggle rope.² The latter included the backpack, ground sheet, poncho and mess tins as well. In both configurations, leather soled boots were mandatory for conventional warfare scenarios. For jungle warfare, the tall green canvas rubber-soled jungle boots were specified. Strictly speaking, FBO should have included the minimum items for overnight deployment including rations, change of clothing, entrenching tool and a contact rate of ammunition including hand grenades, a total weight of about 20 kilogrammes with the rifle. Fortunately, the trainees were spared this exquisite reality check for the road runs. In addition, during the final test, which was six miles in one hour and held on Boon Lay Road, the helmet outer was excluded and this no doubt prevented many potential failures.

All the same, at the end of basic training, there were some very tough trainees in SAFTI and the diligent, burly WO2 Kutalib and his PTIs had ceased to be the nemeses they had initially seemed.

IX. TRAINFIRE

Training to shoot with a rifle was part of a bigger package of small arms training which spanned the basic, section level and officer cadet phases. The overall small arms training module included instruction and practice on the rifle, the anti-tank rifle grenade, the hand grenade, the General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG), the Infantry Rocket Launcher (IRL), and the old British 52mm light mortar. In the 1960s, the M203 grenade launcher had not yet been introduced into the SAF, but there was a rifle grenade that could be fired from the SLR.

In later years, it became fashionable to describe the infantryman as a one-man weapons' platform. It is a valid description. The infantryman vocation is conceived to seek and destroy the enemy in any terrain and weather and his main resources are the weapons he carries on his person. Of these, the centerpiece is the rifle and its accessories: the bayonet and the grenade launcher. The GPMG, the IRL and the light mortar enhance the infantryman's mission profile when operating within a platoon or a section. Those assigned to use these latter weapons are sub-specialists within the vocation. The individual infantryman provides the cross-terrain mobility, but more important, is his independent self-directed operating capability, which allows him to break down a team mission into his personal component and execute it on his own volition. His basic ability, therefore, must be proficiency with his personal rifle and its accessories and his training with the rifle must result in it being an extension of his psyche, e.g. he must be able to shoot instinctively and hit a target at close range.

The rifle presentation ceremony conducted solemnly on the night of 2nd June, following the attestation before a magistrate, had made each first intake trainee emotionally charged about his rifle, as intended. No doubt each entertained visions of being an expert marksman, though many would be disappointed. Basic marksmanship—the ability to hit a target the required minimum number of times prescribed by the establishment—can be achieved by nearly every shooter given a good grounding in the principles of holding, aiming and firing and sufficient practice. But, there are practical limits to how much time, effort and resources can be devoted to a large body under training. Moreover, like any skill, it must be constantly honed to get the combination of sighting, breathing and squeezing the trigger to work fluidly and instinctively.

Trainfire began with company level lectures on the development of rifles and the firing mechanisms and other theoretical subjects. There were also lectures on the organisation and conduct of small arms ranges, with the key admonition that no firing would begin until the red flag was raised on the range flagpole. The first intake was fortunate in that it did not have to move out of SAFTI for range practice other than a couple of times to the old Seletar Range for specialised shoots because it had virtual monopoly of the three ranges in the complex.

Practical training with the rifle began with a briefing on the technical details of the SLR followed by others on identifying the parts, stripping and assembling the weapon by day and night and cleaning and maintaining it. There were practical tests on stripping and assembling within prescribed times and with all the SLRs available in SAFTI being of right hand configuration, with the cocking handle on the left, the southpaws among the trainees were at a disadvantage until they mastered their own personal techniques. Actual shooting, which was eagerly anticipated, followed dry training on holding, aiming and firing. Rifle resting on tripods, aiming discs and Figure 11 targets were used to see if the trainee understood the alignment of the aperture rear sight with the tip of the foresight. That out of the way, a coin was balanced on the foresight guard to see if it would drop off when the trigger was squeezed (as opposed to pulled) while the breadth was being expelled slowly. Though not fool proof, (the rifle rests were pretty rickety and would not remain as positioned), the trainees generally got the hang of it and were ready and eager for their first range practice.

It was mandatory that the range be conducted by a commissioned officer who would stand on a raised platform at the centre of the firing point and issue his commands through a loudhailer. NCO instructors who were crack shots demonstrated firing from various positions at the 100-metre range. The demonstrations brought together the roles of Range Control Officer, the firer's assistant, pre-loading of magazines according to the firing configuration by the loading detail, the collection of ammunition from the ammunition point, the sequence of fire control orders—loading, firing, unloading, making safe, declaring—and moving forward with the assistant to check targets and record scores. The 100-metre range was also used for the introductory shoot by the first intake. For those who had fired the Enfield Mark 4 as a school cadet, the recoil of the SLR was not a surprise, but for those who had not had any experience with rifles, the first round must have been a bit disconcerting. However, they soon got used to it and it would make them grateful for the light recoil of the M16 when it was issued later.

Combat zeroing their respective rifles to the trainees' eyes was done at 100 metres after the mathematics of zeroing was explained. The basis was that the flat trajectory of the rifle at 100 metres would result in the same fall of shot as the drop in trajectory at 400 metres. For the zeroing, each trainee fired three to four groups of three rounds each from the foxhole with support. They would move forward with the instructors to record the details of their group after measuring the distances with a ruler and on their return to the firing point, establish the Mean Point of Impact (MPI) and adjust the rear aperture and foresight post by the appropriate number of clicks or half-clicks. The lessons then proceeded to field firing at combat targets at 200 and 300 metres at the 300-metre range, where butt parties were needed. Targets were made to appear and disappear at different locations according to timed sequences controlled by an instructor at the 200 and 300-metre butts, for firing from foxhole with support, prone without support and kneeling or squatting. Communications between the firing point and the butts were by field telephones. Slow reactions by butt-party personnel to the commands to raise and lower the targets promised many 'takes' (as in take three extra armskote duties).

From the beginning, there were sideshows at the range—as far as possible coaching on trainfire—but on long mornings, they could be other subjects, or opportunities for the Platoon Sergeant or Section Instructors to brief or interact with the trainees. Invariably, a wisecrack or mischief would attract a minor punishment, but the instructors were careful to avoid making trainees who were due to shoot, run around because it would affect their shooting scores. Butt-party duties on the whole were tolerable because the breaks between firing offered opportunities for chatting, catching up on the latest gossip, ribbing one another and smoking. The duties included raising and lowering the 8 foot x 10 foot bulls-eye target (a two-man task), or the Figure 11 target, indicating with an arrow-head pointer the fall of shot or a ‘wash-out’ (the origins of the term WOWO kings, which incidentally predated the first intake and was common in school cadet corps jargon), recording the hits and patching the targets for the next shooter. At the end of butt-party duty, there was the march back to the firing point and the switch of roles.

The first intake trainees also went on to advanced field firing which was represented by firing the heavy-barrel SLR on its bipod at 400 to 500 metres, first in single shot mode and later in bursts from a prone position. For this, the Seletar Range was used. The lessons were essentially for familiarisation with the firing characteristics of the heavy barrel rifles, as these were deemed Section Support Weapons.

The culmination of the trainfire was the Marksmanship Test conducted at the 300-metre range in SAFII. It comprised of three separate ‘practices’ of 11, 7 and 3 rounds respectively, corresponding to the foxhole, prone, and kneeling/squatting positions. Each firer covered two lanes in which targets would appear at 100, 200 or 300 metres. Targets would appear randomly at the left or right lane. For the foxhole and prone positions, the targets could appear separately at 200 metres or 300 metres or concurrently over the two lanes. The Figure 11 (standing enemy) target was the mainstay, but the Figure 12 (prone enemy) target was used for the kneeling or squatting position. The rationale for the Marksmanship firing positions was that the foxhole with support represented shooting from a defensive position; the prone represented firing in a battlefield encounter; and the squatting/kneeling from behind cover like a low parapet or a fallen tree trunk. To pass the Marksmanship Test, the minimum score was 7; those who got 14 and above were designated Marksman Class 1. Failures received extra coaching and had to go for re-shoots. If there were total failures, nobody knew of them because all in the first intake passed out at the end of recruit training.

Range practices continued into section training and officer cadet training. Night firing lessons were conducted during section training after the issue of the M16. For the night range practices, the 100-metre range was used and a strip of white tape of several yards length was laid on the ground in front of each firing position. Figure 11 targets, faintly lit by ‘Yehudi’ lamps were engaged from the prone position with a combination of tracer and

ball rounds, on a single shot basis for the initial lesson followed by burst fire from the hip (instinctive firing) at a range of 25 metres in the subsequent lesson. In officer cadet training, range practices were used for 'mutuals', where trainees learnt to teach their peers according to the official lessons plans. These included zeroing, which the reallocation of weapons in 'A' Company necessitated as well as field firing (standard range practice) and night ranges. Commissioned officers supervised all ranges and were mandatory to be present when firing was conducted.

X. BAYONET FIGHTING

There was no controversy over bayonet fighting in the 1960s. One-on-one combat with the enemy was seen as the end game in the assault and the defence, in the former to destroy the will to fight and the latter, to deny the enemy his prize to the last man, if it came to that. It was not really an issue of running out of ammunition but an expression of bitter resolve. It also represented a measure of the willingness to take a life directly with one's own hands face-to-face, rather than as a distant disembodied activity with a long-range weapon. It sought to test the soldier's squeamishness about the dark truth of his profession, though of course peacetime training would not even be a pale shadow of the wartime reality of sticking a blade into the body of another human being and maybe even turning it.

Interestingly, the training was done entirely by NCOs. There were standing dummies made of Hessian sandbags fixed on a frame, with other sandbags lying beside them on the ground. After the demonstration, trainees queued up about 15 feet in front of each standing dummy. As each trainee came to the head of his queue, he was ordered to fix bayonet as a drill. At the order to attack, he would flick his rifle up from the ready position across his body to the attack position, screech out a blood-curdling yell (or so he hoped) and rush headlong at the dummy, bring his rifle back to execute a butt stroke on the dummy and thrust it forward straight armed, so that the bayonet entered the centre of the dummy and pull it out. Then, the trainee was required to turn to his right or left and stab the recumbent dummy twice, step on it to extricate the bayonet and rush forward past the line of dummies. Enigmatically, they were also taught that if the bayonet was stuck, they could fire a round to free it, raising the question of why not shoot the enemy in the first place? Apart from discovering whether one had a blood-curdling yell to offer, the exercise was mostly an anti-climax, compared to the theory. But, the NCO instructors had a great time getting the under-performers to repeat the process while offering rude observations about their manliness.

XI. HAND GRENADES.

One would have assumed that those who had applied for training to be combat officers would have been reconciled to the idea of the dangers of the profession, perhaps even actively craving for them. The last thing to expect would have been that even the weapons

issued to soldiers would make them nervous. On reflection, it would seem that among the first intake, there were at least some who had not appreciated what they would face in training, let alone in operations. Perhaps among the trainees, there were some who had only the vaguest idea of what military life was like in spite of all the exposure it received in the mass media, if not in school literature.

Grenade training is one activity that readily exposes nervous dispositions. Training started with technical handling, for which there were lessons on the component parts of the fragmentation (M59), assault (M18), phosphorous and smoke grenades, the activation mechanism and details such as the weight, time to explosion and effective radii. It proceeded to holding and lobbing and the rather strange requirement to shout out loudly when a grenade is thrown. (Jack Palance never did that in the film *Attack* though he did threaten to shove a grenade down his officer's throat and pull the pin). From a training point of view, it was understandable that the soldier must have an idea of where his grenade lands, though it was never quite definitely stated whether this was a requirement in operations; it did seem that both the announcement that a grenade had been thrown and the need to locate its destination were unlikely to be observed in the middle of a fire-fight. There were several dry runs with dummy grenades in the grass field of what would become the School of Infantry Support Weapons: carrying their rifles in one hand, trainees pulled the pin and lobbed a grenade overhand into a circle of about 6 feet in diameter made of white tape about 30 feet away and after it landed, fell prone to the ground.

Live practice was conducted on the reverse slope of a feature flanking Good Morning Hill to the east, Spot Height 205. A bunker of sandbags about waist high had been erected. Trainees in steel helmets carrying their rifles waited in a rest area nearby to be called up one by one to the bunker where an instructor waited. Enroute from the waiting area, each trainee was handed a live grenade. At the bunker, he was briefed by the conducting instructor to observe the impact area and on his instructions, to pull the pin with his rifle in hand, lob the grenade, shout "Grenade!", note where it landed, duck behind the bunker wall and wait for the explosion. It seemed simple and safe enough and was so for the majority of the trainees. But for several, it proved an ordeal. They would literally go pale and break out in sweat when their names were called and would receive their grenade as if it would blow up in their faces. There were many instances of the trainee struggling to extricate the pin and after eventually succeeding, lobbing the grenade wildly and ducking promptly, only for the instructor to pull him up by his webbing to observe where his grenade had landed. It must have been a harrowing time for the conducting instructors because there was every possibility of a nervous trainee dropping an activated grenade inside the bunker, leaving no alternative but for a hasty exit on 'an every man for himself' basis. The inevitability of that was simply a matter of statistics. Fortunately, no accidents occurred.

XII. RIFLE GRENADES

The official designations are now lost in the mists of time (though probably available in some recesses of MINDEF's records) but before the M203 Grenade Launcher, there was a rifle grenade. It had a large warhead about the size of a fragmentation grenade and a finned tail that fitted over the muzzle of the SLR by means of a 'projector'. There were High Explosives (HE) and phosphorous rounds. Integrated with the 'projector' was a simple sighting device called the grill, which guided the parabolic trajectory of the grenade, the idea being to estimate the range to the target and aim through the appropriate aperture on the scale. A blank cartridge was loaded into the chamber of the rifle to fire each projectile. The lessons started with a firing demonstration and the usual lectures on the description and capabilities, the mechanism, the safety rules and in this case, information on the projector and 'practice marker.' They went on to learn and practice how to attach the grill, rules of holding, aiming and firing, vulnerable points of an armoured target and care and cleaning of the projector. This was followed by practice in loading and unloading in standing, kneeling and prone positions and principles of aiming at stationary and moving targets. After a technical handling test every trainee had an opportunity to fire one round at 100 metres and one at 150 at the 300-metre range in SAFTI. At about 150 metres, the aiming device was stretched for accuracy, while any hope of directing a round precisely into a bunker at any range was wishful. The whole thing seemed rather improvised. With the introduction of the M16, the rifle grenade was retired without any bereavement.

XIII. INDIVIDUAL FIELD CRAFT

Among the first lessons in fieldcraft, was a demonstration for which the two companies assembled at the 25 metre range to watch the effect of different weapons on various materials that might be encountered in the operation area, either for defence or as cover for the enemy. The lesson was called *Penetration Effect on Materials* (or something like that) and involved sandbags, logs, tree trunks and timber beams. The rifle, heavy barrel rifle and the GPMG engaged these from different ranges and in different modes. At the end of the firing, trainees were sent out to inspect the results, but the lesson did not really have the desired effect. Most of the trainees thought that if they needed to take cover from enemy fire, they would hardly be in a position to pick and choose. But, they no doubt concluded that it would be foolhardy to seek cover behind banana tree trunks and that it was not a good idea to go plucking bananas while on a combat patrol. Like another lesson that was to follow, it seemed one of those ideas that was more impressive in the abstract than in the execution.

The other lesson that came a cropper was one called *Crack and Thump*. Though many of the trainees may have in turn conducted this lesson as instructors, it is unlikely that any of them, to this day, knew what the whole proposition was about. Once again, it was a combined

demonstration for the two companies who were seated along the slope of a feature off Four Track Junction. The lesson purported to show that there was a distinction between the sound of a shot (crack) and the impact of the bullet (thump) or it might have been the sound of a bullet breaking the sound barrier. Other than to suggest that it was useful to distinguish between the sound of a shot being fired and whatever sounds it might produce thereafter as a matter of roughly locating the enemy, the lesson objective remained mysterious, but was probably a means of estimating the direction of the shot.

In preparation for a lesson on night orientation and direction keeping without a compass, there was also a rather vacuous attempt at teaching night navigation based on the stars, at the end of which just about the only constellation that left an indelible impression was the Southern Cross. But, details like how to use it to fix a landmark located south of the observer's location were not clearly explained. Nor did anybody learn how the other constellations would help, assuming, with the exception of the Big Dipper, that they could spot them in the first place. Even with the Little Dipper, the main point that it allowed one to locate the North Star and confirm its location relative to Cassiopeia was lost somewhere in the translation. The instructors themselves sounded like they would not have identified Venus if they had been abducted by sexy female aliens and the question remains why, to begin with, a subject that had not been mastered by them should have been presented at all. Even more puzzling was why a hand-out with appropriate schematics could not have been distributed. It was probably a case of hazy thinking and one cannot help but feel sorry for the instructor stuck with the task, because he tried manfully. Anyway, there is no record of any of the initial batch of trainees having had to resort to this arcane knowledge in the course of his whole career, not the least because in Singapore, it is only a matter of time before a lost soldier or commander would hit a road he recognised if he kept walking about an hour in any direction. However since the SAF soon began training in other countries like Brunei, Taiwan, Thailand and Australia this may have been useful until handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment became standard issue.

The individual fieldcraft lessons comprised the largest bloc of training during the basic phase and were quite engaging. On the whole, the lessons had real practical value and appealed to the idea of 'playing' soldier, although some of the older trainees were self-conscious during the practical parts of the lesson, typical examples being the monkey run or the ghost walk. The last was required for a night lesson in which each trainee had to feel his way in the dark through a path festooned with tin cans containing stones to approach a target location in a variation of the blind man's buff. The subjects all essentially dealt with survival in the battlefield and how to close with the enemy to defeat him, pitched at this stage to the individual level. Of immediate practical value was the lesson on field signals, which made intuitive sense to everybody, although the practical application was freely adapted for signals not found in respectable field manuals. Likewise, the lessons on personal camouflage were taken to heart, if occasionally overdone, considering the amount of vegetation that some trainees mothered themselves in. But, the demonstrations put up by the instructors were fun and many were surprised when they disclosed themselves to have been but a stone's throw from where the trainees sat. The other lessons covered subjects like judging distances despite

intervening elements such as valleys and reentrants; identifying the enemy against the ambient background (shape, shine, surface, shadow, silhouette); digging shell-scrapes; manning an observation post; creating a range card showing distances and prominent objects as reference points which would help to identify the location of any enemies observed; approaching or departing a position stealthily, safely or securely (stalking and infiltration) with practical exercises day and night; and reacting to enemy fire (dash, down, crawl to cover and return fire).

Fire control orders are obviously a mainstay of fieldcraft. They involve the correct format for fixing the target using a clock-face reference system and prominent features, assessing the range and issuing the fire control instruction so that the full firepower of the group can be brought to bear on the target. At basic training level, the scope was to respond to the team leader, or for any member to alert his comrades to the location of the target. It was to remain a practice that everybody should repeat aloud the individual components of the fire control order on the grounds that during a firefight, there should be no miscommunication. Many were left wondering if in the middle of a firefight they would be required to undertake this chanting.

Not quite fieldcraft, but closely related to it was one aspect of movement in the battlefield: crossing barbed wire obstacles. This ranged from simply parting the strands of barbed wire in a picket fence to allow a fellow soldier to slip through, to using wire cutters to open an access, to slithering under a low-wire entanglement (made with short iron pickets and crisscrossing barbed wire) to the distinctly uncomfortable business of pinning down a barbed wire barrier with one's body for the rest of the group to cross. The latter was a technique whereby one or two soldiers would fall across an obstacle of coiled barbed wire with their rifles beneath



Crossing a concertina wire obstacle using human stepping stones.



Lesson on field cooking. What you cook is what you eat.

them and allow the followers to clear the obstacles by stepping on their backs. The standard barbed wire—but not modern razor wire—usually caused some minor lacerations, but the real danger was that being stepped on the back several times had serious potential consequences to the kidneys, especially if leather soled boots were involved. But the technique was often used during public demonstrations to impress the spectators with the toughness of SAFTI training.

Towards the end of the basic training phase, the platoons deployed in the Mandai forest reserve, several map squares north of the Island Country Club, had to spend about 24 hours living in the field. Field rations were issued on the basis of one pack per trainee, together with a Hexamine cooker with a packet of fuel inside. The rations were primitive and heavy by current standards, consisting of hard ‘dog’ biscuits of the ‘dog-eat-dog-die’ variety, dehydrated rice, a can each of Yeo Hiap Seng chicken and mutton curry, a can of pickled spinach, a can of pineapple cubes in syrup, some chocolates and sweets, a couple of packets of orange powder for mixing a drink and an alarmingly meagre roll of toilet paper. As a standard practice, trainees broke open the package and distributed the contents more evenly in their backpacks.

At the deployment sites, trainees were paired off and told to erect two-man bashas using branches and ponchos. With heavy ground sheets, they also constructed raised sleeping platforms that gave some protection against the creepy-crawlies that infested the jungle floor as well as wet ground in case of rain. Full packs served as pillows. Some trainees recollect

lime powder being issued to spread around the bashas. The overnight camp was used to practise movements by day and night, reaction to enemy fire, field signals and field cooking. Nearly everyone had interesting accounts of a night in the jungle, one of the most common being getting lost after visiting the field toilet (or wherever), requiring others to fetch them. One pair of trainees had to abandon their basha for the night when they saw a foot-long centipede crawling into it. Nearly all trainees had brought the issued mosquito repellent lotion but nobody had told the mosquitoes what it was for. In the morning, some found that small pale-looking scorpions had sought shelter in their jungle boots. But, it was a time when there was no stigma against smoking and a good hot meal including pungent curry took casual precedence over security, if not the mission. Thus, nobody raised any serious objections to these anomalies in fieldcraft although several instructors, recounting their experiences during the Indonesian confrontation, would talk of aboriginal trackers in the jungle who could lead a patrol unhesitatingly to an enemy encampment after picking up the aroma of cigarettes, cooking or field toilets from a couple of miles away.

XIV. DRILL

There was quite a lot of drill. Drill is necessary to move a body of people in an orderly manner from point-to-point under the guidance of an appointed supervisor, or to organise that body for several essential activities such as inspection of turnout, inspection of weapons, collection of pay and other issue items, or even simply for speedily checking that each individual was accounted for. It was also—in the early days of SAFTI—a means of supervising the mandatory consumption of the bitter ‘Daraclor’ anti-Malaria tablets and in later years, to ensure that soldiers consumed sufficient water before moving out on strenuous activities like route marches in daytime. At another level, drill is a choreographed display of and by troops for ceremonial occasions, a chance to show off in flamboyant dress uniforms and precision footwork to the stirring sounds of martial music. At a third level, for those in charge of a body of men, it was an exercise in self-assurance and man-management in a very literal sense because that body needs to be manoeuvred precisely along a line of advance which must be anticipated and converted into the appropriate drill commands.

The last point is not straightforward because the words of command for drill in the SAF, like the lyrics of the National Anthem, are in Malay and few in the SAF understand the meaning of the words as such. For the vast majority of Singaporeans who have gone through military training, drill remains a matter of automatic responses to cochlear clicks that would gratify a Pavlov. It is only by familiarity with the sounds that are picked up by rote, that the soldiers in a formation respond to the command. The command itself must, however, be comprehensible and correct in formal Malay, because drill commands cannot be gibberish and Malay is the official national language of Singapore.

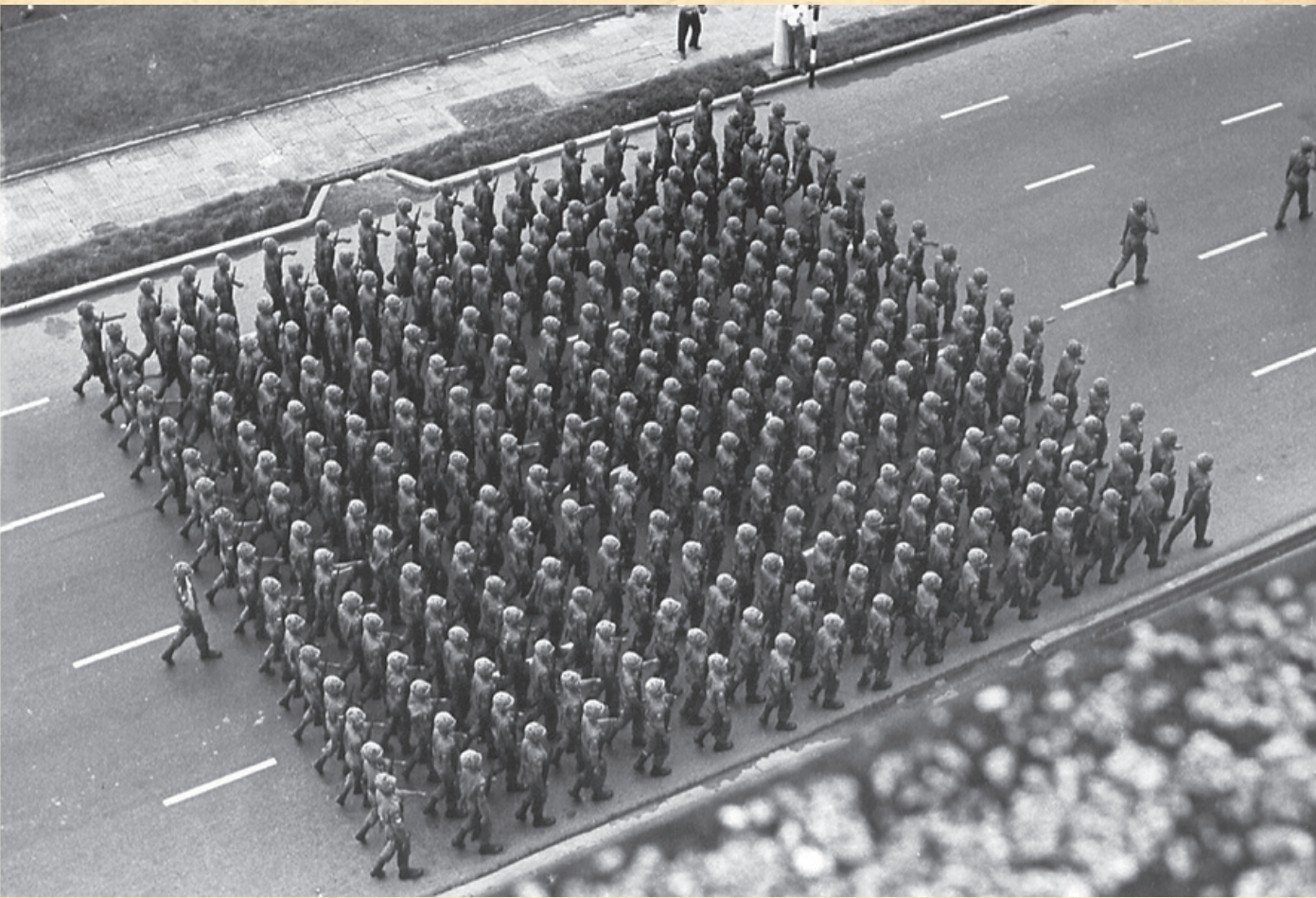
There are certain standard activities in drill. The first is to fall in as a body using the right marker as a point of reference, take a position (usually pre-determined by sizing), shake out into proper spacing (one arm's length from the next person to the side and front), stand at ease with the weapon (if carried) correctly held and come to attention when the person in charge assumes command by issuing the order to fall in. There are specific drill orders to open up or close the ranks in the static position or on the move, to adjust the carrying position of the weapon, to fix or detach bayonets, to shift the position of the platoon by a number of paces in any direction, for an individual to step out of formation and for the whole body to change step from slow to fast and vice versa.

Movement as a body is usually done in columns of three in the direction of march, according to the stipulated pace (single or double time) but can be an advance by ranks to the front. Direction of movement can be changed by wheeling or turning on the spot or right about. The integrity of the formation is maintained by 'dressing' to the right, though under certain circumstances, dressing can be by the centre or left. In big parades, stick orderlies would ceremoniously check the alignment of each rank as a part of the parade activity while the Parade Sergeant Major is forming up the contingents. On the march, movement is stopped by the order to halt (which must be given on the right step) and executed in unison. There are also drill commands for the whole body (less the marker) to snap eyes to the right or left, to pay compliments, to passing objects of reverence such as officers, reviewing stands and Regimental Colours. Other drills include the orders for presenting the rifle for inspection, presenting arms, trailing arms or switching hands carrying the rifle on the march. Orders are typically divided into an anticipatory component, which can be long, followed by the executive word of command, which must be short and forceful.

Drill can be punitive and it was used as collective punishment quite frequently during basic and section training, though sparingly during officer cadet training. Punitive drill comprises two elements: repetitive marching and execution of other drill movements in either columns or files for an extended time with no purpose other than to hassle the soldiers; or the same thing done at double time including marching on the spot, called 'hentak kaki' or both.



OC 'A' and RSM, SAFTI kneading 'A' and 'B' companies into shape for National Day Parade, 1966.



The Macedonian Phalus (16x16), SAFTI's contingent at the 1966 National Day Parade.

Imposed over 30-60 minutes in the heat of day, it is a thoroughly stressful workout that leaves uniforms drenched and tempers frayed. It can also leave the drill instructor with a serious sore throat, which is the only built-in safety valve. The Company HQ seldom interfered; sometimes the punishment was imposed by it. Whatever it was, it was a major deterrent and attention-grabber.

Day-to-day drill is different from ceremonial drill because while the former is essentially functional, the latter is for public entertainment. For all ceremonial drills, a live military band participates as a contingent that remains static after marching in and exits as the last contingent, though it sometimes marches with a moving column or conducts a marching display of its own before falling out. During basic and section training, the ceremonial component was limited to the respective passing-out parades and for the relatively simple role in the 1966 National Day Parade (NDP). For the two Passing Out Parades (POP) (the term that entered into the Singapore lexicon with passing out parades in SAFTI), the form of parade was simple. It involved marching past in review order and advancing in review order to present arms to the Inspecting Officer, followed by the presentation of awards for physical fitness, marksmanship and best cadet in each platoon and the speech. The parade would then march past the review stand in columns and out of the parade square. The POP for basic training was done in SAFTI's first main parade ground beside the MT park. This parade ground was also used for section training POP and it was only by the time of the first commissioning parade that a new super-sized parade ground was available in the planned School of Infantry Section Leaders.

Singapore's first NDP was in 1966. It was a politically charged event because it was an opportunity to show Singapore's determination to stand on its own, while the uniformed contingents would represent Singapore's determination not to be intimidated. The venue was the Padang and the reviewing stand where Singapore's first President, Inche Yusof bin Ishak took the salute, flanked by the political leaders, civil and administrative service, the judiciary, the diplomatic corps and VIPs from the social and mercantile sector, was on the steps of City Hall, where Singapore's historic milestones, including the announcement of Singapore's independence, were declared. Dr. Goh Keng Swee, in the uniform of the Colonel of the Artillery was the Escorting Officer during the inspection. The largest contingents were the Police Force, the PDF and the SAF. There were many contingents, including those of the political parties, the Singapore Fire Brigade, the Vigilante Corps, the People's Association, business groups, civic associations, schools, cadet corps, scouts and guides, bands, cultural groups, lion and dragon dance troupes and Community Centres. But, pride of place went to the SAFTI contingent made up of the first intakes of 'A' and 'B' companies who were dressed in Temasek Green, wearing the SAFTI formation sign and lanyard, with the black M16 rifles marching 16-abreast. Modest by even the standards of the following year, the SAFTI contingent was a defiant expression of Singapore's military self-reliance, especially as the contingent comprised enlistees who had been in the SAF only 70 days. But, to get the drill right, the first intake at SAFTI, still using the SLR as the personal weapon, were temporarily issued fresh consignments of M16s which they had not been trained to use and

spent many hours at the cleared land called Banjo Hill (named after one of the Israeli Advisors) which was to become the Jurong Bird Park. The 16-abreast format for the marching contingent was derived from the Macedonian phalanx used by Alexander the Great in his conquests and seen in its time as unstoppable. The only comfort for the SAFTI trainees during the rehearsals was that they could get their hands on the sleek, light rifles and anticipate the retirement of the trusty but obsolescent SLRs.

The occasion of the NDP was the first time that the public at large got a glimpse of the output from SAFTI, which itself was not something people generally knew about. But the sight of the 256-strong SAFTI contingent marching 16-abreast carrying the then futuristic-looking M16s, wearing US GI helmets with camouflage cover and the SAFTI formation sign stirred public imagination and elicited comments like ‘special commandos’, and ‘Singapore Gurkhas’ whatever that meant. It must have evoked sensations like those experienced by a later generation on seeing production lines spewing Star-Troopers in the Star Wars movies, (or, for that matter, Orcs from the Lord of the Rings). The contingent marched down St Andrews Road, turned into High Street (now Parliament Place), then west along North Bridge Road and South Bridge Road, then Neil Road and Outram Road, to disperse at Sepoy Lines. It was a pretty dramatic coming-out party for SAFTI.³

XV. MILITARY TATTOO

From 1966, the value of bringing the armed forces to the public was recognised by MID. Every year since then, some form of major public demonstration has been offered as entertainment, in addition to the National Day celebrations. These used to take place on SAF Day, which eventually was designated as 1st July. Nowadays SAF Day is celebrated mainly as a parade at which the President is the Reviewing Officer and Guest of Honour and major formations may hold open houses for the public. This arrangement reserves the more spectacular public presentations of the SAF for the NDP. Before the current arrangements were in place, the SAF Day displays were mostly conducted as a demonstration of military prowess in various venues such as Changi Airfield or one of the sports stadiums. When conducted at Changi Airfield, as it was for several years, there was participation by fighter jets, including one in 1972 when a flight of Hunters streaked past the grandstand at the highly risky height of 200 feet above ground, with the advance notice to spectators deliberately withheld. The unexpected explosion of sound caused some spectators to nearly fall off the grandstand seats. That stunt was discontinued and all Air Force demonstrations thereafter were required to observe the minimum height for a fly past, as well as to incorporate advance warning to spectators.

Until MINDEF was formed, the annual demonstrations, usually held close to National Day, included the Police. The first Military Tattoo was a humble affair conducted on 1st August, 1966, at the Jalan Besar Stadium. The programme offered a naval demonstration (on land, no



*SAFTI trainees doing obstacle course
for the first military tattoo, 1966.*



less), a demonstration by the Police Dog Unit, the Police Mobile Squad, the SAF Band and finally, select representatives of the first SAFTI intake. The naval demonstration comprised floats of naval patrol vehicles mounted on 3-ton trucks and Land Rovers performing an interception at sea. The Police Dog Unit put a display of dogs chasing miscreants and bringing them down, dogs jumping through hoops of fire, dogs clearing various types of obstacles and dogs doing other clever tricks. The mobile squad performed formation riding, intricate riding patterns crossing one-another's paths at high speed and finally a balancing act of a number of squad men stacked up on one motorcycle. The SIR Band (and possibly the Police Band) played stirring marches in both stationary and marching configurations.

SAFTI's contribution was an obstacle course assault by the equivalent of a platoon of trainees from the first intake, with representatives from 'A' and 'B' Companies. Pre-fabricated versions of the major components of the SAFTI obstacle course were assembled in Jalan Besar Stadium. They included the 'Tarzan' swing, 'Jacob's' Ladder, rope bridges, high balance, low balances with a fire-pit at the end and concertina wire obstacles which the lead trainees were required to flatten with their bodies to allow those following to charge over. The instructors selected trainees who had already demonstrated the best level of physical fitness and aptitude during the routine training on the obstacle course, though they were careful to make the team represent both companies. Those who were selected were justifiably proud and some, like Lionel Thomas practically begged to be selected, which he eventually was through sheer dint of effort.

The spectators were impressed and entertained by the whole programme, but SAFTI's item was deemed to have stolen the show, thus planting the seed for future SAF Day celebrations.

XVI. BASIC TRAINING PHASE PASSING OUT PARADE

Since the configuration of the companies, platoons and sections were not going to be changed, a POP after the basic phase was, strictly speaking, a public relations exercise for all concerned—trainees, SAFTI, MID and the families of trainees, with perhaps a touch of psychology in giving the trainees a sense of having achieved a milestone. A milestone had definitely been achieved in the 74 days since the trainees reported to SAFTI. They had become inured to the military routine and the physical and mental hardships. Mundane issues like getting ready for the muster parade, familiarity with the military rank structure, checking-out of camp over weekends, gathering in the canteen or getting a break from SAFTI cooking on free evenings and even taking time out to meet the girlfriend had become routine. SAFTI had lost its intimidating face, even if many dreaded the Sunday evenings they had to report back after absurdly short weekend breaks of about 36 hours. All those who had chosen to stay on were now pretty much in for the long haul.



Dr. Goh at the first recruit POP. The Parade Commander (far left) is MAJ T.E. Ricketts.



Dr. Goh Keng Swee addresses the basic training POP.



The Basic Training POP reception for 'B' Company in the company dining hall.

Though not yet a household name, a select few among the public, those associated in one way or another with the trainees, were now familiar with SAFTI. Many had visited the camp from the third to the sixth week of confinement to camp and after that, had helped their relative or friend to recuperate and recharge during the weekends or done laundry service, as precursors to the thousands of households which would do the same when NS was introduced a year later. Others would have come across the media coverage of the official opening of SAFTI on 18th June that year. For the Singapore Government, however, the completion of the basic training phase of the first intake was a milestone that needed telling to a larger audience, both locally and regionally. A major political decision was evidently paying off.

Rehearsals were woven into the training programme and the parade was choreographed and supervised by WO1 Sng Cheng Chye, RSM, SAFTI. It would take what the trainees would realise was a standard form, with a march past in review order by each of the six platoons, an advance in review order to end with a salute to the Reviewing Officer and a second march past in columns of threes. The Reviewing Officer was Dr. Goh Keng Swee, till then mostly a legendary figure seen from afar except on the occasion of the official opening of SAFTI on 18th June. There were prizes for the best shots, the best in physical fitness and the best

trainee in each platoon and the overall best trainee in each company. The rehearsals included the procedure for prize winners to collect their prizes. This seemingly straight-forward task, when broken down into its component parts as ceremonial drill was an extended exercise in precision: the trainees had to come smartly to attention when their names were called, pass their rifles to the trainee to their right, take one step forward, turn left or right, proceed to the reviewing stand, halt smartly in front of Dr. Goh, salute, step forward, receive the prize with both hands, right palm over left, step back, salute again, deposit the prize at a table nearby, march back to his position in the ranks, collect his rifle, come to attention and stand at ease again. Each of these steps had to be done as a drill and the sound of his right foot slamming into the ground at each halt had to be distinctly heard. There were separate company rehearsals and combined rehearsals with the SIR band under SAF Bandmaster LTA (later Captain) Abdullah. For the initial rehearsals, the SAFTI Corps of Drums (which each military camp used to have, made up of HQ Company personnel) kept time for the marching. MAJ T. E Ricketts of 'B' company was the Parade Commander, while CPT Albert Tan of 'A' Company was the Parade 2I/C. The expectation of the parade, as the first milestone on the path towards a commission was an exciting prospect to the trainees. They would no longer be raw recruits, but officially trained soldiers, though lowly privates. They were now reasonably at home in the army and the next step, which many were looking forward to without apprehension unlike the basic training, would lift them to a higher status in the hierarchy in about three months.

The parade was held on the morning of Saturday 13th August at what was, in those days, the main square of SAFTI, next to the MT lines. For the parade, the M16 was again used and the trainees were in crisply starched Temasek Green fatigues and camouflage covered helmet liners. Relatives, friends and local dignitaries were invited and there was an open house, which required the trainees to render their barracks spotless. For the Singapore public, it was a novel experience to be invited to a parade as a national event, though relatives of soldiers in the regular battalions had in the past been invited to attend parades in what were essentially limited private functions. It was evident that the guests of the trainees were uncomfortable with the socialising aspects of the reception and tended to cluster around 'their' recruit. Most of the trainees left with their guests for the weekend after the reception at the respective dining halls.

XVII. A HISTORICAL BLIND SPOT

What the first intake of SAFTI experienced in the basic training phase was ground breaking in so far as military training in Singapore had ever been. It was unique even among officer training establishments, not excluding Israel, because it was an amalgam of IDF concepts and traditional British military training, influenced by local terrain and society. But, a great deal happened in the course of the 74 days from 1st June to 13th August, 1966. SAFTI was officially opened; its raw recruits participated in a military tattoo, became the stars at



Three from the People's Association with guests and family members at the basic training POP: Chan Seck Sung, Chan Jwee Kay and Tan Lai Hock (left to right).

Singapore's first NDP, graduated as private soldiers, made SAFTI a household word, and set a benchmark for the future training of National Servicemen in the Republic.

Regrettably, nobody thought to keep comprehensive records of these historical developments.

Endnotes

1. *Minutes of The General Staff Fortnightly Meeting, 21 November, 1966.*
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *For some reason, in the official television records accessible to the public (Mediacorp archives) the SAFTI contingent in 1966 is not captured.*

SECTION TRAINING

I. SETTLING DOWN

The only break at the end of basic training was the normal weekend, which was not much since the POP was on Saturday, 13th August and section training began on Monday, 15th August. There was no change to the configuration of the platoons and sections. Strictly speaking, each trainee was now a private soldier, but for some reason they were usually referred to as ‘trainees’, probably a force of habit. By now, however, the trainees had settled down to life at SAFTI and nearly everyone took the regimented routine in his stride. Friendships and loyalties had developed and housekeeping duties had sort of synchro-meshed. Collective punishment, especially extra-drill and the threat of confinement, had made it in every trainee’s interest to cover his barrack-mates and present a united front against the instructors. Physical fitness had reduced the stresses of life and improved reactions to the unexpected. A perceptible hardening had taken place in the last two months, and recovery from the previous day’s exertions was usually complete after a night’s deep sleep, even when it was brief because of late training. The sense of being constantly hassled was being replaced by a can-do spirit: the instructors had become to some extent predictable and pre-emptable. Besides, less ‘mistakes’ were being made. One of the most significant and welcome changes was that the trainees no longer had to move as platoons to and from the dining halls (exclusive to each company), but instead, went on their own or in random groups during the scheduled times.



Tailgate party. Fresh rations in the field.

This phase saw training increasingly move out of the immediate precincts of the SAFTI training area to other parts of Singapore. Resettlement was going on from the market gardening plots of Pasir Laba that would eventually be Areas A, B, C, D and E and also the area around Tuas, to Lim Chu Kang, Neo Tiew Road and Upper Jurong Road, east of the Jalan Bahar/Boon Lay Road junction, with some of the farmers moving as far afield as Marsiling and Punggol (short-lived as their prospects of remaining farmers would prove as Singapore's development plans caught up with them). Section training exercises were conducted in the then undeveloped rural areas of Changi, Seletar, Bedok, the Mandai forest reserve, Bukit Timah, Marsiling (Spot Height 110) and even sectors off Upper Jurong Road that had been slated for resettlement from the SAFTI/Tuas area. In the SAFTI training area, unofficial names had taken hold for various reference points such as Four Track Junction, Mangosteen Junction, Flag Pole Junction, Mast Hill, Snake Hill, Red House Hill, Bunker Hill, Elephant Hill, Zailanni Patch, Cowdung Hill, Sawmill Area, Good Morning Hill and Python Hill (south of Tuas). Tracks with official designations such as Track 11, Track 41, Track 48, etc., and features identified by spot height in the topographical maps remained as such, with trainees and instructors becoming increasingly familiar with these locations in their mental maps.

They were also becoming familiar with the distinguishing characteristics of many features: the steepness of the slopes, the thickness of the vegetation, the hardness of the soil for digging and how marshy the re-entrants were. One bothersome story also began to make the rounds. There was a narrow creek running across the western flank of the Choa Chu Kang cemetery area, which was rumoured to be the burial ground of unclaimed bodies from hospital morgues, presumably with cheap coffins and done by indifferent undertakers employed as casual labour. It was claimed by several trainees that after they stepped into the creek, they experienced sores and rashes. If trainees developed such symptoms, the explanations were probably more straightforward than that, but the idea gripped the imagination, especially in a seriously superstitious community.

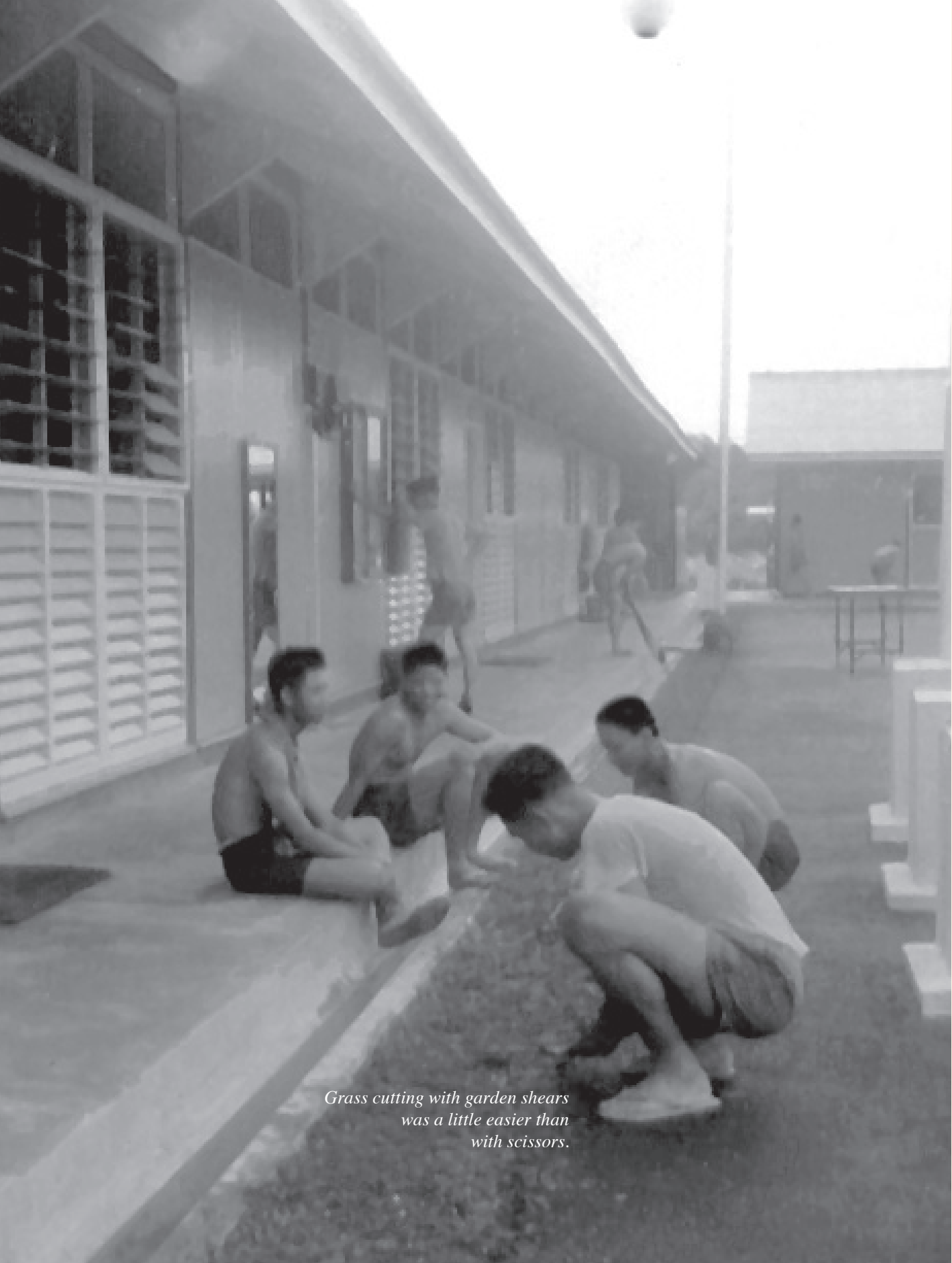
In the immediate vicinity of SAFTI, the locals had readily grasped the economic potential of large numbers of soldiers training in their midst. Enterprising villagers quickly identified strategic rendezvous or dispersal points and began to offer soft drinks in bottles or plastic bags, cigarettes, sweets, and even packaged meals like nasi lemak. They soon established what items moved fast, but it remained a mystery how they managed to zero in on the location and timing of gathering troops. The presence of country belles as salesgirls was not accidental either. Some form of 'jungle telegraph' was at work and possibly also some kind of protection racket to guarantee stakeout rights. A few dollars of profit a day was a big thing to the farming communities in the 1960s who had difficulties making ends meet. As SAFTI training became ubiquitous, the 'F' (food) echelon became so familiar with training programmes that these itinerant stall operators on bicycles not only became adept at predicting the arrival of the training troops, but were sometimes more reliable than the ration delivery. They probably prayed that troop transport after exercises would be delayed because it could mean a sell-out, even with a re-supply from the sources.

There was a less charming angle to the camp followers as well, which would eventually lead to tragic consequences. Packs of children would enter the gazetted grounds or hang around when blanks were used in maneuvering areas to pick up the ejected shells for the brass bases to be recycled as a cottage industry. As they became bolder, they would follow up live-firing exercises, which offered vastly more brass from the empty cases and in due course even material from unexploded blinds and mortar shell fragments. SAFTI had to institute a continuous public education programme around the training areas in the hope of deterring this dangerous practice, because the warning sign boards along the boundaries only served to deter the faint-of-heart to the advantage of the bold. It became a standing operating procedure to dispatch boat and road patrols before live-firing commenced, partly to alert those who had accidentally strayed into the grounds and partly to deter deliberate entry. However, it was by no means a fool proof process.

SAFTI's footprint grew rapidly around the Jurong area. Among the economic beneficiaries that had a fairly long run of good times was the laundry and a restaurant at 15½ milestone Upper Jurong Road and several food stalls at Tuas. SAFTI's official laundry service was provided by the Prison's Department, which not only mangled and mixed up uniforms but also frequently returned items with holes burnt into them. When this happened to bed sheets and pillowcases it was not a problem for the trainees because the QM store would replace them, but it was quite another thing with uniforms because of inspections. Many trainees had also taken the trouble to alter the issued uniforms for a better fit and it was a routine to drop them off at the laundry on the way home for the weekend and pick them up on the way back a week or so later, or even within a day in urgent cases. The laundry staff was soon able to identify the trainees by their regimental numbers and it was a mutually beneficial arrangement. When there was no night training, trainees would sometimes combine a visit to the restaurant and the laundry. However, there were several occasions when fights broke out. In one instance, there was clearly some secret society activity involved and several first intake trainees demonstrated their marked preference for discretion over valour. The weight of evidence suggests that somehow, the trainees had given offence, because one of the characteristics of secret societies was that they preferred to keep a low profile in their dealings with the public, unless provoked.

There were no reports of untoward events from the food stalls at Tuas, a village on the east bank of Sungei Tuas (now possibly the Southern Tuas Basin, the river and village being completely erased by reclamation and industrial development). Ramshackle as the wooden buildings were, the seafood and other village fare like garden fresh vegetables, 'hor fan', Hokkien mee, char kueh teow, kueh chap, smoked pigs' ears and fried-egg and seafood soup were a real treat, all for a pittance.

Alternative sources of food from those of SAFTI cookhouse were welcome. The military fare could be wolfed down after a morning or afternoon of relentless physical effort, but not as a meal to be savoured unhurried. Throughout the training of the initial batch in SAFTI (and from evidence thereafter) there was little improvement in the culinary capabilities of



*Grass cutting with garden shears
was a little easier than
with scissors.*

those who supplied the food. It would take the sustained outcry of National Servicemen to bring about the change that eventually led to high quality camp food in nearly all SAF units.

II. OBJECTIVES OF SECTION TRAINING

Section training was in line with the thinking that every infantry officer must be fully familiar with the skills, role and scope of duties of the infantry NCO; or, to put it more succinctly from the Advisors' point of view, officer candidates should be selected from the NCO cadre. As such, the training was a fusion of section level operations with the role of a section leader. But, as there was not yet an NCO base in the SAF, Manpower Division was following the reverse of the IDF approach. From Manpower Division's point of view, the initial officer training courses at SAFTI had to build up the NCO base as well. The overall recruitment strategy was to re-route those who could not make the first cut for officer cadet training to staff the NCO shortfall in combat units either until the follow-on officer cadet course began, or permanently as their grading warranted.

The 14-week section training phase was intensive. Key personal skills—topography, signals, demolitions, operational planning, and issuing of operational orders—were introduced. But, the carrier wave was the role of an infantry section in the four phases of operations: attack, defence, advance and withdrawal (the use of American euphemisms like retrograde operations had yet to gain general currency). The employment of tactics to project combat power, an introduction to Signals, demolitions and the basics of field engineering, map reading, crossing of water obstacles and patrolling were incorporated into the training. The sub-text of the training in this phase was the combat leadership of an infantry section, which ideally would produce a Corporal who could manoeuvre his seven men as a close-knit team against the enemy, within the context of a platoon mission. But, there were practical difficulties in achieving this because each section comprised about 13 trainees and, at best, there would only be one or two opportunities for leadership role-play during the whole phase for each trainee. It was this phase of training that brought in the widespread currency of the term LOB (left-out-of battle) to the SAF.

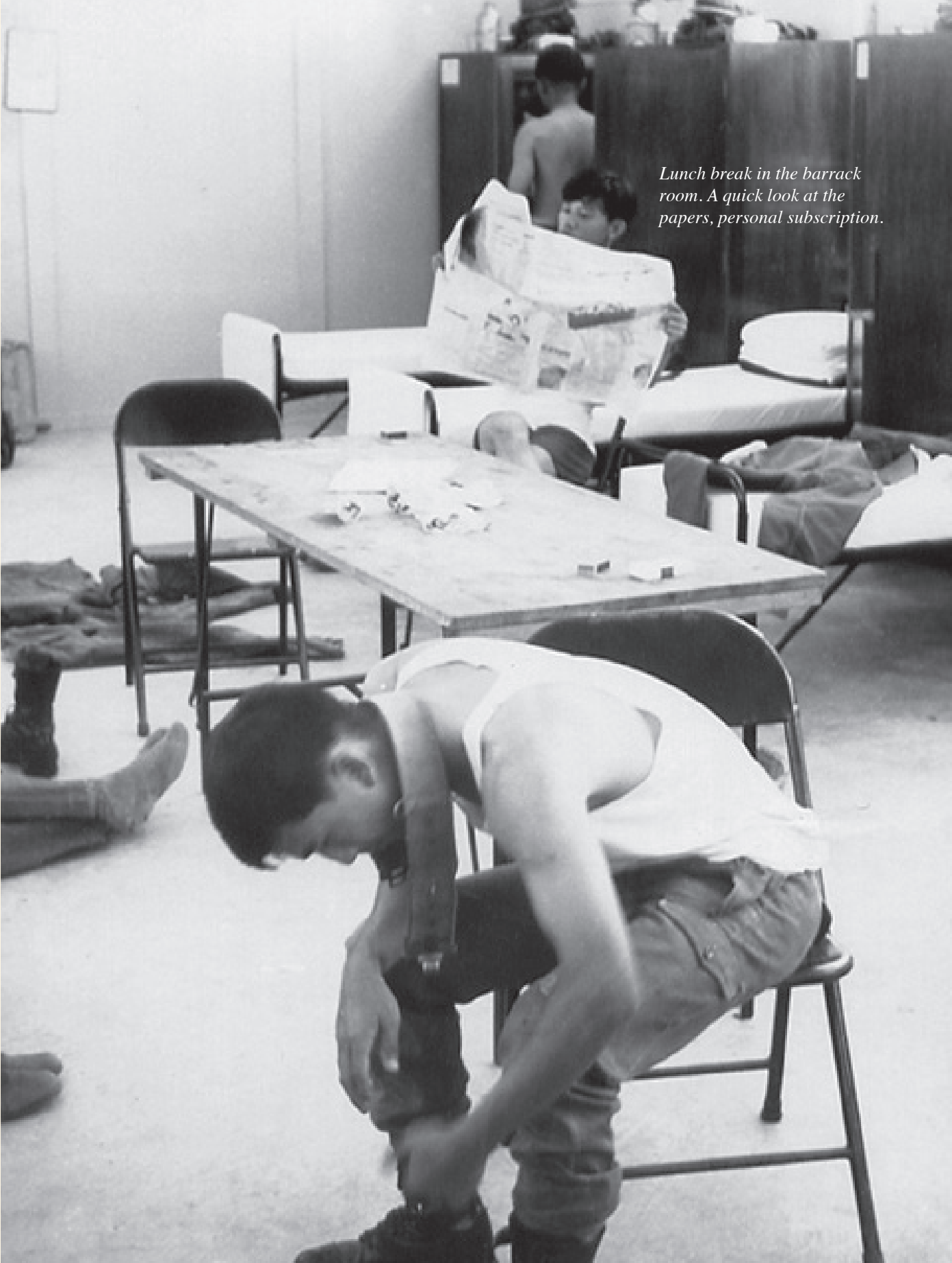
III. THE M16 RIFLE

The first few weeks of section training were spent in map reading, elementary signals, section battle formations and introduction to combat as a rifle section, while the HQs of the two companies were busy formalising the replacement of the SLR with the M16 (initially referred to as AR 15) as the personal weapon. This allowed for repeated firing of blanks. The M16s had been used for the National Day Parade as well as the basic training passing out parade the weekend before. Although enough stocks of M16s were available, an administrative delay had occurred for the preparation of the instructors to teach the technical handling of the weapon. As far as can be recalled, the M16s were issued a fortnight after the beginning of the section training phase.

Each trainee was responsible for a rifle (the serial number was listed against his name in the armskote book), as well as the bayonet, which, together with the magazines drawn for the day and the bipod which was then a standard issue with each rifle, had to be returned to the armskote before the trainee could book out of camp, or at the end of the training day.¹ It was a perpetual running battle between the procrastinator and the duty armskote man. The chromed barrel of the M16 was easy enough to clean, though by the same token, it was easy for the instructors to spot either pitting or ‘fornicating elephants inside’ except that they used a more military adjective. The rifle came with a cleaning rod, not the pull-through used for the SLR. The cleaning rod consisted of several detachable sections, the ends of which were screwed into one another, the top piece having a slot for the flannelette and an alternative one with a cylindrical wire brush like a miniature bottle brush. The joints were not robust enough to withstand much wear and tear and frequently gave way. Nobody remembers how it came about, but soon, some trainees began displaying a sturdy brass one-piece cleaning rod which did the job and was worth the bother of packing in the backpack on overnight field training, even though it tended to stick out awkwardly because it was a little longer than the barrel of the rifle. Just about everybody else got into the act soon after that so some enterprising metal worker in Sungei Road (where nearly any kind of military knick-knack could be bought from the ‘Thieves Market’) must have made a tidy pile for his initiative. In due course, a new 2-piece model of the cleaning rod evolved.

It was not only trainees who were excited by their new toys, but the officers and NCOs as well, because the M16 was frequently seen on television in the hands of American GIs in the news coverage of Vietnam and had gained universal admiration. Nearly everyone knew the story of Eugene Stoner who had developed the weapon for Colt and the fact that he was now developing another weapon under the Stoner brand name.²

After a second zeroing exercise (the first being with the SLR during basic training), range practices were to continue well into section training despite the intensive range lessons in the basic phase. This was initially to satisfy the trainfire package that would fully qualify the trainees to use the M16 and thereafter, at intervals during the course, to make the new weapon a natural extension of their combat instincts. Range practice tailed off as live-firing exercises became the major platform of tactical training. The M16 introduced new capabilities, particularly with the full automatic mode permitting burst fire, which in turn allowed for effective instinctive firing from the hip. The M16 also added realism to the training, together with its other advantages over the SLR because a blank attachment could be fitted after removing the flash hider. Obviously, with the first intake at SAFTI being the first to use the M16, the trainfire package itself was experimental and essentially grounded on the SLR syllabus, which did not fully exploit the capabilities of the new weapon. A major transition, was in fact in the making. The SLR represented single aimed shots, a WWII concept, while the M16 represented overwhelming firepower, with high velocity lightweight rounds and a big increase in the combat load of ammunition. The operating doctrine had yet to be formulated in the SAF.



Lunch break in the barrack room. A quick look at the papers, personal subscription.

One of the casualties of the M16 introduction was the confidence that the rifle could be used for parrying or smashing aside an enemy's weapon in hand-to-hand combat because of the fragility of the fiberglass hand-guards, although the bayonet still seemed a viable proposition. In fact, however, the hand-guards of the SLR were also hollow and would scarcely have withstood hard impact, even if the portion of the barrel that projected beyond the hand-guards were long enough to have been of some use. Truth be told, the concept of bayonet fighting was probably a romantic notion after the solid wood foundation of earlier rifles like the Enfield Mk. 4 and the American M1 Garand became outdated.

IV. JUNGLE LANE

An exciting lesson that was tacked on to the trainfire programme was the Jungle Lane, which called for instinctive snap shooting. This prepared trainees to deal with unexpected encounters at close quarters with the enemy in densely vegetated terrain as could be expected in jungle warfare against guerrillas or even in urban warfare scenarios where the enemy had a lot of cover to exploit. The lesson combined single shots, bursts and live grenades along a path of about 100 metres. The targets were located at unexpected turns in the path or were activated to appear by a system of ropes and pulleys by the instructor who walked beside the trainee. Each trainee was escorted through individual dry runs along his lane. The preparations were elaborate and rather dodgy because of the ropes and pulleys, but it was fun all the same. After each target, the number of hits was recorded by the instructor, who also patched up the holes. The grand finale was the lobbing of the grenade. Each platoon was divided into sections and distributed over various re-entrants in the live-firing area as the twists and turns of the lanes created potential overlaps of templates. Together with the live grenades, the distraction of manually activating targets and potentially wild instinctive firing, this may have been the most stressful subject the instructors went through.

V. DEMOLITION TRAINING

From an infantry point of view, demolitions would play a major role in the subject of field engineering (which was spread out over the section and officer cadet training phases), other aspects being the construction of field fortifications, mine warfare and camouflage and concealment. Demolitions were introduced during section training as a sub-set of field engineering. The Platoon 2I/C of Platoon 5, 'B' Company, LTA Yusof Talib, was in charge of demolition training in the beginning. Instructors in those days indulged in the bravado of smoking around explosives to impress trainees. In fact, most military explosives are inherently stable and a naked light would have to be deliberately applied to some flammable part of explosive materials to activate a detonation chain (with the exception of the detonator itself, which is made up of a highly sensitive nitroglycerin compound). The lessons during section training were quite basic and most trainees easily caught on. They dealt with the detonator cord, the primer, the detonator, friction or electrical igniter, blasters, fuse, plastic

explosives, TNT (trinitrotoluene) blocks and the whole ignition chain. After all the warnings of the sensitivity of detonators, inserting a fuse into a detonator, initiating a demolition chain with a friction igniter or applying a flame to the cross-cut fuse tended to be a fidgety affair and occasioned anxious moments for some trainees and hilarity for the observers and instructors. But the explosions were satisfying and it was rather fun to see how a fairly sturdy sapling could be cut down with a detonating cord. The skills learned during section training were used extensively during the officer cadet phase.

After LTA Yusof Talib left, a flamboyant Indian Muslim called Hamid, then Second Lieutenant, took over. He was duly nicknamed Hamid Bomb, which he seemed to relish, though his real name is Abdul Hamid. He did, however, attend a formal course in demolitions in the United Kingdom and he set up a commercial demolitions business after serving several years in the Engineers on his return.

Demolition training was to continue at a more sophisticated level of combat applications in the officer cadet phase.

VI. MINE CLEARING

A thin metal rod with a spade grip at one end called a mine prodder, was issued as the workhorse infantryman's answer to minefields. Perhaps, it was fortunate that in the 1960s, land mines were still relatively unsophisticated, but the theoretical lessons indicated that human ingenuity could readily devise devilish means to kill and maim fellow humans. This included mines that could pop up and explode above ground when activated by a hapless foot, and chain reactions that would outwit the most conscientious clearing even if only one mine was triggered. But, anti-personnel and anti-tank mines were a fact of military life and an important element of tactics, especially in channelling enemy movement and denying access, while saving on manpower. As minefields could be encountered any time, the infantry needed to know how to deal with them on their own, rather than depend on the Pioneer Platoon or the Engineers with their specialised gear. Actually, there was only one way out for the Infantry, if it either needed to cross a mined area or found itself smack in the middle of one, and that was to clear a path painstakingly by prodding the ground. According to the Geneva Convention, all minefields are required to be marked but Southeast Asia was far away from Geneva and English is not a universal language. Hopefully, the soldier who accidentally discovered the minefield would cooperate and stop screaming or speedily depart for Valhalla, so that the others could concentrate. The mine prodder was one way of doing it, but another was the bayonet. The idea was to lie down prone and stab the ground practically inch by inch with the prodder or bayonet until an obstruction was felt, then gingerly keep prodding to determine the contour of the obstruction to roughly establish if it was a mine or an innocent rock and, in any case, proceed in a different direction, more or less forward.

Having a sweat cloth around the forehead, is not a bad idea when prodding for mines, as is also an effective prayer which, among other things, would hopefully ward off the enemy when one is in the middle of a minefield, although it is a well-known policy to cover a minefield with fire in actual operations, just to spice up the clearing exercise, you understand.

In the officer cadet phase, other methods of mine clearance such as demolitions and flail tanks were taught together with the theory of laying minefields as part of field engineering lessons.

VII. SIGNALS

This message was waiting in the wings from day one of signals training in the SAF. It would come loud and clear over the air in the large unit exercises that were carried out to test tactics and expose senior commanders to the new doctrines and operating procedures that went on in tandem with the expansion of the army, after the induction of the first intake of National Servicemen in August, 1967. It reflected both the autocratic attitudes of senior officers plus their frustrations at having to learn—and abide by—standardised practices. While ‘Prontos’, ‘Sheldrakes’, ‘Seagulls’ and ‘Spyglasses’ were in some demand, they had no time for ‘Starlights’, ‘Molars’, ‘Foxhounds’ or ‘Holdfasts’ nor even ‘Sunrays Minor’. They wanted ‘Sunray’ himself, and immediately at that, if not sooner. And, if things were not as they expected them to be on the ground with one of their sub-units, the expletives, followed by choice phrases in Hokkien would blister the airwaves and leave their subordinates in total darkness of their bosses’ latest instructions.



Official opening of the School of Signals in SAFTI, 22nd July, 1967. LTA Leslie Terh in bush jacket.

But from the very beginning, the first intake had the full benefit of being brought up on NATO voice procedure by CPT Louis Lee who commanded the cell that would officially become the School of Signals on 22nd July, 1967, under then LTA Leslie Terh, who took over the Signals training just before the officer cadet phase. The scope of military communications was revolutionised from the SMF days, because of the absolute criticality of communications to military operations. The SMF had been using vacuum tube technology, while NATO had moved into transistors. Even so, nobody would have predicted in the 1960s the changes that would be evident even ten years after the School of Signals was opened, let alone in the new millennium.

The first intake was not burdened by awareness of the big picture. Their Signals lessons during section training consisted of some radio wave theory, voice procedure and field telephones. Less than a handful of the trainees picked up anything from the theoretical lessons about radio transmission, transmission power, frequency modulation, tropospheric scatter, the differences between HF, UHF and VHF, or the various types of antennae. Nor was any great effort expended on the subject; it was understood that there would be a signaller at the platoon level and more of them above that echelon. The required objectives of the lessons were to be able to turn on the radio set, establish communications, apply voice procedure protocols and pick up the phonetic alphabets, nicknames and code words. Slidex and Griddle were deferred to officer cadet training.

Until around December 1966, after the officer cadet phase had begun, the sets available were the British A 41 (manpack), the HF 156 (manpack) and the 6-channel crystal controlled CC 15 base stations with loud speakers. Trainees were distributed around SAFTI in groups and given some practice on tuning in to the frequencies, joining a working net and applying the basic voice procedure. There was a lesson towards the end of section training that required groups to deploy around Pasir Laba with vehicular sets, establish communications and pass messages. In Platoon 5, 'B' Company, the hot favourite for the best section leader trainee was caught taking things a bit too easy by the OC during a spot check. He had taken off his shirt, was deployed non-tactically and gave every impression of having a tailgate party in a Land Rover. His colleagues concluded that his prospects for the best section leader prize had been dashed. However, he survived the escapade and went on to claim the prize.

The lessons on field telephones were much simpler, covering the use of the field telephones in static deployment, the function of the switchboard, the use of D-10 cable dispenser packs and the role of the signallers in setting up the communications. These were useful preliminaries to defence exercises. The use of field telephones in the rifle ranges earlier had already exposed the trainees to this.

VIII. TOPOGRAPHY

Section leaders must lead troops on foot in the operational area, identify their current position, move as required to various locations, identify other features on the ground and appreciate the lie of the land. Reading a topographic map was, and remains, a core competence for land forces NCOs. These were some of the few auditorium lessons that the trainees experienced. It was highly unlikely that everybody understood the concepts of grid lines, contours, triangulation and/or the function of theodolites. For that matter, the instructors themselves were probably not fully aware what part these played in the development of topographic maps. The topographic maps were the 1: 25,000 in yard grid which was a comfortable scale giving a good deal of detail. The lessons introduced the prismatic compass and how to fix a compass bearing using the bezel markings and how to get and use a back bearing. They also dealt with orienting the map, orienting map to ground, scale, conventional symbols, line of sight, contours, spot heights, grid references and inter-visibility, which were generally understood. These were followed up with others showing how to trace a line of advance which would require compass navigation and how to create a simplified sketch for easy reference on talc, leading to the drawing up of a datum table on an overlay, showing direction and distances for night topography. Practical lessons followed in the shape of topographic marches which required individual trainees to lead their sections to checkpoints, identify reference features during the day and at night, identify



Map reading was a core competence and started early in section training.

the bearing, or back bearing of a reference point and how to move around an impassable obstacle by counting the number of steps moved off course, so as to get back on track after the obstacle. The last was important for jungle navigation where movement would be mostly by fixed bearings because of a lack of prominent reference points. Day and night lessons were conducted under the supervision of instructors who would assign trainees to lead a particular leg of the route. There were also group lessons that required trainees to report back on the details of checkpoints that had been assigned. Most of the practical lessons were around SAFTI in the Jurong, Choa Chu Kang and Lim Chu Kang areas. One consideration in those days, now no longer applicable with the use of Kevlar helmets, was to remove the steel helmet when taking a bearing with the prismatic compass. Initial topographic exercises were conducted only with the helmet liners.

Night topography lessons provided all sorts of diversions. There were several instances of the navigators falling into disused latrines or leading their teams through pigsties. On one occasion, a trainee slipped down a slope and the barrel of his SLR pierced his neck, leaving a scar that is still visible. In one platoon, a trainee who had night-blindness was led round and round a well by his colleagues just for a lark. It is difficult to establish if the night navigation lessons were really effective in making the trainees confident of compass bearings and whatever visible prominent objectives were available as reference points to chart a course on the ground. In theory, individuals were required to lead their section when called upon, in the expectation that they were each tracking the progress. Most of the time, they were preoccupied with keeping the man ahead in sight and not really in a position to check and confirm where they were. If they were asked to take over the lead by the instructor, they tended to follow a general sense of direction, especially when it came to those areas around SAFTI and depend on familiar landmarks that they had come to recognise in the course of routine training. Often, the night lessons would take trainees through vegetable plots and farmers' backyards as the exercise planners did not take these into consideration. Away from habitation, there were serious attempts to orient the map to ground, but there were too many clues to get a sense of mastery over the subject. One of the problems was that reference points such as track junctions looked very much like one another. Only uncharted terrain like virgin forests would really demand the application of map-reading techniques.

Topography lessons set the stage for practically all the subsequent training leading to a commission, including planning for missions using the process known as 'appreciation of the situation.' For quite a few trainees, topography—like signals—must have seen the writing on the wall that they were not destined for a commission. Unfortunately, because of the pace of training and the limited pedagogic skills in the army and possibly superficial knowledge as well of the subject, the problem may not have been evident enough at the time for remedial action. Those first intake trainees fortunate enough to attend the Jungle Warfare Course in Ulu Tiram, discovered how challenging topographic navigation could really be. Over time and especially during the officer cadet phase, trainees began to get the hang of map-reading



Improvised floatation using back packs.



Sungei Tengeh was a favourite venue for crossing water obstacle training.

and by the time the ‘appreciation of situation’ test was conducted, they were generally able to plan operations off a topographic map. With global positioning satellite equipment these days, it can be argued that map-reading skills are passé, but the fact remains, soldiers can easily find themselves in situations where they do not have technical means at hand and must resort to fundamentals. In any case, map planning of operations is unavoidable.

IX. CROSSING WATER OBSTACLES

Mobility for the infantry, especially in the monsoon belts of uninhabited tropical forests where rivers and streams are frequently and unexpectedly encountered, must cater for standard techniques of crossing water obstacles tactically. This important subject, now more commonly referred to as watermanship, was introduced during the section training phase, beginning with individual improvised flotation devices. These ranged from wrapping up personal back packs in the water proof ponchos using the toggle rope, to jerry cans and (in desperate circumstances) trapping air in uniform shirts and trousers after tying up sleeves and other openings, if something more substantial like a log could not be found. As SAFTI did not have a swimming pool at the time, no effort was made to teach swimming or waterproofing to all trainees, although it may have been possible to use the sea off the boat shed at the end of Pasir Laba Road.

The main lessons under CWO had to do with crossing streams tactically as a section or a platoon. This was done at Sungei Tengeh (now part of the Tengeh Reservoir beside the Tuas Second Link with Johor Bahru) and the Jurong River. The lessons included crossing with boats, improvised rafts and ropes. The tactics were fairly simple. Protection parties moved forward to secure the crossing point and the rest moved from concealed positions in groups to make the crossing. Where a conveyance was not available, a couple of swimmers would be sent across with a light line tied to the crossing rope and on reaching the other shore, pull in the crossing rope and secure it. A far shore protection party would then cross over, pulling themselves along the rope with one hand while holding the rifle out of the water with the other. The fact that the rifle would work perfectly well even after a good dunking was not generally appreciated then, even though the SAF was expected to fight in torrential downpours. The rest of the party then crossed over in tactical groups and set up a perimeter defence around the bridgehead until the whole party had crossed.

All trainees were required to wear lifejackets while doing CWO. The training was not very demanding, but it meant sloshing through the sucking mud of the swampy banks of the rivers, being bugged by pests and always being soaked to the skin. As many cadets smoked, it became a priority to keep cigarette packets and lighters dry in small plastic bags. To add to the misery, someone introduced long transparent plastic sleeves to protect the M16, something which not only made it awkward to carry because it could not be slung, but also ‘un-cool’ in appearance as it took away some shine in public from the warrior image.

X. BATTLE FORMATIONS

The first exposure to teamwork, as compared to individual skills in basic training, was in the shape of battle formations, which is the tactical way a body of troops (in this case an infantry section) moves in an operational area.

Although in the barracks, the occupants of each barrack room were referred to collectively as a section, there were between 12 and 14 trainees per room. The actual configuration of a rifle section according to the tentative table of establishment (TOE) was understood to be 8 soldiers divided into 3 groups on a 3-2-3 basis, with the Section Commander (Corporal) leading Group 1 and the Section Second-in-Command or 2I/C (Lance Corporal) leading Group 3. Each member of Group 2 would carry the heavy barrel version of the standard rifle, which had replaced the single Bren gun as the Section Support Weapon. Although one man could handle the Bren, it came with a second barrel to replace the first one if it overheated and needed a larger supply of ammunition, which was why it was assigned to a 2-man crew. With the heavy barrels, it was now possible to have twice the firepower with the additional prospect of splitting the support base. (In some armed forces however, the section support weapon was (and remains) the General Purpose Machine Gun, though it requires a pretty hefty soldier to carry it around even without the tripod). During section training among the first intake, it was necessary not only to practise the battlefield drills according to the establishment strength of a rifle section, but also to expose each recruit to the lesson objectives. This called for considerable ingenuity and flexibility by the instructors and the occasional adoption of a system of LOBs.

Battle formations referred to the tactical dispersion of troops on the move, such that they would be able to react to contact with the enemy. In closed terrain such as the jungle, and at night, movement in single file is the most efficient, with either the Section Commander or a point man leading and messages can be passed back and forth along the line. However, the individual soldiers must be sufficiently spaced out so as not to be caught altogether in the killing area of an ambush (or other enemy field of fire), but not too loosely as to break contact with one another. On the other hand, in more open terrain, it is often sounder to spread out laterally so that maximum firepower can be brought to bear immediately on contact with the enemy, while keeping some elements in reserve to the rear. This is usually referred to as the 2-up formation at the section level. Variations of the theme can be readily imagined with larger bodies of troops, including the provision of vanguard, flank guards, and rear guard to alert and protect the main body. These elaborations were introduced during the platoon phase of officer cadet training.

Battle formations were coupled to field signals and reaction to enemy contact, as well as day and night configurations, the latter requiring closing up and relaying messages. The field signals, initially taught during basic training, covered stopping, taking cover, reporting

to the commander's location, speeding up, warning of enemy ahead and instructions for a point man to advance to conduct reconnaissance. Reaction to enemy fire included among others, diving for the ground, crawling to cover and returning fire, executing an outflanking manoeuvre with suppressing fire from a support base, charging into the enemy position if caught in the killing area of an enemy ambush, or withdrawing behind the screen provided by a smoke grenade or a combination of all the above. For nearly every daytime lesson, there was a night equivalent.

XI. FIRE AND MOVEMENT

A key aspect of infantry operations is the concept of fire and movement. One element of a body of troops moves while another provides cover. The approach is applicable from the tactical level to the theatre level, although at the latter end of the scale it may not be immediately evident because of the expanse of the theatre of operations and the strategic resources such as artillery and air support that can come into play. Its essence is readily appreciated at the tactical level of a rifle section of three groups in a 3-2-3 configuration. On contact with the enemy, one group would provide covering fire while the other two would advance or withdraw; in certain circumstances, two groups could give covering fire while the third moved. The idea is expressed as one foot on the ground all the time, like the movement of a pair of dividers over a piece of paper. Even if there is no firefight going on, the principle applied: in hostile territory it is always useful to have one group in a firebase position on dominating ground while the other two moved. The groups can leapfrog one another provided that all kept in range of the firebases, which is taken up by the respective groups in turn. In close terrain, the system is still applicable although the distances are severely compressed. In withdrawal, the process works backward, until a suitable location is reached for disengagement. The same process is inherent in an outflanking manoeuvre, where one group pins the enemy with fire while the assault force outflanks the enemy. Obviously, in a real firefight, things are unlikely to go like clockwork and there can be many a slip betwixt cup and lip. But, all the same, there is no better way.

After battle formations, this basic manoeuvre was the first operational drill that was taught during section training. Following a demonstration by the instructors that covered advance and withdrawal under enemy fire, each platoon was dispersed into sections under section instructors in various parts of the SAFTI training area. Each section was then divided into non-permanent groups under nominated Section Commanders for practice. The section would proceed along an indicated line of advance until the instructor would shout out that it was under enemy fire, or an enemy simulator fired a few blank rounds from a concealed position, which required the trainees to dash forward, hit the ground and crawl towards whatever cover was available to return fire. Practice incorporated fire control orders plus the orders for the respective groups to move to the next intermediate position. When the SLR, which did not come with a blank attachment, was in use there were no blank rounds and

trainees actually went around shouting “Bang! Bang!” Recruit Subandie bin Saharie, perhaps feeling that red-blooded men do not go around shouting “Bang! Bang!” substituted it with “Bullet! Bullet!” until a couple of sharp raps on his helmet by an instructor with a stick brought him back to orthodoxy.

The first live-firing exercise was a day execution of fire and movement, conducted by the respective platoons in section level sub-groups in Areas A and B. This lesson introduced the elaborate preparations that went into the live-firing training format, the frequency of which probably distinguishes the SAF from its regional counterparts, especially at the officer cadet training level. The intention to adopt this approach was the major consideration for selecting Pasir Laba as the site for SAFTI. The hilly terrain provided the stop butts permitting multiple compartmentalised firing areas for concurrent exercises day and night, including the use of light mortars, rocket projectiles and machine guns for support fire. The templates converged on Area C, which was in the centre, while any flat trajectory rounds that went too high would fall into the sea.

Many dry runs preceded the actual live execution, while ground preparations included setting up targets for trainees to aim at. Targets for night exercises were individually lighted using ‘Yehudi’ lamps. Barriers at the entry points into the live-firing areas were manned and activated. Clearance had to be sought from SAFTI Operations Centre, which monitors the airspace over the area, especially because of the proximity of Tengah Air Base. Boat and vehicle patrols around the live-firing grounds were sent out to alert any inadvertent intruder, and all road traffic within the live-firing area would be closed down. On numerous occasions, administrative movements—especially to and from the Boat Shed—that encroached into the prearranged live-firing time windows, brought things to a grinding halt.

For all concerned—instructors, trainees and SAFTI Operations Centre—a live-firing exercise is tense and demanding. Instructors were supplemented by Safety Officers who moved with the firing group to keep everybody in line, or with the firebases to make sure of the timing and direction of support fire. If, as in later exercises, obstacles like barbed wire barriers were to be breached with explosives like the bangalore torpedo or pipe charges, the Safety Officers would have to ensure that the appointed protection parties move into and out of position with the breaching party and also that the breaching party properly activated the firing mechanism and moved back into the safety zone before the charge explodes (between 17 and 23 seconds depending on the pull-igniter). Similarly, after the breaching charge exploded, the protection parties on either side of the gap had to move into place and engage their targets with live rounds as the assault group poured through the gap and fanned out into position to commence the live-fire assault. At night, penlights were attached to the back of the helmets of the protection party. The gap also has to be held open by the appointed personnel who would have to shout “Gap! Gap! Gap!” while the assault forces charged through. Accidents, such as the failure of the breaching charge to go off, or a trainee tripping on the way back to the safety area, actually occurred often and caused

massive disruption. Consequently, preparations for live firing included, among others, the digging of a trench for the breaching charge, ensuring that soldiers did not load rifles with live rounds prematurely and conducting a number of dry runs. When support weapons were used, ranging was conducted beforehand, but not too early as ambient weather conditions could affect the settings.

Zailanni Patch received its name during the section training phase of the first intake. Zailanni bin Mohamed was from 'A' Company and had the honour of being the first casualty of live-firing exercises at SAFTI, Pasir Laba. To the east of Bajau, Spot Height 209, off the north bound leg of Four Track Junction was (or there used to be) a small open space. It was one of the locations where section level fire and movement live-firing exercises were held. Zailanni was hit by one round in the leg, probably by the group providing covering fire. Fortunately, it was only a flesh wound. But thereafter, the location was called Zailanni Patch. Zailanni graduated with the First Batch and joined the artillery, leaving the service with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

XII. SECTION COMBAT OPERATIONS

The core lessons of section training were the tactics employed in engaging the enemy as a team. Whereas reaction to enemy fire addressed a systematic response to regain the initiative after an unexpected contact, including ambushes, this aspect dealt with being in possession of the initiative and bringing about a decisive outcome in support of the overall mission. The scenarios would range from a day quick attack after a chance encounter to a deliberate attack at night. In the first instance, the Section Commander would conduct a hasty reconnaissance, formulate a quick plan and initiate the engagement, recognising that the enemy could evade him if he delayed the engagement. At the other end of the scale, the situation could be that the enemy was relatively static or in defensive deployment and offered the opportunity for more comprehensive reconnaissance and planning, approach from the most favourable direction and the possibility of surprise. The differences for day and night took into account the difference in visibility which was double-edged, but favoured the side with the initiative, i.e. the attacker, as it could be converted into surprise, one of the most important of the principles of war. In between the two extremes, it was possible to identify variations on the theme that could be converted into training drills. For example, a quick ambush could be set up if an approaching enemy is highly likely to pass along a well-defined line of advance either on foot or in vehicles; on the other hand, if the section were caught in an ambush, its only recourse may be to charge the enemy position to get out of the killing ground, accepting the inevitable casualties.

While the last situation did not (luckily) warrant a live-firing exercise (the enemy was simulated with thunder flashes, smoke grenades and blank rounds by instructors), there were several day and night live-firing exercises involving the offensive aspect of combat operations and also a section withdrawal. In one instance, during a day deliberate attack exercise, one of the instructors got slightly carried away and kept the firebase firing on the final objective even as



Martin Choo and his "Mamak".

the assaulting troops were on the verge of over-running it. He kept shifting the fire up the slope about three yards ahead of the assault troops. Apparently, he wanted to add a greater sense of realism; the assault force could vouch for the fact that a margin of safety of three yards was realistic enough from a firebase more than 200 yards away. Interestingly, it would not have occurred to any of the trainees to raise such an issue; risky practices and experiences were generally converted to folklore and bragging rights. The fact that no permanent injuries or fatalities occurred, combined with the voluntary presence of the trainees on the course rather than as conscripts, made such a situation possible, when strictly speaking it was an unprofessional tempting of Providence. However, there was no reason to doubt that if something untoward had happened, MID would have taken the sternest view of it.

The subject also introduced the basic elements of the operation order, map planning and sand-table modeling, the last two being natural extensions of map reading. Another important concept was the adoption of rehearsals, using simulated terrain and objectives for deliberate operations. This greatly contributed to everybody knowing his task, location, role and cue for action once the operation was underway, while also allowing for one another to take over critical functions in case of casualties. Rehearsals would become a significant element the higher the echelon involved, though mainly for blank firing exercises or Training Exercises Without Troops (TEWT) in the advanced courses, while for live-firing exercises, they were built in through the mandatory dry runs on the actual ground anyway.

XIII. PATROLLING

This was a fun package. It was also an important activity, especially at the section level, as it involved three characteristic roles at the lower echelons in operations, namely collecting information, dominating terrain and destroying the enemy through combat. The SMF had considerable experience in actual operations as the combat elements of both the Volunteer land forces and the two regular battalions had been deployed against Indonesian guerrillas during the confrontation. Trainees in the first intake were told of the harrowing experiences of a patrol from 1 or 2 SIR running into one another in the jungle and actually opening fire until the officer on one side recognised the voice of the officer on the other side when he was issuing orders. He then identified himself and between them, the two officers managed to prevent a disaster by what the Americans presently describe as ‘friendly fire’.

It turned out that the incident about the two patrols accidentally engaging one another had been the result of the search operation. 2LT Teo’s platoon had reached the ambush site from the east, while 2LT Goh’s platoon had approached from the west. 2LT Teo’s sentry had shouted his challenge unintelligibly and immediately, grenades were thrown and the exchange of fire occurred, until 2LT Goh recognised his counterpart’s voice.

In later years, the First Batch picked up more details of the famous incident in which a patrol sent out by 2 SIR and led by the Platoon Sergeant in the temporary absence of the Platoon Commander who was on a course, was ambushed by Indonesian guerrillas in Kota Tinggi on 28th February, 1965. The patrol had flouted tactical discipline and some troops were bathing and relaxing at the side of a stream when they were caught completely off guard by a group of Indonesian infiltrators. The Platoon Sergeant tried to negotiate but the Indonesians opened fire on them in cold blood. Nine 2 SIR soldiers were killed and many were wounded. Others dispersed into the jungle and the survivors arrived at the Company Tactical HQ individually or in groups from noon the next day to six days later. On 2nd March, 2 SIR was deployed in the ambush area. Many of the officers involved were now instructors at SAFTI. CPT James Chia (Platoon Commander No.2 Platoon ‘A’ Company) had been the Regimental Signals Officer; Second Lieutenants Goh Lye Choon (Platoon Commander Platoon 5, ‘B’ Company SAFTI), Thomas Teo (Adjutant SAFTI) and Naranjan Singh, (section instructor ‘A’ Company SAFTI) had been Platoon Commanders of ‘D’ Company which was sent out to search for and recover the casualties from 2 SIR.

One of the biggest players in the above incident was CPT (then LTA) Daljeet Singh, 2I/C of ‘A’ Company, SAFTI. Leading his Mortar Platoon men on patrol, in a series of exciting encounters, he made contact with the Indonesian guerrillas that had killed the 2 SIR men. Eventually, the Indonesians guerrillas were cornered and several of them were killed.³

But, the big picture for the SAF was that patrolling would remain a major preoccupation in the event of operations in the local terrain, because they would inevitably bog down into jungle warfare between regular and paramilitary forces on all sides. The British-run Jungle Warfare School in Ulu Tiram, Johor was at the time the best training centre for such warfare in the world and its core curriculum was structured around patrolling to locate, fix and destroy the enemy.⁴ The package on Patrolling for section training began with a demonstration on 'harbouring' attended by both 'A' and 'B' companies in the sports field beside the Officers' Mess. It was conducted entirely by instructors from both companies and it seemed to have been orchestrated solely by the SAF personnel, as the Advisors were also keen spectators. They were hardly in a position to oversee this aspect of training, in which the locals had had operational experience and which the British forces had made into a fine art during the communist insurgency in Malaya.

The harbouring drill was rational and relatively simple: an advance party would identify a suitable site in the jungle for deploying either an overnight tactical halt or a longer-term patrol base, it would then lead the main body to the site usually in single file in section packets led by section commanders. The advance party would then lead each section to its section deployment area and the Platoon HQ to a suitable location in the centre of the base camp. Each section would be in a state of stand-to covering their front, until the stand-down was signalled. All actions were based on field signals so as to eliminate any tell-tale noise which could alert the enemy. Only after the harbouring drill was completed, were the troops allowed to organise their shelters for the night or the duration of the base camp, while stand-to and stand-down were activated by a pre-determined code which would be tapped out on a tree trunk or log, as such noises would not be out of place in the jungle. Stand-to was activated before dawn and before dusk as SOP, partly to adjust for changing light conditions and required every soldier to be at his perimeter defence position until stand down. Listening posts and sentry points were placed around the perimeter at suitable distances to provide adequate reaction time for the base in case of enemy approach or detection. Daily passwords were disseminated for any activity outside the perimeter including patrols, while all departures for outside activities and returns into the perimeter had to be escorted by sentry personnel along a pre-arranged secure route. If time permitted, the base camp defences would be enhanced with obstacles.

Following the demonstration, platoon level harbouring was practised, initially around Pasir Laba and later, in the Mandai forest reserve on an overnight deployment. But, the main part of the training on patrolling involved section level recce (reconnaissance) patrol exercises in the Pasir Laba/Lim Chu Kang area, during which the patrols were required to locate checkpoints or other installations and bring back descriptions of the site, 'enemy activity' at the site, and other details on which they would be debriefed by instructors who had planted a variety of data and 'enemy activity' at the checkpoints.

One of the more exciting aspects of the programme was training on riverine patrolling in the Seletar River. Aluminium assault boats were used. Trainees sat in an all-round defence

position in the boats and the main objectives of the lessons were how to deal with enemy fire from the shore and how to divert the boat immediately to the shore and disembark tactically, to engage the enemy in case of an ambush, or if enemy activity was spotted during the approach.

The land-based lessons were eventually applied with a lot of free play in a summary exercise towards the end of the section training.

XIV. DEFENCE

Defence exercises eventually came to be seen as a real pain. The primary cause was the digging of foxholes, weapon pits and platoon command posts, the latter requiring contributions of labour from the sub-units. After doing the foxholes, there was the overhead shelter for longer deployments. The idea of sleeping in a foxhole, depending on rationed water supply for ablutions and using field toilets were also nothing to get rapturous about either. And, to make things even more memorable, there were the alerts, the reinforcement drills, the patrolling and the spoiling counter-attacks.

Most of the above came in the officer cadet phase. At the section level, defence comprised essentially of the basic techniques: identifying locations for each two-man fox hole based on the concept of mutual defence at the section level; digging a shell-scape as an intermediate step in case the enemy happened on the force while the foxholes were being dug; using sandbags to build up the rims of the foxhole; clearing a field of fire; preparing a range card; and building overhead shelters with timber and zinc sheets (if supplied) and more sandbags, plus camouflaging the whole thing and refreshing the camouflage daily. There were many features in Pasir Laba which had laterite soil and digging a hole of 5 feet by 3 feet by about 4 feet deep with regular sides, easily required the five to six hours allowed by two men teams. There were, among the trainees, some with farming and rural backgrounds who could do this with astounding skill but for most of the rest, it was an endless chore. The main implement was the US style entrenching tool that was carried on the webbing. It was really a small spade with a broad point instead of a straight edge. It offered neither grip nor leverage and was constantly snapping in two. Clearing the loosened earth was done with helmet outers and Hessian bags. The work was frequently interrupted by other operational assignments.

One of the First Batch officers, Eng Song King was credited with changing the design of the entrenching tool to a short Asian changkul (hoe) several years later. This was a vast improvement even though reducing the handle of the changkul also reduced the force and leverage offered by the Asian farm implement. In due course, regular changkuls became part of the stores issued to a platoon with a defence mission. Song King, a Nantah graduate, went on to become Military Personal Secretary to Dr. Goh Keng Swee, then Commanding Officer, Officer Cadet School, Commanding Officer 1 SIR, Commanding Officer, Officers' Personnel Centre, and finally Assistant Chief of General Staff (Intelligence) before resigning

as Lieutenant-Colonel to take up a career as a businessman. One of the tasks assigned to him by Dr. Goh was to translate into English the great Chinese classic, *The Water Margin*, for the edification of MINDEF HQ.

At the end of any exercise involving defence, the trainees were a bedraggled bunch, covered with mud, faces drawn, constipated, equipment in decrepitude and thoroughly ‘shagged’. There still remained the unenviable task of cleaning all the stores and weapons before they could hit the sack.

XV. SUMMARY EXERCISE

Towards the last week of section training, ‘A’ and ‘B’ companies separately deployed in the field, each to conduct a 4-day summary exercise which was structured around patrolling and living in the field. Three locations about five miles apart from each other—in Choa Chu Kang, Sarimbun and Neo Tiew Road—were selected as platoon basecamps where the trainees set up bashas (poncho shelters) in section configurations. The sites were mostly rubber plantations and smallholdings among market gardens that were still being worked by the farmers. There was reasonable privacy for both the locals and the troops. Shortly after pitching bashas, each section was given missions to reconnoitre the ‘area of operations’ and



The summary exercise of jungle patrol operations meant cooking combat rations.

locate and report on the disposition of the other two platoons. The tactical disposition of the 'enemy' was built up over the succeeding days. The Section Instructors did not quite lead each section, but they often oversaw its activities after appointing one or another of the trainees to take charge on various occasions. As each section averaged 13 trainees, one or two would be asked to stay back and prepare meals for the whole group with the composite rations. It was clear that several free ranging chickens ceased to range freely after they crossed the paths of some of the NCOs, who were also not above chatting up the farmers' daughters, although to what effect was not evident.

Strictly speaking, the camps were not tactical, being just a few yards off the tracks that crisscrossed the areas. The shelters consisted of two-man bashas. Improvised camp cots raised a few inches above ground were constructed with a framework of sturdy branches pushed through the sleeves of the thick canvas ground sheets. Though the personal hygiene proclivities of fellow trainees became increasingly self-evident, life was made tolerable with field toilets (sanitised with copious amounts of lime powder strewn around and shielded by Hessian cloth), sponge baths with 'Good Morning' towels and an adequate supply of water from stand pipes and kampong wells, when water bowsers (trailer-tanks) supplied to each platoon daily ran dry.

The privations of living in the field, coping with mosquitoes and flies and other fellow denizens of the tropical outdoors were aggravated by the lack of personal time. The summary exercise brought home the fact that in operations, the soldier is always on call and there is no such thing as unwinding at the end of the day or time to break away for personal pursuits. Somebody up the command chain seemed to be always thinking of some fresh initiative. Being among human habitation was something of a relief in itself—if the camp had been in the jungle and during a prolonged patrol assignment, it would probably have taken a great toll among the trainees and may in fact have helped some of them to decide about making a career of it.

The working day began with patrol missions that took assigned groups to the location of the neighbouring platoons some five to six miles away. Contact drills were applied when a group ran into what were 'enemy' platoons, identified through coloured bands on helmets. Section instructors played the role of Controllers and Umpires. Each platoon appeared to have caught some prisoners of war and there were reports of various forms of robust interrogation to get intelligence. As the distances between platoons were considerable, some resorted to getting lifts from farmers' pickup trucks and other vehicles plying the rural tracks, not entirely with the disapproval of some accompanying instructors. In one case, a recruit managed to borrow a motorcycle and brought along a pillion rider, but an officer and an Advisor who spotted them gave chase in a car until the motorcycle accidentally veered off the road. The two were identified and awarded a couple of weekend duties. Without motorised transport, the patrols would often return late at night after an exhausting day and usually be dead to the world as soon as they hit their ground sheets.

The final phase of the exercise was the collation of information picked up during the patrolling and supplemented by the instructors' inside information for a round-robin attack exercise among the three platoons. The sections approached from different directions, assaulted through the campsites and withdrew after a non-tactical regrouping. The camps were struck shortly after that and the trainees returned to SAFTI. No one remembers the contents of the debriefing, partly because there was no special tactical issue to discuss and mainly because it was a case of the medium being the message. As such, it provided a fairly realistic opportunity (and all things considered, an enjoyable one) to practise tactical movement, infiltration, reconnaissance reports, living in the field and formulating and executing attack plans. It would also have been a major input in the selection of the top trainee during section training.

Endnotes

- 1. The initial issue of webbing was a British pattern with two large pouches slung directly on the belt over each hip. The pouches were designed to accept the magazines of the SLR, plus other odds and ends. The small magazines of the M16 fitted comfortably in them with room to spare. Trainees did not carry the full expected load of 12 magazines with them when deployed for training. Instead, when live rounds were to be used, the magazines were separately brought to the distribution point and issued to the trainees before the execution of the exercise or just before they moved to the firing point for range lessons. For blank firing exercises extra magazines were issued at the armskote and sections were given boxes of blank rounds for loading on their own before the exercise proper began.*
- 2. There was a strong rumour that when Chartered Industries were set up Eugene Stoner was engaged by the company to develop a local assault rifle and a section support weapon.*
- 3. History of 2 SIR, 1962-1978, 25th Anniversary Publication of 2nd Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment, Singapore 1987, pp. 15 – 21*
- 4. Malaysia continued to accept SAF Officers for courses in the Jungle Warfare School until 1972, after which Singapore had to set up its own course.*

HORNET EPISODES

I. BELUKAR KWANG

Trainee Kwang Kwok Yeow was in Platoon 4 during the section training phase. The platoon was doing a blank-firing exercise involving an attack on an enemy post on an un-named hill identified only as Spot Height 205, abutting Spot Height 175 in the Lam Kiong Estate area. Hill 205 was densely covered with a type of fern known locally as 'belukar', which grew shoulder high. Farmers had not cultivated the hill slopes of Pasir Laba and they had no reason to venture up them, so there were no paths. The trainees of the first intake had to make their own paths on any feature selected for training. Kwok Yeow, compact and muscular, had already gained a reputation for bashing through and had picked up the nickname 'Belukar' Kwang.

Among other types of vegetation, hornets in Singapore frequently nest in ferns. Kwok Yeow has no recollection of seeing anything, but he was suddenly engulfed in a swarm of hornets. After the initial attack, he instinctively fell to the ground and tried desperately to crawl away. His rifle was snagged in the undergrowth and his helmet came off, exposing his head to the swarm that went for him remorselessly. Platoon 4 Commander, CPT Jagrup Singh, seeing his plight, sprinted up the hill, lifted him in a fireman's lift and dashed downhill away from the swarm. If CPT Singh had sustained any stings, nobody had been the wiser. But, he got Kwok Yeow to the road and sent him immediately in the safety Land Rover to the SAFTI Medical Centre. On the way, Kwok Yeow passed out and he recollects regaining consciousness only at the Medical Centre where the Medical Officer (MO), CPT (Dr.) Seah Cheng Hock lost count of the number of stings he had sustained. The MO reckoned that Kwok Yeow was lucky to have survived, as hornet stings, especially if extensive, can kill. Some victims are extremely allergic to the venom and can succumb to just one or two.

To this day, Kwok Yeow's admiration for COL (RET) Jagrup Singh is undiminished. But as far as the section attack on an enemy post was concerned, the enemy obviously won that time.

II. KEEPING HIS HEAD

Tony Seng Peng Khoon got it in the neck—as well as on the head and face—also during section training. He was then in Platoon 6, 'B' Company. He was on patrol training with his section. Ahead of him, Michael Tan Tiok Hong had unknowingly kicked something beside the path they were advancing along, only to find he had literally stirred up a hornets' nest. Hornets, as everybody should note, do not take kindly to such treatment. Peng Khoon dropped his

rifle and snatched off his helmet, mad with pain. His buddy behind him, Victor Lam Ying Kit, kept his cool. He grabbed the helmet and rammed it back on Peng Khoon's head and both rolled down the slope of the hill they were on. Peng Khoon got a preview of the state of his head and face from the look his Platoon Sergeant, Staff Sergeant Richard Ong gave him. He had been stung 14 times. He was warded in the SAFTI Medical Centre for two days of treatment and observation in case his neck swelled to the point of choking him to death.

III. EVASIVE TACTICS

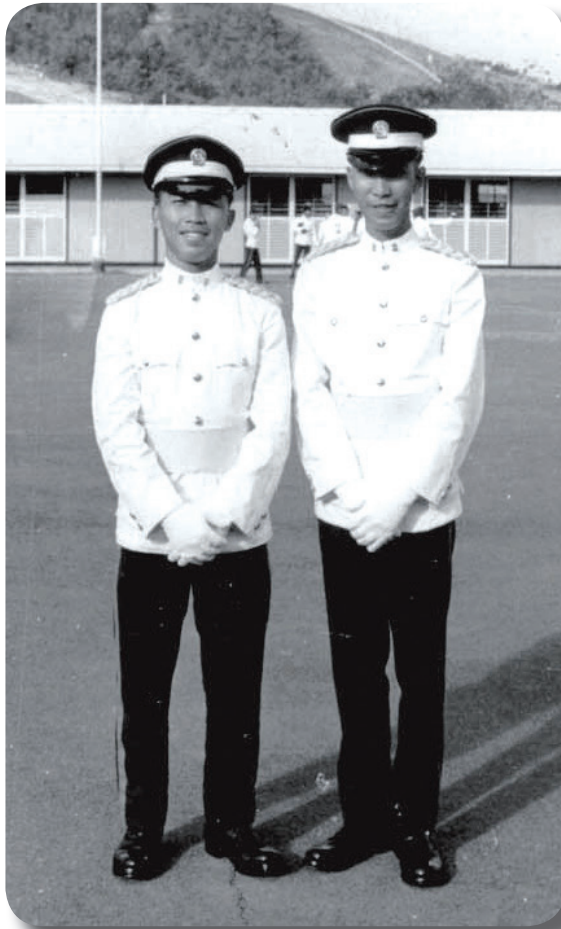
Mukhtiar Singh and Chua See Tiew discovered a unique way to get out of the second half of Exercise Red Beret, an infiltration exercise from Tampines to Pasir Laba, though not by choice. Moving towards Bukit Timah Hill along an overgrown footpath beside Mandai Road, they heard the unmistakable sound of a swarm of angry hornets coming their way as they passed the sluice gates of MacRitchie Reservoir. Having listened to accounts of hornet attacks from their colleagues, they recognised what it meant and hit the ground. Though they were not aware of it, they had been given a live demonstration of the Doppler Effect. They remained absolutely still but they were not spared. Fortunately, they had adopted the best course of action, if one could call accepting the inevitability of a limited amount (hopefully) of hornet stings an alternative to running. When the sound of the hornets died away, both bolted for their last checkpoint where they knew they could get help. Sensibly, they did not venture to recover See Tiew's rifle and their maps. Two instructors at the checkpoint arranged for them to be evacuated to SAFTI Medical Centre, after which one of them went to recover the rifle and maps. Mukhtiar and See Tiew were excused the rest of Exercise Red Beret.

IV. HORNETS

In Singapore, people generally use the term 'hornets' indiscriminately to describe the bee-like insects that respond to a threat to their nests by attacking the intruder and anything else in the vicinity. In fact, hornets are a species of social wasps, belonging to the family Vespidae (origins of the name of a popular brand of scooters) among which are included hornets, yellow-jackets and digger wasps. Some are solitary, while others form colonies. There are species of false hornets but trying to establish that before taking to one's heels is not recommended.

By and large, wasps living in colonies are aggressive only when their nests are threatened. They actually play an important part in ecological balance by preying on other pests, especially caterpillars and flies. Social wasps make nests of pulp from chewed up wood and vegetable matter, which are encased in a rounded paper-like envelope typically about the size of a football. As many as 15,000 may be found in a nest.

Hornets and yellow-jackets range in size from 1.25 to 2.5 cm and are mainly black and yellow. Yellow-jackets often live near human habitation and construct their nests in the ground or close to it. The “hornets” that soldiers in Singapore run into therefore are most likely members of this group. Their stings are painful and some people may be fatally allergic to their venom. Interestingly, a dying yellow-jacket worker releases an alarm pheromone that alerts its mates and draws them in a swarm to its location.



Officer Cadets Victor Lam and Seng Peng Khoon.



Baldfaced hornet



*Common
yellowjacket*



Giant hornet



*Nest of
baldfaced hornet*

*Graphic Courtesy
of West Virginia University.*

BARRACK LIFE DURING SECTION TRAINING

I. GROUP AFFILIATIONS

Though strong friendships were formed across sections and platoons and even the two companies, section training was compartmentalised. Other than in area cleaning, platoon drill, collective punishment, movement to training areas in vehicles and in terms of accountability to the Platoon Sergeant, Platoon 2I/C (second-in-command) and Platoon Commander, there was no compelling context for affiliation or identification with the platoon. The section partitions in the barrack blocks effectively isolated each section and generated a section identity. While a platoon would move out as a body to the designated training area, once there, after any platoon level demonstration or briefing, the respective section instructors took their charges to sub-areas directly and reconfigured again for meals of fresh rations and transportation back to camp. Within the sections, however, close associations flourished, some of which would last throughout their whole career. There was also a sense of co-operation that withstood minor personality clashes and transient aggravations. This was partly a matter of mutual survival since the training required operating as a section without the formal hierarchical structure of a section as in an operational unit. The status within the section depended on individual personality and/or role play as designated by each section instructor, the least popular role being that of the Infantry Rocket Launcher (IRL) carrier.

During section training, the sense of being a platoon was at its most intense in the daily area cleaning, when the toilets, washrooms and shower stalls of each platoon plus the areas immediately surrounding each platoon block had to be made ready for inspection by the



In the early days of section training - a typical section in 'A' Company.



The barrack room had become a second home by the section training phase.

Company Warrant Officer (CWO). By about the third week of recruit training, WO2 Hong Seng Mak had moved over to 'A' Company and WO2 Harry Lim had taken over in 'B' Company. Both remained CWOs in the respective companies throughout section training. Unsatisfactory work was never let off and the platoon or platoons responsible would be held to account as a whole. Interestingly, it never seemed to have occurred to any trainee to isolate and identify a culprit to the instructors or Platoon Sergeant. Usually, the CWOs would conduct their inspections after the company had left for the training area and the respective platoons would have the glad tidings waiting for them on their return. From the CWO's point of view, the most effective punishment was extra drill, which would be meted out either after lunch or in the evening, if there were no night training. As a special treat, it could be scheduled for Friday evening or Saturday afternoon just before the long or sort weekend break.

Platoon Sergeants had their own concerns as well—they could range from being ticked off by the CWO or Platoon Commander for some oversight by the platoon, or problems associated with the armskote, platoon stores or instructions in the RO. They could conduct their own extra drill sessions or, on behalf of the CWO, though the CWOs were not above conducting the drills themselves. Platoon Sergeants could also hold back dismissal over the

weekends, usually for a stipulated period like three extra hours and even threaten to cancel the whole weekend. The latter was never done in fact because it had to be pre-planned with additional indents of rations and having extra cooks stay back as well, not to mention the Platoon Sergeant himself. But, in at least one case in 'B' Company, the Platoon Sergeant, an outstanding NCO who went on to become an RSM as WO1, was so incensed about something that he seemed determined to carry out his threat. As it happened, however, during a lull in field training towards the end of the week, the Platoon Commander and Platoon 2I/C decided to have a friendly chat with the platoon. The atmospherics seemed right for an appeal and though an immediate response was not offered, the Platoon Commander apparently had a word with his Sergeant and the platoon was let off. Interestingly, the Platoon Sergeant seemed to have resented the appeal behind his back and raised the subject at a subsequent occasion, leaving the platoon considerably nervous for a time, anticipating a settling of scores.

II. INTERIOR ECONOMY

Less drastic punishment was in the form more of a forfeit than punishment as such. Keeping pet birds seemed to be the vogue with NCOs at one time during the early days of the course, and there were some trainees, like Chen Yew Ping, who were also into the hobby. A favourite forfeit was to order a trainee to catch a required number of grasshoppers to feed an NCO's bird or birds before leaving camp for the weekend.



Part of "interior economy" included exterior grass cutting.

It used to be a common sight to see several trainees walking around the grass skirting at the back of the platoon blocks, grabbing for grasshoppers that they flushed out with a stick or their feet. Yew Ping subsequently insisted that he had never been asked to catch grasshoppers for punishment but had done so for himself. In fact, several instructors and his Platoon Sergeant had cooperated and for a while, he had been looking after a bird which they had 'picked up' from somewhere during training and kept in a cage in the company store. Perhaps...

Another common forfeit was to order trainees to cut grass with scissors. A contractor did the routine grass cutting. But, when there was overgrown grass in between schedules, it was also sometimes an assignment to a platoon to cut the grass using a primitive grass-cutting implement that was common in those days. It comprised a six-inch blade attached with wire to a hockey-stick shaped branch and was swung in a continuous circular overhead motion. It was time-consuming in the extreme and required real skill to get an even cut over a given plot. But, the scissors job was sheer punishment.

Each week, during section training, a trainee would be appointed Platoon I/C. His job included marching the platoon to and from lecture sessions; making sure that all training stores were collected and returned after cleaning; all rifles were returned to the armskote for the night and weekend; all assignments for area cleaning for the platoon were completed; that barrack room doors were closed while the platoon was out on training; and supervising the cleaning of instructors' washrooms and company offices when it was his platoon's duty assignment. The latter sometimes yielded useful information of forthcoming exercise appointments and even details of checkpoints for topographic exercises, which were usually disseminated liberally to those concerned.

III. AFTER HOURS

A thriving pirate taxi business had been spawned by SAFTI and it cost around 50 cents a head to SAFTI from Jalan Jurong Kechil, or back. The taxi drivers were also agreeable to a pit stop at the laundry shop in both directions. There was nothing to stop trainees from leaving camp in the evening if there was no night training, other than the distance to 'civilisation', which was around the junction of Jalan Jurong Kechil and Bukit Timah Road and beyond, those days. It also meant a long return journey to be back in camp by 2359 hrs. Many trainees did squeeze in a night out or two each week, changing into civvies as soon as they left the camp main gate and changing back again before re-entering. Some would go as a group only as far as the coastal village of Tuas or the shops at 15½ milestone for dinner or supper. Mostly, the idea was for a break from the claustrophobia of barrack life, because it was always possible to go to the canteen for television, beer and snacks if need be. But, for some, the nights off were important for their family responsibilities and other urgent personal affairs. Unlike the National Servicemen of later years, nearly every trainee of the first intake at Pasir Laba was an economic digit in his family and several were the main breadwinners.

If the training went on into the night, as it often did, the parade square would remain lit up until all the necessary equipment cleaning was done and returned to the stores. Most trainees spent a lot of time on cleaning and oiling their rifles to reduce the workload the next morning before muster parade and also to prevent the dreaded pitting of the barrels, which would attract some stiff responses at a weapons' inspection. Night training was always followed up with a night snack, which included hot tea in hay boxes and either sandwiches, cream puffs or "bubor kachang", a watery green-bean or red-bean porridge. Though the latter was a traditional Singaporean recipe, SAFTI was probably responsible for introducing this to many young men in Singapore. It has also embedded itself in the military menu because it is now, as of this writing, been made available in all military units.

Other than marking an overlay for night navigation exercises, there was no 'academic' training as such, involving written work or passing a written examination. It would have been awkward with only one GS table and about six chairs per barrack room to do any kind of written assignment outside the auditoriums. Also, although NCOs would naturally be required to train their sections in operational units, during the section training phase, there were no mutual i.e. peer instruction as part of leadership training. It would have entailed too many sessions, whilst even among the trainees themselves, it was evident that quite a few would have had great difficulty expressing themselves in writing, if written exams of any kind had been included in the syllabus.

The cleaning of equipment and weapons at night also became the forum for social interaction as section-mates tended to get together while doing their chores. The broad cement apron in front of each platoon block was the usual venue and groups would festoon them around three sides of the parade square. These sessions provided the only real inter-section bonding opportunities. Those who had finished their assigned cleaning tasks of collective equipment would proceed to another favourite pass-time, the polishing of leather boots and brass fittings like shoulder titles and cap badges, or ironing uniforms. Every section had its own iron purchased collectively by the section and some had immersion heaters for hot drinks. There were not many who wrote letters, probably because they would be home in the weekend anyway, while those who were courting would meet on nights they were off training. Some would use the telephones in the company offices after duty hours. Quite a few would read newspapers or books, but there was no evidence that any one kept personal diaries. This may have been smart since there was no guarantee that what was in a barrack room would be treated as strictly personal and confidential by either colleagues or instructors. However, there was not a single instance of a break-in into a locker, loss of money or intrusive search of private possessions left in the lockers by fellow trainees or instructors throughout the course. On the contrary, there seemed to have been a very high sense of personal integrity and mutual trust all round.

Oddly, there was no attempt to provide in-camp entertainment as such. Nor had the idea of national education and the Music and Drama Company yet surfaced. At this stage of the training, there was also no promotion of sports, although occasionally the concept of making

Wednesdays a sports and recreation day was broached. But, having links to NAAFI—the (British) Navy, Army, Air Force Institute—it would have been easy to obtain the up-to-date movies that were shown in British camps. Perhaps, at the time, there had been some reservations about showing films which had not been cleared by the Singapore Film Censor Board, though they were shown in 1 and 2 SIR and later in SAF units until some time in the mid-1970s. On the other hand, it may have been assumed that if there was free time, the trainees would rather leave camp at night than see a movie. Or, they could always visit the canteen for TV.

IV. MINDING THE MINDERS

Life in the platoons depended very much on the personalities of the instructors, and in particular, the Platoon Commanders. The overall experience of trainees was that they were under pressure primarily because of the training schedule. There were administrative chores of one kind or another that were imposed by the Platoon Sergeants which further ate into their time, but once everything was squared away, there were intervals of freedom. For the most part, the officers of both companies remained in their appointments throughout the basic and section leader phase. Though there was no serious incidence of unreasonable behaviour on the part of the officers, some earned reputations for being more volatile and demanding than others, while others earned reputations for being a soft touch and fraternising with the trainees. This was so for NCOs as well, 'B' Company being in particular, the fiefdom of NCO section instructors. Among the officers, a couple of junior subalterns (Lieutenants/Second Lieutenants) in 'A' Company were regarded as temperamental and capable of 'blowing up' when things went wrong or, they were crossed or otherwise discomfited. OC 'A' Company, MAJ John Morrice was seen as caring but having a short fuse, while his 2I/C, CPT Daljeet Singh was believed to be fatherly, easy-going and friendly. In 'B' Company, both the OC, MAJ T.E. Ricketts and his 2I/C CPT James Teo (later Lieutenant-Colonel, Director, SAFTI) were seen as strict, tough and a little aloof, while Platoon Commander, Platoon 5, CPT Edward Chan, who tragically died in a traffic accident in 1988 after leaving the SAF as a Lieutenant-Colonel, was renowned as a martinet, who never smiled. His 2I/C, LTA Yussof Talib was suave and self-confident and the initial instructor for demolitions. Platoon 5 was always 'on the ball.' In spite of everything however, no trainee was subjected to any formal disciplinary proceedings before a junior or senior disciplinary officer during section training.

V. THE PARTING OF WAYS

As the 98 days of section training wore on, the impending end of section training began to assert itself in the form of tentative rehearsals for the passing out parade. Still, however, the trainees did not show any nervousness about their immediate future after the end of section training. SAFTI had so far remained silent about the next phase of training and



Section Training POP where MAJ Morrice was Parade Commander.

no one among the trainees seemed to have anticipated a parting of the ways at the end of the phase. In due course, there were separate and joint drill sessions for both companies in the main parade ground beside the QM/MT complex, some attended by the officers. The trainees were put through their paces for marching in columns of threes and in review order as well as the advance, in review order and presenting arms to the initially notional reviewing officer. The format for the parade, choreographed by SAFTI RSM WO1 Sng Cheng Chye, was essentially the same as the POP for recruit training. Soon, the designated officers for each contingent began to participate and the rehearsals became increasingly stressful for the trainees. The Parade Commander would be OC 'A' Company, Major John Morrice, the Parade 2I/C, would be 2I/C 'B' Company, CPT James Teo, a reversal of the arrangement from that of the basic training passing out parade. The Platoon 2I/Cs would lead each platoon and the



Gurcharan Singh receiving the award for best section leader.

Parade Sergeant Major would be WO1 Harry Lim. The SIR Band under LTA Abdullah was present for all the combined rehearsals. The dress code was No. 3 dress with helmet liners in camouflage cover. Sikhs wore the camouflage covers over their green turbans.

As 18th November loomed ever larger, the invitations to family members or alternative guests were distributed. Each trainee was required to prepare a complete uniform ensemble for the parade and get the items laundered to the standard expected. A fresh issue of camouflage covers for the helmets was arranged. By now, the more focused trainees had already altered their issue items for a better fit and many were beginning to take pride in their uniforms to the extent that some were even prepared to go home and return to camp in them. It was revealed that there would be a one-week break between the POP and the beginning of the next phase and each trainee was entitled to a free railway warrant on Malaysian Railways up to Padang Besar in the northernmost Malaysian state of Perlis. They would be entitled to break journeys along the way. Many began making plans. But, things must have been pretty depressing for those who were advised that they would be deferred to a later officer cadet course, while many of those who were deemed to have failed and were not included in the POP chose to leave the service. Some remained. At the same time, some of those who did not make it, were relieved. In all likelihood, the final disposition of the trainees could only have been done in conjunction with Director, Manpower, Mr. Herman Hochstadt and with the full cognisance of Dr. Goh Keng Swee, who believed in hands-on supervision of key issues. A very strong possibility existed that the distribution of those who would proceed immediately to officer cadet training and those who would be deferred to subsequent batches, was deliberately structured to include a good representation of good performers in the second batch so as to spread the talent. As it turned out, the deferment did not affect advancement: the SAF as such (post-SMF) from the beginning never subscribed to



Spoofing the establishment.

seniority in rank or service as a basis for promotion and the deferment eventually proved to be nothing more than an administrative measure except, of course, in terms of placement on the officers' salary scale. But, those who were deferred were initially sent to various weapons training courses and later assigned to outside units as Assistant Platoon Commanders, wearing officer cadet georgettes.

The final rehearsals included prize winners collecting their prizes from the Reviewing Officer. The overall best trainee was Gurcharan Singh of 'A' Company and Swee Boon Chai was best trainee of 'B' Company. There were also prizes for the best shot, the best in PT, and the best time returned for the 10 km run—Ponnusamy Kalastree of 'B' Company. These trainees had to practise stepping out of their ranks, marching to the reviewing stand, receiving the award, placing the award on a side table and marching back to their places, with the appropriate stamping of feet and salutes. In the meantime, their right hand neighbours had to hold their rifles for them.

In both companies, plans were made to celebrate the end of the phase. 'A' Company simply arranged for a multi-course Chinese dinner in a restaurant called the Half-Way House at the village surrounding the junction of Bukit Timah Road and Jalan Jurong Kechil. Officers, NCOs and wives or partners were included. 'B' Company decided to celebrate the event with a dinner in the company square, with an impromptu concert performance provided by the trainees. Director, SAFTI, LTC Kirpa Ram Vij was the Guest-of-Honour. The trainees built the stage over two days, with the help of SAFTI QM and the Training Aids staff. Both companies planned their respective function on the night of 18th November to facilitate the departure the next day of those who wanted to use the railway warrant for a holiday in West Malaysia.



Happy revellers at 'B' Company Farewell Party.



Jimmy Koh's 'A Go-Go Girls' giving their all on stage.

The great day finally dawned. HQ Company made the parade ground ready with armchairs for VIPs, steel folding chairs for other guests, bunting and flags on the walls of surrounding buildings and the tall parade square lamp posts and arrangements for the refreshment of guests. Several staff members of IHQ were assigned the task of ushers, while others would be spectators; the Provost Platoon prepared to handle the influx of vehicles, the Photographic Section of Doctrine and Training Department stood by to record the historic occasion and somebody from SAFTI Orderly Room to handle the media corps. The trainees were by now also organised for a major change in deployment. They would all be relocated one way or another: those who would be posted to 'A' Company (the list, with the platoon each trainee was assigned to was pinned on company notice boards); those who were going for weapons training and later as Assistant Platoon Commanders in units; those who would be assigned as Corporals to units; those who did not make it to Corporal but opted to stay in the Army anyway; and those who would leave (or had already left by that day). Some would be going home with their parents or other guests to join the dinners later, others would stay back and go home late at night or the next morning.

The parade was scheduled to commence at 1000 hrs. By about 0915 hrs, guests had begun to arrive and they included military attaches from various embassies and representatives from the Far East Land Forces and the Israeli Advisor team. All SAF units were represented. Prominent members of the Singapore Civil Service and Singapore's business community were given VIP treatment. The trainees had assembled in their respective company lines and were formed up on the parade square by 0945 hrs. From then, the parade went on like clockwork, with the arrival on the dot of 1000 hrs of Dr. Goh Keng Swee, the Minister for Interior and Defence as Reviewing Officer. Dr. Goh seemed greatly pleased at what he saw before him: the largest contingent of trained Corporals Singapore had ever gathered

in one place, of which many would go on either directly or after a brief interval for officer training. In about seven months, he could expect to get more than 100 newly minted Second Lieutenants to further his plans for the SAF, the beginning of a pipeline that, as it turned out, would go on indefinitely with the introduction of National Service the next year. Dr. Goh's vision for the SAF was encapsulated in one phrase of his address: "I expect all of you to be like the redoubtable Gurkhas."

After the parade, each trainee had to return his rifle to the armskote. Most had the good sense or force of habit to run the cleaning rod through the barrel with some oil knowing that the rifles would be out of use for several days, but otherwise, no further cleaning was necessary. Each company's storeman manned the company armskote for that evening. Once the rifles were in, the trainees joined the reception that had been arranged for the guests in the dining halls, which had, among other decorations, potted bonsai plants loaned by the father of 'B' Company trainee Lee Hock Seng. That over, 'A' Company went off for its dinner at which, from the accounts and the photographs taken, a good time was had by all and some more than others. 'B' Company may have had an even more enjoyable time with the musical groups, singers and skits (private rehearsals and/or impromptu performances) plus a considerable quantity of duty-free beer. Trainee Koh Whatt Teo had arranged for several 'A-Go-Go' girls to perform on stage and some of the instructors and trainees were visibly eager to reciprocate later in the evening in more private circumstances. On the following day, various groups of close friends departed for Malaysia by train.



Some reached Penang on the free railway warrant.

OFFICER CADET TRAINING

I. REPORTING TO 'A' COMPANY

The nine days of break between the Section Training passing out parade on Friday, 18th November and Sunday, 27th November, when the cadets returned to 'A' Company on the eve of the new phase, whizzed by so fast that for some, it seemed no more than a figment of their imagination. But, it had been real enough. Many of the cadets made use of the railway warrant that each had received to go as far as Thailand and they had plenty of stories to tell, and some documentary evidence as well. There were many mini-reunions in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Hadjai, the three most popular destinations. For others, especially the few married ones, it had been a blessed opportunity to be with their families. For the majority, the bachelors, it was a blissful time with girlfriends, fiancés, and/or their old 'gangs' from whom they had been estranged and seemed to be drifting further and further away, a prelude to what would eventually be the way things were as the army took over their lives. There was however, a sense that this was the home stretch, distant as next July was at November's end. For some, the anxieties were greater than others because oral and written self-expression, higher intellectual processes and most of all, spontaneous leadership traits, would be demanded and graded. It was far from certain that whatever had qualified them for selection as officer cadets was a guarantee that they would make the cut. They could not even be sure that their natural instincts would serve them faithfully when they were placed under the microscope of leadership role-play. So far, the skills that had been imbued during basic and section training had been essentially methodical and manual. Especially for those with lesser education, they could only hope that their guardian angel would not desert them at the critical moment.

For another group, there was a high degree of fatalism: having made it so far, they had already exceeded what they deemed their fair entitlement in life, given their socially conditioned expectations. If they graduated as officers, it would be a bonus and even then, they would not have gone beyond the rank of Captain. If not, they were certain of a fast track in the NCO ranks, where they would probably not have been out of place, perhaps even more at home. There is a strong likelihood that this was also MID's calculation. Many of those who deferred at the end of section training—or so it seemed to their colleagues—should have been selected for officer cadet training. But, if the entire cream of the crop had been sent as the first intake in 'A' Company, it would have been difficult to justify a hundred percent success rate at the end of the course. In the meantime, those who had been deferred, would have been uniformly of second order eligibility and would, theoretically, have created follow-on batches of officer cadets of lesser calibre, as it were. On the other hand, by mixing and matching, all batches would average out and those who did not make it to a commission in any officer cadet frame, would go on to become very highly trained NCOs. Given that merit

and not seniority in service would count towards advancement, the current arrangement was in MID's best interest.

About two thirds of the cadets, as they now were formally called, had been in 'A' Company for the basic and section training phases. But it was a new environment for those from 'B' Company as there had been little cross-company interaction. In dribs and drabs, the cadets drifted in that benchmark Sunday, some well before night to check out their new grouping on the company notice boards. The pack had been pretty thoroughly shuffled though some close links had sustained, with buddies being assigned to the same platoon and even the same section. There were three pairs of siblings. One pair, Titus and Javamani Stephen was in the same section. The other pair, stepbrothers Lien Beng Thong and Hee Kam Yong too ended up in the same section too. Another pair of stepbrothers, Subandie bin Sahari and Amin bin Jantan ended in different platoons. But, new contacts and new relationships were inevitable and it was remarkable how quickly the bonds developed. The section was still the primary group, and as the training progressed, the mutual support within each section became, in many instances inviolate, as against other sections in the same platoon and even more so against other platoons. However, mainly because the routine training was not on a competitive basis, there was little inter-platoon rivalry except for a brief interlude during the inter-platoon boxing competition.

Barrack rooms and rifles were re-assigned but each cadet had taken back his entire issue of uniforms and kit in his duffle bag, called Ali Baba bag for the break and brought them back in reasonably presentable condition in preparation for the first muster parade as officer cadets. Many had simply taken their uniforms to the laundry at 15 ½ milestone, Upper Jurong Road before the break and picked them up en route to camp. The laundry had become used to this Sunday night routine and stayed open until around midnight. The assigned cadets sorted out their own bunk distribution in each barrack room and spent the first evening, for the most part, lining their cupboards with brown paper and organising their cupboard layout. The dress code included a white plastic disc backing for the badge on the jockey cap and white georgettes for collar lapels in the No. 3 Dress configuration. Cadet Under Officers had to wear a white sleeve with a single thin blue strip on each epaulette while the respective NCO appointment holders wore wrist straps with the badges of rank. The first Cadet Under Officer was Officer Cadet Gurcharan Singh.

The first night was spent as usual with the majority polishing their leather combat boots and sand brass fittings to a mirror finish, with some compulsively ironing their uniforms before fitting on the georgettes and laying them by for the muster parade the next morning. Once again, no one fully recollects that first morning, but there was a muster parade in No. 3 Dress and a vague notion of an intensive inspection by the new Platoon Commanders and new section instructors. The company then marched to the company auditorium for a briefing on the cadet appointment holders' duties, responsibilities and delegated authority, followed by an address by MAJ John Morrice and an overview of the syllabus by CPT Daljeet Singh. There

is also the perception that the first day's activities were camp-bound and oriented towards administrative priorities. In any case, by the end of duty hours, Monday-morning blues had pretty much dissipated and everybody was back in the groove as if the break had not occurred.

Those who came from 'B' Company had the opportunity to renew their acquaintance with Company Warrant Officer (CWO) Hong Seng Mak, who had been promoted to WO1, having briefly known him in the first two weeks of recruit training in 'B' Company. It was not exactly reassuring to discover he was the king of the parade square in 'A' Company because he had earned a reputation for being unbending and unforgiving of mistakes. Before long, everybody referred to him as "Tiger" or "Tiger Hong" and his presence in the barrack lines had the effect of a curfew. It is a matter of wonder to most of the First Batch how few of them actually ran foul of Tiger in the form of extra duty or other forfeits. Tiger demonstrated that it is not necessary to harass anybody to cow them: merely, let it be known that no nonsense would be tolerated and come down hard, but fairly, whenever it reared its head. Tiger's personal conduct—in dress, inscrutability, aloofness, lifestyle (non-smoker, qualified boxing referee, whip-thin)—offered no opportunity to fault him or encourage cynicism about his professional credentials. As far as the cadets were concerned, while they may have had their personal stars among the officers and instructors, no one left such an impression on them as Tiger did.

CPT Jagrup Singh and CPT Goh Lye Choon, previously Platoon Commanders of No. 4 and 6 Platoons respectively in 'B' Company had come over to 'A' Company as Platoon Commanders of Platoons 1 and 3, while CPT Albert Tan remained as Platoon Commander of Platoon 2. MAJ John Morrice and CPT Daljeet Singh remained as Company Commander and Company 2I/C. 'B' Company cadets had come to know of several of the officers who had been instructors in 'A' Company during the pre-cadet training phase, including CPT Clarence Tan of the red Midget, while CPT Albert Tan (no relative) had also figured prominently in the recruitment brochure in an elegant home setting with his wife and elder son, Adrian. The easily recognised CPT Cedric 'Butch' Klienman, Commander, Platoon 3 of the original 'A' Company had been reassigned to the Training and Doctrine Department. A Sword of Honour winner at the Federation Military College, he looked like a Caucasian although he was Eurasian, spoke with a clipped accent reminiscent of his partial German ancestry, had curly reddish hair and was known for his stylish turnout and earnest professionalism. Ex-'B' Company members of the new Platoon 3 were introduced to LTA Abdullah 'Dollah' Ghani, a tough young Malay officer who took himself and his duties very seriously though his irrepressible boyishness got him into regular trouble with the Adjutant and it seems now that his name was always on the duty officer roster several days running at a stretch. A Federation Military College graduate, LTA Abdullah left the SAF in 1970 after attending a course in the School of Advanced Training for Officers (SATO) to join the Malaysian Armed Forces, where he earned the sobriquet of 'Yehudi' Ghani and retired as a Major General.



Charlie Kumaran may have been posing here but officer cadet training brought more paperwork.

II. A NEW TACK IN TRAINING

Looking back, it is now clear that the syllabus for officer cadet training was a planned fusion between the Israeli priorities of field skills and the British officers' regimental lifestyle as understood and experienced by the SMF. But, there was a distinct change of rhythm between the essentially physical nature of the recruit/section training phases and the more cerebral officer cadet training. Though field and practical training still dominated the programme by far, there was more classroom work, among which operational planning, air-photo reading, signals, military law, unit administration and mess accounts stood out for one reason or another. The company and platoon auditoriums became a more frequent venue than during the previous phases, and as they were air conditioned, it was welcome any time for all and indispensable for some to catch up on sleep. At the time, the medical profession had little, if any, knowledge of sleep apnoea and there were two cadets in particular who must have suffered from it. This was because as soon as they hit the bench in the auditoriums, they would fall soundly asleep. One of them unfortunately failed the course but the other did pretty well in the order of merit.

There was very little follow-up in most of the classroom lessons by way of study time, 'homework' assignments, or practical application for the lessons to stick in the mind. Subjects like military law and Officers' Mess accounts merely made the cadets aware of their existence in the scheme of things in an officer's life. Only through serious application and on-the-job experiences are such fields likely to be grasped anyway.



A ground reconnaissance for an appreciation of situation lesson, possibly deliberate defence.

The exceptions were lessons on how to derive a plan through the process known in the British staff duties manual as ‘Appreciation of Situation’, air-photo reading and, to a lesser extent, the theoretical aspects of Signals, all of which had practical applications for combat training. The ‘Appreciation of Situation’, which systematically analyses under set headings, alternate courses of action in arriving at a plan of operation, got the attention of cadets because they were told from the beginning that there would be a written examination towards the end of the course. To many cadets, given their educational background, this must have occasioned considerable anxiety. It is quite probable that when the test (a three-hour written submission, complete with overlay on tracing paper) was conducted in the last month of the course, the determining factor was not so much reasoned arguments, but the broad feasibility of the final plan of attack which, at the platoon level, was straightforward enough.

Operational Planning. By and large, cadets looked forward to the practical application of operational planning. It was almost always in No. 3 Dress with jockey cap, jungle boots and water bottle, with no webbing or rifles. Typically, a whole morning, when it was relatively cooler, would be spent at some vantage point studying terrain with respect to the mission and the enemy scenario, each cadet supplied with a topographic map, air photographs and the mission statement. The presiding instructor would intersperse individual planning sessions by grouping the cadets and nominating presenters at random or according to whether they had been spotted goofing off, or if they thought they could get a good presentation from the nominee. There would be detailed checking on the ground to highlight issues that may have been missed or spotted by the cadets and not infrequent refreshment breaks if a convenient

kampong grocery was around. What the farmers thought about all this as the cadets walked through their market gardens is anybody's guess, but in all likelihood, many resented it though the intruders were particularly careful to respect their property and livelihood. After all, several of the cadets had come from farms.

Administration. Several subjects were bundled together under the heading 'Administration' for which some 50 periods including night lessons were allocated. Based on infantry units, there were lessons on the duties of a Platoon Commander in 'peace and war' and administration in relation to an 'independent mission' which stressed welfare, morale, the need to keep training and maintaining equipment. Some simple scenarios were devised. Practical work involved making an 'administrative plan'. From there, it went on to planning a training schedule, life in a military camp with the duties and chores of officers, rations and petrol checks, looking after unit guardrooms where minor offenders were often in detention, handling and maintenance of ammunition, health discipline and inspection of quarters and other facilities in camp.

One subject, 'Administration In The Line' sounded portentous, if somewhat archaic. It seemed to suggest a mindset that went back to the experiences of WWII and earlier, implying a slower pace of war, requiring rear HQs to plan for troop rotations, leave, postal services and long term medical and personnel administration. Of course, it could also apply to occupation forces or peacetime deployment such as United Nations missions away from permanent HQs. It did not sound too odd at the time as Confrontation with Indonesia had been a recent experience and it had involved Malaysian and Singaporean troops being deployed in distant field bases. No doubt, there will always be the need to administer troops 'in the line' as for example for a United Nations deployment, but given the communications capabilities of the new millennium, the pace at which operations will be conducted and most of all, the progress made in management 'science,' the approaches applicable in the 1960s were rapidly on the way out. At the time, administration was the purview of a personage with the grand title of Deputy Assistant Adjutant Quarter Master General (DAAQMG) at the Division level, if there had been one and his line manager in the Brigade HQ and unit, the much feared Adjutant. In the SAF, the appointment of Adjutant itself, with awesome powers of discipline over subalterns, did not last beyond 1969, when the office of Manpower Officer or S1, replaced it, with only a pale shadow of the Adjutant's authority. The administration as a whole was divided among the S1, S2 (Intelligence), S3 (Operations Officer/General Staff Officer) and the S4 (Logistics), with the S3 being *primus inter pares*.

There was a considerable emphasis on unit transportation and the planning of road movements in convoys. These were all pretty relevant but there was no sense that the processes were set in concrete and a general perception among the cadets was that they would have to pick up these things with hands-on experience when they were posted to units. There was also another factor that came between the cadets and the conviction that they were listening to the gold standard: what they experienced in SAF TI in those early days militated against the

pronouncements in the classroom by the lecturers. SAFTI was still being put together piece by piece, man by man and vehicle by vehicle. Still, it was beguiling to know what could be.

Another subject that was a vestige of two centuries of British military administration was 'Regimental and Pay Accounting'. The breakdown of the subjects give an idea of how things have changed since then: double column cash book; nominal and real accounts; stock, property and investment (officers' mess stuff); transfer and balancing; definition and preparation for audit; star classification and pay codes. The first few batches of officer cadets were doomed to go through these arcane subjects, but the SAF was no British military outpost far from Whitehall. MID quickly identified these millstones round the necks of Unit Commanders and set about streamlining the procedures for unit administration. For a start, every officer was required to have a bank account to which the centralised Pay Office credited his or her salary, less any docked pay or other garnishing.¹ But, for several years, the junior officers were required to draw a sidearm and a magazine of rounds, withdraw cash from the bank and accompanied by a pay clerk, hold a pay parade for the rank and file.

But, there were subjects relevant to career officers, as the First Batch would be, who could be expected to have a greater general knowledge of the organisation as a whole than National Service officers who were yet to be even defined as a factor in the equation. These dealt with the operation and organisation of various bases: Central Manpower Base (then a brand new concept); General Equipment Base; Weapons, Ammunition and Optical Base; the all-important Transport Base; and the equally critical Vehicle Repair Base. Career officers could expect to have to deal personally and network with their counterparts in these establishments immediately after being posted to units, to expedite relevant matters for their own subunits.

Staff Duties. The British military, with years of regimental tradition under a central authority in a parliamentary system of government had developed a great number of traditional processes by the 20th Century. By the Victorian era, many of these traditions had become de rigor. These included the form of ceremonial drills, the correct way to raise and lower the flag at a military outpost and the format for formal dining-in. One of them was also how military correspondence and papers were to be crafted. The bibles for these traditions are the *Queen's (or King's) Regulations* and the *Staff Duties In The Field*, both of which were still authoritative sources for the SAF in the 1960s. The latter prescribed the language and layout by way of models, for a host of documentation from how to reply to an invitation to dinner, and the correct form of abbreviations in military messages, to the military symbols for marking maps and operational overlays. No doubt in a British regiment, the Adjutant would be on the lookout for any carelessness and would award the subaltern, appropriate remedial training. But, starchy as it seemed, it was a good education for young officers, while standardisation facilitated rapid integration, wherever the officer was reassigned. The lessons of staff duties, given to the first batch of cadets were relatively short and to the point: firstly, how to write a formal letter within the organisation and secondly, military symbols.

The latter was to prove most useful in the course of unit life and advanced training as there were numerous exercises and the operations overlay was the main reference document for the Orders Group.

Military Law. Most cadets recognised the importance of a working knowledge of Military Law. The objective of the Military Law lessons, if limited, was clearly stated (as it had to be, given the complexity of the subject and the overall time available during the cadet training phase): to teach officer cadets how to refer to the Singapore Army Act and the Manual of Military Law. The relevance of the subject in the military stemmed from several facts. The military had delegated judicial authority by Act of Parliament (The Singapore Army Act) to deal with a fairly serious range of typical offences within its own turf, including detention of offenders in unit guardrooms and detention barracks. Discipline was a major consideration in the daily life (and during operations) of military installations because of the inherently onerous nature of duties. The authority of those of higher rank over their subordinates had to be managed through a legislated process such as summary trials so that they would not be exercised arbitrarily. And, last but not least, there had to be a supervisory body such as the Legal Department of MID, later MINDEF, to ensure not only due process but also recourse to appeal. The problem with the Military Law lessons was that precisely because of the profound issues involved, the way they were presented to an educationally heterogeneous audience left the impression of a checklist for dealing with disciplinary issues. But, they were a start and it was expected that in units, there would be qualified people like the Adjutant to guide young officers. Of immediate practical value to the cadets, were the scales of punishment that could be ‘inflicted’ on officers and soldiers.

Training Safety Regulations. The paucity of Training Safety Regulations when SAFTI first started training, is amply demonstrated in the fact that the entire syllabus for the subject was covered in four hours, of which two were for a case study of training accidents and the last was for a written test followed by a summation. There were hardly any documented safety regulations other than internal memoranda within the units and SAFTI. A cryptic entry in the minutes of the General Staff Fortnightly Conference held on 21st November, 1966, sums up the situation: “The Director (General Staff) will appoint a committee to study the Safety Regulations some time next week, before sending it up to P. S. These Safety Regulations are provisional and shall come under review once every six months. They will continue to be so for two or three years”.² Of course, it was too early in the life of the SAF to have any comprehensive and tested Training Safety Regulations and whatever there had been from the British forces was rapidly overtaken by the fact that the system of training in terms of pace, subject matter and especially the intensive use of live ammunition and explosives was a quantum leap. What was remarkable was that no one—cadets and trainers alike—thought too much about it and indeed found what was actually practised in the field appropriate, in so far as acquiring military combat skills was concerned. There would be accidents and serious ones at that, but fortunately for the cadets in the first few batches at SAFTI, there were no fatalities.

Other Classroom Lessons. But, there were more classroom lessons that offered the prospect of nodding off, or at least, lapses of attention, when out of the quadrant of the lecturer's vision. Those that involved practical work such as air-photo reading, Slidex or Griddle (Signals code-based text preparation for secure transmission—how primitive we were then!) or operational planning got the cadets' attention as they could be picked on to make a presentation or provide an answer. Others such as the double-entry bookkeeping for Officers' Mess accounts were freebies. Not that the lecturers themselves took the latter any more seriously than the cadets or were much more knowledgeable: you credit the debit and debit the credit. And, no doubt put the Mess NCO on a charge if the accounts go awry or some beer is unaccounted for.

Charm Syllabus. Cadets always looked forward to educational tours, the germ of national education classes, except that the idea was genuinely that officers were expected to have a minimum of general knowledge. Looking back at things, the operative word was minimal, but the cadets visited the Jurong Industrial Park, petrochemical industries, shipyards and several other national establishments. Perhaps, these boondoggles were necessary interruptions at the time as the majority of the instructors were doing ground preparations for involved exercises or the exercises themselves were being put together. The educational tours intensified towards the end of the course. The gentrification of cadets included one lesson close to the passing out parade on table manners with western cutlery during a dining-in. The briefing included how to work one's way inward with the cutlery as the courses were served, how to eat one's serving of soup 'square' (dip, raise straight up, move horizontally to the lips, lower straight down to the bowl and repeat), the passing of the Port and Madeira, and how to offer and respond to the toast (don't repeat after the Toastmaster "To the President", just intone "The President"). There was also a cocktail function towards the end of the course where the cadets were required to wear long-sleeved shirts with ties and indulge in polite conversation with guests and superiors. It was emphasised that politics, religion and women were strictly taboo subjects in an Officers' Mess. Which may have explained why the cadets needed to know what was going on in Jurong Shipyard and Mobil Refinery.

Guest Lectures. Another aspect of the broadening of minds at the time was altogether more impressive because they represented not only the expectations from the first intake by the standing of the lecturers, but the privileged insights that were provided. There was a spate of lectures by senior civil servants and academics towards the end of the course, when time was heavy on everybody's hands after most of the core lessons had been done and the final evaluation was underway. No doubt, too the final weeks of the course included some slack while the details of the commissioning parade and the commissioning ceremony, along with the future assignments of the graduates, were being finalised. The list of speakers and subjects, probably only to be dreamed of by current officer cadets, included:

- J. Y. Pillay, Deputy Secretary, Economic Planning Unit, Ministry of Finance: National Economic Planning; 27th June, 1967.

- Howe Yoon Chong, Chairman Housing Development Board: Public Housing and Urbanisation in Singapore; 4th July, 1967.
- Professor G.W. Bartholomew, Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Singapore: The Constitution of Singapore, 7th July, 1967.
- Dr. Kernail Singh Sandhu, Lecturer, University of Singapore: Conflict in Vietnam, 10th July, 1967.
- Professor G. G. Thomson, Head Political Study Centre: The July 1964 Riots in Singapore.

But, the highlight of the lectures was the one by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew on 19th December, 1966. This was his second lecture in SAFTI. The first had been on 18th June, 1966, when he had unexpectedly been present at the official opening ceremony of SAFTI, at which Dr. Goh Keng Swee had officiated. His visit on 19th December was as Guest of Honour for the official opening of the officer cadet course. The theme of his address was the planned development of the SAF, which was still on a broad-brush basis, but indicative of the enlarged scope compared to what it was at the time. Yet, the current serving officers and the cadets were given reason to believe that they would be regarded as an exclusive group. Although on 29th November, 1966, the day after the officer cadet phase had started, Dr. Goh had announced that with effect from 1st January the following year, all new government and statutory board employees would have to undergo military training, it was only on 21st February, 1967 that Mr. Lee officially promulgated the introduction of National Service for all male citizens at age 18. But in December 1966, it was a work in progress. Mr. Lee observed that the small group of men who were employed full-time as professionals to run the machinery of the armed forces, needed to be men of quality. Not just quality of the mind but possessed of the character and mettle which “determines if the men you lead have the élan, confidence, the verve: which is only possible given dedicated, able and inspired leadership.” For the cadets who were on the threshold of a commission, it was as good a job description as they were likely to get.

III. OFFICER CADET FIELD TRAINING

The entire platoon is strung out along the track on a moonless night and everybody is running at a dog-trot, rifle in hand or slung across the back and steel helmets wobbling, panting, shuffling, stumbling, wondering when it would end. At the head of this ungainly centipede is a stretcher with a cadet at each corner, trying to cushion the gouging of the handle from his bruised shoulder with each bounce, at the same time synchronising his steps with that of his three fellow cadets at each of the other corners and his desperate breathing with his gait. Another cadet is lying face up on the canvas bed of the stretcher, holding on to the sides for dear life as the stretcher bearers negotiate each obstacle in the path or falter as they stumble over roots, small boulders and potholes, or dodge encroaching branches on the track. Adding to the misery, are the instructor’s vitriolic comments and jibes. The

stretcher bearers are praying for the blessed word “Next!” when the four cadets in the queue immediately behind them speed up, pace their counterparts’ running rhythm and take over the handles in a movement similar to passing the baton in a relay, which in fact this is, except that this will be no neat passing but a brutal jamming of the stretcher handle into the collarbone of someone who may be shorter or taller than his predecessor. The relieved bearers then move aside as the rest of the platoon passes them and join the tail end. In between, perhaps another cadet might be nominated by the instructor to be the casualty, though being a casualty on a stretcher for a night evacuation exercise was not exactly a treat either; sometimes, the peskiest cadet might also be nominated the casualty and strangely, the evacuation would hit severe atmospheric turbulences five feet above ground. And, if the instructor was in a mischievous mood, he might select a Malcolm Alfonso or a Charlie Kumaran, or a Chng Teow Hua, the heaviest cadets in their respective platoons, to be the casualty for the whole exercise.

On the whole, the consensus among cadets was that it was better to be a stretcher-bearer than a casualty. The stretchers used in 1966 had solid wood frames and heavy gauge canvas, resembling for all the world, camp cots without legs. They were rolled up and carried by the medical orderly attached to each platoon for operations. But, the cadets all took the point of the casualty evacuation exercise: no comrade would be left behind, alive or dead. Obviously, there were arithmetical limits depending on the ratio of casualties to non-casualties, but the lesson was pressed home as an article of faith, at the heart of soldiers’ morale and esprit de corps. Quite so.

The casualty evacuation exercises were initially conducted as stand-alone lessons, but were judiciously or punitively added to other exercises, especially raids and withdrawals, during the course of officer cadet training. They were the culmination of the limited training in first aid that was conducted by NCOs from the SAFTI Medical Centre, which had dealt with the use of the FFD, pressure points to stop bleeding and improvised splints.

If casualty evacuation was tough, it was only one measure of the increase in training intensity in the transition from section level to officer cadet training. Field training as a whole involved longer blocks of time per session, extending overnight as with the three-day field deployment as a company off Pasir Ris for the introductory lessons on coastal navigation, or the lesson on field fortifications and deliberate defence at the platoon level. During the latter part of the course, there were the raids—endless foot-slogging over interminable distances in all weather, carrying heavy radio sets, the Infantry Rocket Launcher and a variety of cumbersome stores. As far as possible, such training would be spaced out to allow some recuperation, but with the range of subjects to be covered, the pile-ups were inevitable.

Training in manoeuvring areas far from SAFTI, such as Seletar, Changi or Pasir Ris offered the opportunity for nodding off during the hour-long outbound 3-tonner rides, but there was always the prospect of the rations truck being late with the meals, or being late to arrive

at the pickup point after the exercise. Breakdowns, traffic jams, separation of vehicles in the convoys or simply not finding the right access road to the RV were the usual expectations and Murphy's Law ruled gleefully. One of the more unpleasant experiences was that of the vehicle's tarpaulin cover being torn or damaged such that after a wet training session at night, the inside of the vehicle would be a wind tunnel. It was a testimony to youth and hardiness that none of the cadets got pneumonia.

Preparations for live-firing exercises became more demanding with platoon training, which in turn became the template for field training as officer cadets. The operations required the further subdivision of the platoon into various elements, such as the support group or protection parties for breaching of obstacles. Choreographing these elements, each under the supervision of a Safety Officer and usually with a specified target area, required even greater care. Dry runs tended to increase. Coupled with frequent inattentiveness on the part of the cadets, the interruptions in clearance from SAFTI Operations Centre, or some other concern on the ground, live-firing exercises could wear on the nerves of everyone. And inevitably, after the exercise, someone would have dropped a magazine or a bayonet and the lost item would have to be recovered with a collective search after all the Figure 11 targets and other training stores had been picked up. Talk about looking for a needle in a haystack at night! Oddly though, the missing item was almost invariably found. What focusing the collective minds can do, as Benjamin Franklin might have remarked. But, the seemingly incessant dry runs ingrained important professional insights about orchestrating engagements with the enemy in combat situations with confidence, as also for managing the future training of one's own troops as officers.



There was always tension with the business of activating a bangalore torpedo.

There were only two significant instances of serious casualties during officer cadet training. The first was during a night platoon deliberate attack by No.3 Platoon, which was a follow-through from a day deliberate attack, both in area A. In both the day and night versions, a barbed wire obstacle had to be breached by a bangalore torpedo. The same objective was involved and the difference was that for the night attack, the positioning of the various groups had to be closer to compensate for the darkness. Probably because of this, the assault force was brought in closer to the breaching point and may have encroached into the danger template. Dry runs had been conducted at dusk and the Figure 11 targets and other prominent reference points had been marked out with Yehoudi lamps after dinner. There had been one more dry run in the dark and everyone was in position for the live-firing execution. The exercise was cleared for execution. The breaching party had ignited the bangalore torpedo and was back in place, waiting for the explosion, ready to charge forward again and mark the gap for the assault forces to storm through. The bangalore torpedo went off and the assault proceeded. It was only during the reorganisation that it was discovered that two cadets, Gurbachan Singh and Menon, both from No. 11 Section, were bleeding, the former from his right thigh and the latter from his right bicep. Both had felt a distinct impact when the explosion occurred but no pain as yet. There was some mild panic but both casualties were evacuated to SAFTI Medical Centre in the safety vehicle and warded for the night after a rather liberal application of hydrogen peroxide on the wounds by the Duty Medical Orderly. They were evacuated next day to Outram Road General Hospital and were operated on the following day for shrapnel. The wounds earned them about two weeks of Attend 'C', meaning rest in bed but the bigger bonus, or so it seemed at the time, was that they did not have to do Exercise Red Beret. In fact, both missed out on one of the best exercises of the course.



The assault streams through a gap in the wire obstacles cut by a bangalore torpedo.

The second instance of an exercise casualty occurred during the battalion attack demonstration on 11th July, 1967. While assaulting one of the objectives, Officer Cadet Martin Choo of Platoon 1 happened to be skirting an Amonal field that was used to simulate mortar fire when it was activated. He sustained second-degree burns on his arm and was unable to participate in the Commissioning Parade five days later. Dressed in ceremonial uniform with his hand in a sling, he watched from the sidelines.

IV. PHYSICAL TRAINING

Routine physical training was essentially the same regime as was practised since the recruit training: the obstacle course and cross-country running. The latter was a random mix of three and four mile runs which no longer intimidated the cadets, many of whom were getting something of a high from the running by this stage, given that the runs were in PT kit and not battle order. The PTIs were always fit, as were several of the younger officers whose duties kept them in the same trim as the cadets, but some of the older officers with considerable sedentary work would have had problems keeping up with the cadets on the longer runs. Cadets continued to display a general weakness in the arms, compared to their legs as was evident in the problems encountered with the ropes and the six-foot wall. SAFTI was not yet littered with chin-up bars outside dining halls and it was up to the cadets to do what they could to improve things in this regard.

A total of 25 periods of Physical Training was allotted to Unarmed Combat, a subject that had not been included in the basic and section training phases. Conducted mainly by the PTIs, the programme was supervised by MAJ T.E. Ricketts, who had been OC 'B' Company. MAJ Ricketts had been seconded from the Police Force, in which he had earned a reputation for his fighting spirit and sheer guts. He was a tough burly Eurasian who spoke deliberately



Some esoteric lessons like immobilising prisoners of war were slipped into the eclectic officer cadet syllabus.

and not a lot. His father had been British and his mother an Iban. He was not exactly a Black Belt in martial arts, but was able to explain and demonstrate the basic techniques, which were based on the Police Training School syllabus, while the PTIs who followed up with the practical training seemed to have just finished doing their own training. On the whole it was a whimsical attempt to prepare cadets for man-to-man encounters with the enemy. But, apart from one cadet, Alan Walters, who had a Brown or Black Belt in one of the martial arts, the rest, for all their training, would probably have ended up grabbing an enemy any which way they could, if they had been forced into a life-or-death struggle. It would have been a far cry from the smooth, confident and deadly approach that the instructors seemed to have imagined they could inculcate among 140 cadets in 25 periods. That having been said, there were a couple of neat moves such as the one to ward off a knife attack and break an arm, or breaking a neck using the leverage provided by the back of the helmet and the chin strap, if the enemy happened to have it strapped on, assuming one was able to sneak up on the enemy from behind. The syllabus also included instruction on how to search a prisoner-of-war and tie him up. There was a test at the end of the training package but it is doubtful if the results were critical. A fly on the wall at the assessment session would have probably died of hysterical laughter when the assessment of several cadets came up.

V. TOPOGRAPHY

It goes without saying that for infantry leaders, expertise in map navigation and cross-country movement by foot or vehicle is *sine qua non*, a definitive skill. The actual skill develops with practice and experience in all kinds of terrain and in the tropics, the most demanding is the secondary jungle. But the concepts—theory if you will—are sound and intelligible: forward bearing, back bearing, triangulation, backtracking, after deliberately selecting a point beyond



Map reading was still a priority, rain or shine.



The state of development in Singapore in 1966 made cross-country vehicle topography something of a challenge.

the objective, etc. A recent development locally, arising out of experience against communist insurgents and the Confrontation by Indonesia, was the marrying of topographic maps to air photos in locating objectives and helping navigation both in the jungle and on 'conventional' terrain. Movement on the floor of a primary jungle is not particularly difficult because the canopy of trees prevents undergrowth, except where trees have been felled by man or nature, or shifting cultivation has created secondary forest cover. Night movement is foolhardy unless an advance party has managed to mark out the route, but line of sight is seriously limited even in broad daylight and reference points are not readily available to check location and progress. The only reference points available are streams and their confluences, but these are deceptive because size and occurrence are dependent on the monsoon cycle and streambeds can shift, assuming they have been charted in the first place. Reliance on the compass is almost total for direction while the tedious estimation of steps is a makeshift indicator of distances. When an impassable obstacle such as a stand of tall thorny ferns is encountered, the only recourse is to make three 90° deviations, count steps and return to the original bearing after the obstacle. If the obstacle is made up essentially of undergrowth, the head of a column, on a rotation basis, must cut a path with machetes, while the leader maintains the heading from just behind the path-makers. Where there is some visibility, prominent trees or other growths are used to provide intermediate objectives in the line of advance.

The instructors were generally well versed in the theory and quite a few in practice because their training in local terrain, against Indonesian guerrillas during Confrontation had given them actual operational experience. At the time for SAFTI cadets, the Mandai forest reserve



Ground verification for appreciation of situation.

provided the only jungle terrain for navigation exercises. But, the other aspects such as vehicle topography, navigation over ‘conventional’ ground, and air-photo reading could readily be practised around the island. As a lot of Singapore was still very rural those days, the cadets got to know many places that the average Singaporean would not normally venture to.

Practical topography lessons were something that nearly every trainee looked forward to. Cadets were sent out as individuals, or in groups either on foot or by Land Rover and were required to locate checkpoints and report details of objectives assigned to them. Instructors usually waited at the checkpoints to confirm that the cadets had located the objectives. While the foot-based lessons could be tiring, being on their own unsupervised, was enjoyable. There was no real challenge to the lessons as it was always possible to get some local guide to point them in the right direction. Even the lessons in Mandai were no big deal because ready references on the ground prevented too much straying. Among these were the huge pipeline from Johor, with cleared ground on either side; the reservoirs themselves; a woodcutters’ track; and the drainage system. Often, cadets would run into illegal alcohol distilleries and improvised gambling dens.

For night topography lessons, instructors accompanied the cadets into the Mandai forest reserve, but while one or two of the NCO instructors might choose to accompany a group, those conducted outside the reserve were usually unaccompanied. The platoons would RV at a location where dinner would be served and wait for dusk before setting out. As the lessons did not involve anything very stressful, these were nice congenial moments for informal interaction among the cadets and between the cadets and instructors. A good deal of comradely bonding among future colleagues took place on such occasions.

VI. SIGNALS

Lessons on Signals became more serious during officer cadet training, as they should. Long distance communications is the indispensable element of command and control. In the 1960s, things were still primitive by the standards of the digital age. The idea of Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence (C3I) and its successors, had not yet been widely adopted and the radio sets that the cadets had hitherto used, were real clunkers, barely improved versions of the Korean War era. But, once again, the critical importance of wireless communications in the military had rapidly been grasped by MID and orders had been placed for US style sets that had been due in November, 1966, but slightly delayed in the delivery. In the meantime, the nucleus of the School of Signals, which was being set up in SAFTI, had worked out a syllabus for officer cadet training. Initially taken by CPT Louis Lee, who had been trained by the British in the SIR battalions, the bulk of the syllabus was handled by Lieutenant Leslie Terh, a recent graduate of the Federation Military College, who despite attractive offers by the Malaysian Armed Forces to stay on with them, had promptly returned to Singapore after separation. Dr. Goh Keng Swee officially opened the School of Signals in SAFTI on Saturday, 22nd July, 1967.

Signals lessons focused mainly on voice communications, although at the higher echelons, means existed to transmit texts and graphics with more advanced equipment wirelessly. The lesson objectives were for cadets to be able to establish communications with the various types of radio sets—High Frequency (HF), Very High Frequency (VHF) and Ultra High Frequency (UHF)—that were planned to be commissioned in the SAF, understand the networks that linked the combat echelons and to communicate according to NATO voice procedure. An important element was coding and decoding messages, using the means of the day: Slidex and Griddle. There were practical field exercises and a written test. Most cadets tended to trip up over the codenames, the phonetic alphabets and the irrational urge to use pompous, indirect sentence structures as soon as they got the handset. Quite naturally, the voice procedure lessons were also occasions for a lot of fooling around, but LTA Terh recognised that the foolery contained an important element of learning as well, and wisely let much of it pass. But, it would take a lot of practice before most of the cadets began to speak naturally over the air and learn the most important lesson of all: that clear communication over the ether came only with clear articulation of ideas in the head first.

VII. AIR PHOTO READING

Using air photos was nothing new, but the SAF did not have the means at the time to acquire them independently. The RAF, which was still operating out of Singapore until 1971, was the primary source of stereo pairs until the SAF set up its own Air Photo Unit. But, air photos offered almost real time planning information and therefore merited competence in interpretation by officers. The photos that were used for the lessons were either specially

commissioned or taken during Confrontation or the Malayan Emergency. The emphasis in the lessons was on comparison of map to air photos and interpretation of air photos, which required the ability to recognise and identify objects, such as wire defences, minefields, armoured vehicles and other items that would be significant in an attack on the objective. There were also lessons on measuring distances, using air photos and transferring the grid from a topographical map to an air photo. Naturally, all processes involved were manual and the closest any of the cadets came to a computer was a primitive analogue Combinations Calculator (nCr). But, it was obvious that air photos, if only a few hours old, were a vast improvement over maps and even an observation post overlooking the enemy position when planning an operation. More doubtful at the time was their superiority over topographic maps for movement, but obviously, they would have been always a boon where maps of the locality were not available at all. With the satellite photographic cover of practically any part of the earth's surface freely available through the Google website however, real time computer downloads incorporating gridlines and scales have probably made topographic maps obsolescent.

VIII. INSTRUCTOR TRAINING

Cadets got a peek into their future duties with a package of training on methods of instruction. Though this term was not in vogue at the time and the School of Methods of Instruction (SOMI) was some years downstream, the entire course was an object lesson on methods of instruction as practised by the IDF, or more accurately, as was evolving in the SAF at the time. Never before had the local military—British, Malaysian or the SMF—undertaken such an extended and intensive course for so many and the first intake at SAFTI, both cadets and instructors, were guinea pigs. One of the main contributions of the Advisors was that they revolutionised the training parameters. Peacetime was a bonus for training and every hour available should be, within sensible limits of human endurance, packed to the brim, imparting military skills to cadets. “The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war” was an oft-quoted maxim in SAFTI. Night, inclement weather and midday heat were all operating environments and soldiers were the better for being exposed to tough training during these times to have an edge over a more indolent enemy. They also imparted hard-earned lessons from their homeland about how to train soldiers. All training must start with a need to train; then define precisely the objective of the training session; then identify the required attainments whether a skill or a body of knowledge or both; then practise to develop the skill; and finally revise and confirm. All the lessons that could be, were set down in writing in lesson formats which specified preparations, timings, demonstrations, rehearsals and even revision questions from previous related lessons. Among other things, this took care of uniformity across the organisation and succeeding generations, while saving time for new instructors. It also eliminated some of the quirks that were characteristic of British-based lesson formats where the presiding instructor improvised from broad outlines.



Officer Cadet Ajit Singh conducting a mutual on stripping and assembling the M16.



LTA James Chan evaluating a mutual lesson by Officer Cadet Wong Fook Wah.

As a way of revising hands-on skills of cadets, while also getting them used to instructing as they would have to do in units after graduation, small arms, individual fieldcraft and section training lessons from the earlier phases of training were assigned to cadets individually and in groups to conduct 'mutuals' i.e. peer training. Also added to the end of the overall syllabus of instructor training, was a package of platoon training which had been taught among the earlier lessons in the officer cadet phase. These elementary lessons on platoon quick attack and platoon night immediate assault were relevant not only as revision for the cadets themselves, but also as they would be platoon commanders in units. Finally, within this package as a whole, there were classroom lessons on the planning of training programmes in units which would include administration, proper sequencing, physical demands and the effective use of limited resources and detailed planning of individual exercises.

A separate package incorporated familiarising cadets with conducting a range practice. Cadets were appointed the roles that instructors had hitherto taken at the range, though during the actual conduct, an officer had to be present according to range standing orders. There were both day and night ranges, including the first zeroing lesson since assignment to 'A' Company and a lesson on firing the M16 on bipods at between 400 and 500 metres.

Training on the use of the Infantry Rocket Launcher (IRL), the 52mm light mortar and the rifle grenade were all relevant for a period after the First Batch were commissioned, as they were part of the weapons inventory. Cadets were nominated to conduct technical handling mutuals on all three subjects. The rocket launcher then in use was a crude, almost improvised weapon, barely an improvement over the WWII Bazooka, with a tendency to foul its barrel after about three rounds and totally awkward to carry in the field. It did have some value against armour and bunkers. It was soon to be replaced in the SAF with the Carl Gustaf



*A good view of the
Infantry Rocket Launcher. (Not yet loaded)*

82mm. The 52mm mortar was a British WWII design and the ammunition may well have been of that vintage. It was fun to fire and had a maximum range of 400 metres, but was held up by hand as it came without a bipod. It was replaced in two years by a much more reliable 60mm mortar with a bipod, which gave it a maximum range of just over one kilometre, but was in turn replaced by the M203 grenade launcher which was not available for officer cadet training in 1966/67. The rifle grenade, which was fired from the muzzle of the SLR, was dropped altogether with the adoption of the M16.

IX. THE GENERAL PURPOSE MACHINE GUN

Although British forces had had the 7.62mm GPMG for several years in 1966, local units were apparently still using the pre-WWII Bren gun in .303 calibre into the early sixties. The first intake cadets received no training in the latter, because in lieu of the Bren, the section support weapon was the heavy-barrelled version of, initially the SLR and subsequently the M16. But, all three suffered from depending on a standard magazine of rounds that meant interrupted support fire. A decision apparently was taken some time in mid-1966 to equip the SAF with the GPMG, at the platoon and company level. The GPMG could be fired from both a bipod and a sturdy tripod and was fed by linked rounds. In threes, it could provide support to up to about 1,800 metres and at a pinch, one gun could be handled by one man,



LTA George 'GPMG' Ho supervising a field firing exercise with the GPMG.



Nice job if you could get it: a GPMG fire support base in a live-firing exercise.

though it was usually a crew of two. Like the Bren, it came with a second barrel which had to be changed when the first overheated, as it was not water-cooled, though the alloy used had better heat resistance than the material used for the Bren.

It was decided that the first intake officer cadets should be made familiar—indeed at home—with this weapon and one of the instructors, LTA George ‘GPMG’ Ho Yat Yuen had been sent overseas for training in its use. When he returned in November 1966, he designed a very comprehensive training programme of 61 periods with day and night practice. The cadets could sense that the GPMG was a real force multiplier—a term not in general use at the time—in all phases of war and nearly everyone became competent in handling it. The GPMG was presented to the cadets as a crew-served company support weapon, deployed wherever possible as a team of three guns, subject to fire-control orders and strict fire discipline, rather than to be used spontaneously by the firer as he saw fit, except when deployed singly. The only problem was that it was one of the most troublesome weapons in the armoury to clean after a field exercise. The gun, its tripod and the contact rate of several box magazines of linked rounds were also a heavy load in themselves. As for the section support group, it was tentatively left as two heavy barrelled M16s, which was not a bad decision especially since all the members of the section would be using the same calibre rounds and standard magazines.

Most of the live-firing with the GPMGs were conducted in ‘field ranges’ which meant they were fired at targets in the live-firing area from dominant features and not the rifle ranges. Everybody had to fire live, both day and night and some prototype electronic targets were used. As a control measure, each firer was expected to squeeze the trigger for the duration of time it took him to deliberately say “Twenty One” and let go. The standard configuration of a magazine of linked rounds was four ball to one tracer. The GPMGs were used as a team of three guns during several live-firing exercises day and night, including one on Bajau feature (spot height 209) from a fire base on ‘Demonstration Hill’, and the final battalion attack demonstration on Bunker Hill on 11th July, 1967, witnessed by the public, the Prime Minister and Dr. Goh Keng Swee.

X. BATTALION SUPPORT WEAPONS

Somebody or some office in MID was thinking well beyond the issue of the First Batch of graduates from SAF TI, to the next step in the organisation of the SAF. What had been inherited was a rudimentary Brigade Headquarters—1 SIB—with some HQ elements and the four Battalions—2 or so Volunteer Infantry battalions and 1 & 2 SIR—with no uniformity or standard equipment scale, let alone standardised operational doctrine and some haphazard maintenance resources. To date, the troops had been deployed for operations against an external aggressor only at the level of platoons within a company as the aggressors were only tactical guerrilla units. This was not the anticipated threat scenario; a regular force would have to be structured for conventional operations against regular aggressors, while subsuming within it the capability to deal with lesser threats. As a start, a rational establishment table had to be drawn up for the future Infantry battalion. From what the first intake of officer cadets were taught, it would seem that a tentative choice had been made for battalion support weapons, because they were included in the syllabus. There was the strong possibility that a sales pitch by vested interests from abroad was at work, although the essential logic of the weapons at the time could not be denied.

There had been something of a half-hearted attempt to suggest that the Infantry battalions might expect support from a gun battery or battalion when Lieutenant Belsha from the Volunteer Artillery gave a lecture on the 25-Pounder WWII vintage towed gun-howitzer.³ An answer to the German 88mm which had wreaked havoc among the Allied troops, it had been an excellent weapon in its time. But it was now a museum piece, and the Volunteer Artillery was soon to be relegated to a ceremonial battery for gun salutes. It is unlikely that Lieutenant Belsha persuaded anyone in his audience that the backing of these guns would help win any battle.

More persuasive, were the weapons that were being either proposed or considered: the 81mm mortar, the 20mm light cannon and the 106mm Recoilless Gun. Most of the lessons were conducted in the classroom: characteristics, proposed establishment, tactical handling,

ranging, fire planning, sand table exercises and so on. But for the 81mm mortar, there was a demonstration by instructors, signifying that it was almost certain to be adopted, as one version of it was already in the establishment of the SIR battalions. This was in line with the thinking that for the immediate future, the SAF would depend on mortars for high trajectory support because of the mobility it afforded in closed tropical terrain, simplicity of operations and ability to go where the Infantry went. The big problem, of course, was the supply of ammunition (later to be defined as contact rate) and who would carry it. It was suggested that some of the Infantry would have to backpack a quantity for close terrain operations. As it turned out, the 81mm was adopted as an Infantry battalion support company weapon, while the 120mm mortar became the main Artillery weapon. The 106mm Recoilless Gun was also adopted as an Infantry battalion support company weapon and retained for several years, but the light cannon was dropped quite early in the evaluation.

On the whole, these topics left only a sense of what was to be expected and the theoretical lessons conducted in the classroom were soon forgotten. But, the concept of instruction at the time was: must know, should know and could know. Presumably, these lessons fitted into the second category.

XI. INTERNAL SECURITY

Every trainee on the course was familiar with the riots that had wracked Singapore in the 1950s. One series referred to as the Maria Hertogh Riots had been sparked off by religious polarisation and they had been bloody. A second series had been instigated by communist agitators and involved striking Chinese school students—organised by the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students' Union—and the Hock Lee Bus Company riots, while a third and the latest had been deliberately provoked by political agitation related to Singapore's impact on the Malaysian political scene. Riots from 16th September, 1963, to 9th August, 1965, had been the purview of the Malaysian Federal Government. The earlier ones had been handled by the British Colonial Government, though local military and police forces had been deployed together with British garrison units. Quite apart from the human and economic costs of violent riots, they provided breeding grounds for political and social instability. Being integrated with the Police Force under the Ministry of Interior and Defence i.e. MID, which everyone in 1966 believed would be an indefinite situation, internal security was seen as a key role of the Army and one which it would be called up on to provide sooner rather than later.

The core lesson that was taught in officer cadet training was how to deploy a platoon to disperse a crowd of rioters. The teaching medium was each of the officer cadet platoons where each trainee played a role as a soldier, NCO, sharpshooter or the Platoon Commander. The secondary lessons included the use of gas masks against tear gas, the manning of road control points and the conduct of an Operation Freeze—cordon and search operation for

suspected ring leaders, a number of which were actually executed by First Batch officers during the 13th May, 1969 riots in Singapore—vehicle and foot patrolling and the protection of vital points or installations. The background to the training was official co-operation with the Police. It was an elaborate procedure: the Commissioner of Police, who had the legal authority to deal with public disorder and would use the Police Force and the Riot Squad in the first instance, had to officially request for military assistance by activating the Public Order Preservation Ordinance (POPO) before military troops were deployed. In a situation where there was likely to be confrontation with the public, a Police presence was called for, because by definition, the role of the military was to deal with external enemies of the state and not fellow nationals. Accordingly, a Police Officer was required to be present with the troops. It was also required that only minimum force be used and a comprehensive record of events be kept by an official diarist and a cameraman, so that appeals could be heard in court and more importantly, evidence could be presented in case of grievous injury or death.

For the cadets, the IS package was rather a lark, but only after familiarisation with the gas masks was over. For that exercise, groups of cadets entered one of the bunkers at the end of Pasir Laba Road and a tear gas canister was activated. The cadets had to quickly don their gas masks. It was a nightmare. The gas masks were cumbersome, offered severely limited visibility, and were invariably not airtight so that the smoke got through to the eyes. Teargas also reacts with sweat causing serious smarting. Cadets were required to stay in the room for an interminable five minutes and many must have suffered panic attacks, before blessed relief came by way of release into the open air. Even after that, the gas tended to react with sweat to leave everybody smarting on various parts of their bodies and especially in the armpits and the crotch. The IS exercises were conducted towards the latter part of the course as a package. Initial practices were held in the parade grounds, around the barrack blocks and the SAFTI rifle ranges. The basic structure was a platoon box which was formed on the command 'Form Box' with the Platoon Commander carrying a loud hailer accompanied by a Police Officer (representing civil authority) in the centre, two soldiers armed with SLR single shot rifles on either side of the Platoon Commander, two soldiers carrying a banner ordering the crowd to disperse peaceably in English, Malay (Jawi script), Mandarin and Tamil, a medical orderly with a stretcher and each soldier with his gas mask on hand in anticipation of tear gas usage. The standard position was to hold the rifle in front of the chest, barrel upward, like a vertical port arms, to indicate that it was only a warning until forced to act. The movements were drill movements and troops were expected to have a smart turnout, the better to intimidate rioters. On instructions, either wing of the platoon, or both if need be, would swing out on the move to extend the frontage to contain the rioters. The box could also advance at a trot. The key injunction to the Platoon Commander was never to back a crowd into a blind alley, but always provide a bolt-hole. Where the rioters stood their ground, the idea was to identify the ringleader. If the rioters threatened violence and gave clear indication of resistance, the Platoon Commander, after using tear gas and issuing appropriate warnings, was authorised to disperse the crowd with

*“Disperse Or You Will Be
Dispersed By Force”
in four languages.*



*The Platoon tactical HQ
is raised for an Internal
Security (POPO) exercise.*

One round at the knee (fat chance).



minimum force. One of the other soldiers would be required to pick up the empty cartridge for forensic evidence. The diarist would be furiously timing and recording each step. The platoon would advance to quickly retrieve any casualties before the crowd hijacked them to display as evidence of military brutality.

There were IS field exercises that brought the cadets back to the urban scene, a welcome relief after the hills of Pasir Laba. There were rest periods in Police Stations or under tentage using camp cots, the excitement of deployment, vehicle patrols and opportunities to be ‘rioters.’ The cordon-and-search operations, mostly conducted at Housing Development Board (HDB) flats in Taman Jurong were also quite a diversion, the Platoon Commander having to plan the deployment of the platoon around the identified building, move stealthily by truck to the Form Up Point (FUP) and take up position around the building without giving the suspect or suspects a chance to break out. Each flat had to be searched by teams accompanied by Police representatives. It was presumed that the operation was initiated and coordinated by the Police Headquarters Operations Room (CPSO) in Pearl’s Hill with inputs from Internal Security Department.

As it turned out, the lessons were put to good practical use in 1969 when on 13th May, violent racial riots in Malaysia threatened to spill over into Singapore. First Batch officers were deployed with SIR platoons—several of which were then without Platoon Commanders. By then, POPO had become the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance (PPSO) with a series of threat codes ending in deployment of troops. But, a major change was introduced in the strategy by then Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. Instead of allowing the situation to deteriorate inexorably to full-scale rioting, he directed that as soon as there were reliable signs of broad-based public disturbance, the Commissioner of Police would consult with the military to deploy troops to pre-empt rioting and restore public confidence. The military deployment would be significant and could involve the use of troop carriers, such as the V200s, at key points and vital installations. This approach was adopted immediately, leading among other things, to staff and instructors from SAFTI being deployed with officer cadets and section leader trainees, for patrolling and riot control.

XII. INTRODUCTION TO COMBAT

Up to now, during basic and section leader training, the execution of a mission, or engagement in an exercise firefight, had been either a reaction to a spontaneous development in the ‘battlefield’ or the response to a verbal briefing by the commander, as, for example, in the case of a mission to carry out a reconnaissance. As individual soldiers, this prompted the execution of an instruction from a superior, whereas as a trainee NCO, it required formulating a hasty plan of action to organise the rifle section to achieve the objective. In the latter case, if time permitted, the planning would have been more deliberate and elaborate, but in the course of section training for the first intake in ‘A’ and ‘B’ companies, it was more familiarisation with the role of the NCO than intensive training under which an NCO



An appreciation of situation lesson overlooking Red House Hill, with IDF Advisors and senior Singaporean officers on a field visit.

might be expected to learn in-depth professional skills, such as planning a raid behind enemy lines.

Officer cadet training required a different perspective, mainly because of two things: platoon missions were extended in time and scope, as for example, in the case of holding a sector in defence or dominating an area against enemy forces at large; secondly the Platoon Commander has more resources—around 30 men—and must personally convert his assigned task into a plan of action within the terms of the company mission and flanking sub-units in the area of operations. This calls for training in operational planning and management within the framework of the parent unit's mission. The officer cadet trainee must, in short, become familiar with the uniform process that the military adopts for planning and executing assigned missions that is called 'battle procedure.'

This training was incorporated in a topic known as 'Introduction To Combat.' It covered, in a broad brush fashion, the 'Principles of War', a contentious subject which nevertheless had important lessons to take to heart, such as maintenance of the aim, concentration of force and always maintaining a reserve for contingencies; the famous 'Appreciation of Situation' which is the analysis of the situation in relation to the assigned task so as to arrive at a plan of action, which in turn, is converted into an operation order. And, the battle procedure itself, within which all the related elements fit in, from studying the warning order from the higher HQ to carrying out an 'R' (reconnaissance) Group, to conducting rehearsals of the planned sequence of fighting on the objective, if time permitted.

There was a lot of bread-and-butter for the officer cadets here, because the SAF they were privileged to launch, would spend an enormous amount of time in training, as units from platoon to division level, very often with full troop complements and at other times, with only HQs. More immediately, there were many exercises in the officer cadet phase that required cadets to role-play the Platoon Commander. Many hours would be spent in interpreting the orders from 'Higher HQ', entering data on talc sheets covering topographic maps, identifying military symbols, creating sand-table models and drafting orders. However, there was also the need to learn how to shortcut the steps in the form of a quick or hasty battle procedure.

This package also introduced that most important element of 'fire planning'. Limited enough as it was at the platoon level, it was highly relevant in all phases of war, as it integrated the fire support of the platoon and company support weapons and even, when available for special missions, the support from higher echelons like the battalion support company or, far less likely, Artillery at the brigade level. It also familiarised the cadets with the coordination and orchestration over the radio of forces under their command in the heat of battle.

There were a number of training exercises without troops (TEWTs) which required each cadet to go through the process of planning and developing his operation order for a given scenario which included planning in the field. It was good training and mental conditioning. In actual operations—with which the First Batch as a whole was destined to have hardly any practical experience—it would have no doubt contributed to success with minimum casualties.

XIII. FIGHTING IN BUILT-UP AREAS

This subject immediately began to be called FIBUA from the acronym printed in the training programmes. Essentially, it was training in techniques of engaging the enemy in an urban setting where individual buildings would have to be cleared, one by one through the close teamwork of decentralised small groups coordinated by a higher HQ if the area of operation was large enough, for example, a city block. It could also involve overwhelming an enemy holed out in a single building, or in another context, the occupation and control of a small grouping of habitations such as a village. A built-up area to be taken by main force, however, could involve a combined arms operation not excluding air support. But, there probably would still remain mopping-up operations to winkle out enemy stragglers and those deliberately left behind.

It is highly probable that prior to the first officer cadet course at SAFTI, this subject received very little attention in the armed forces in Singapore. But, WWII had pointed the way to combat in built-up areas being the future of war. Battles have historically been taken to civilian centres, but mostly in the form of sacking the conurbations of a defeated enemy or those that were unguarded. But, with total war, civilians had become the target of choice

in breaking the enemy's will to fight. With the attack on Stalingrad by German forces in particular, the city as a high-value target had become a contested battleground and had shown how stubborn regular troops on both sides could be. The closing battles of WWII – Bastogne, the Italian campaign and Berlin itself—served as models for developing battle drills, while later conflicts, especially in the Middle East, introduced urban guerrilla warfare. In the 1960s, some key considerations were identifiable already: short of bombing a city to rubble, one would have to be taken, and often retaken by land forces, street by street; civilians would be caught up in the battle and become an important propaganda element; medium-to-small-calibre weapons including armour, mortars, anti-tank weapons, machine guns, grenades and demolitions including booby traps and improvised explosive devices deployed by the enemy, would play an indispensable part; the main combat troops would be Infantry, Field Engineers, Signalers, snipers and combat medics and a new dimension would be added to the battle—the element of height or the vertical dimension. Fortunately, when the first batch was being trained, the term suicide bomber referred only to a Japanese kamikaze pilot of WWII.

The training conducted for the first intake was not particularly ambitious because there was no dedicated training facility that would bring out the lessons clearly. Such a facility would eventually be built, but even so, it would lack something because it is prohibitively expensive to provide for one that could take the punishment of live-firing training. So, only about 30 hours of training was programmed, including lectures and film shows, TEWTs and one or two 'live' exercises. The subjects included planning of an attack on a house, clearing a street occupied by a holed-up enemy, capturing and controlling a village and defending a fortified building in an urban area.

As an improvisation, the barracks that housed the personnel of the WWII battery on Spot Height 230, known as Bunker Hill at the end of Pasir Laba and a similar feature in Tuas where the Tuas Battery was deployed, possibly in the whereabouts of present-day Tuas Crescent were used for the training. They were solid reinforced concrete buildings with verandahs and flat roofs. The doors and windows had long gone but the openings were intact. In fact, they had been in use until very recently by the Volunteer Corps and even some British units in Singapore. A demonstration with live rounds and live grenades was staged at the Bunker Hill barracks by the instructors. The idea was for a team of two to approach the entrance crouching under windows and other fenestrations, flatten themselves on one side of the doorframe, lob a grenade into the building, shout "Grenade!" and simultaneously enter the door after the explosion to spray their respective halves of the interior. They were then required to shout "Clear! Clear!" so as to signal to the follow-on team to proceed to the next objective. The tactics left much to be desired, but the cadets could see the complexities involved in a house-to-house clearing operation on foot even without enemy snipers, booby traps, and multi-storey buildings.

No live-firing exercises were conducted for FIBUA, other than the demonstration by the



In 1966-67 there was not even a notion of a dedicated place for training for combat in built up areas. SAFTI officers' bunks were props for tactical exercises.



instructors. The danger of ricochets, the explosion of a grenade in a confined area and the joint entry through the door of two trainees at a time with cocked rifles was too great. But, blank round exercises were conducted at section and platoon levels. After the initial use of the facilities at the end of Pasir Laba, some Fibua patrolling was done around the officers' bunks and mess area. Exercises then moved to the heart of Singapore city itself. These included High Street—now Parliament Place Stamford Road and Bugis Street. The cadets were trucked out in the evening to be in position after the orders group or 'O Group' around 2200 hrs. On several occasions, the instructors conducted demonstrations which included moving through monsoon drains to approach the objectives. Under cover of the dark, there was at least one instance when they resorted to a bit of subterfuge: one group of instructors entered the monsoon drain at the MPH building side of Armenian Street while another emerged across the road in front of the shop-houses where The Substation is now, giving the impression of great speed of execution. The purpose was also to avoid messing themselves up in the drain. Although the cadets caught on, they had no choice but to do the whole thing. They also came in for some choice condemnation by the 'jagas', one of whom was employed by a shop called "Woolen Bazaar" owned by the cousin of Officer Cadet Mukhtiar Singh. It was common in the 1960s and 1970s for business establishments to employ elderly Sikhs to guard their premises in town. The jagas would sleep on their rope bedsteads called 'charpoys' in the five-foot way outside the firms employing them, their presence being the main deterrent rather than any fear by intruders of aggressive confrontation by them. The jagas obviously began to regard the repeated FIBUA exercises by one batch of cadets after another, a serious infringement of their professional duty to sleep on the job. In sheer exasperation one was heard to say "Apa ini, hari-hari malam, Clear! Clear! Sini suda clear. Pergi la!"⁴

XIV. PLATOON TRAINING

As Second Lieutenants, the first assignment of most of the graduates would be the command of an Infantry platoon. The core curriculum of the course was obviously predicated on this assumption, though given the pace with which SAFTI was launched, there must have been some improvisation in the development of the curriculum as a whole. It was also to turn out that the number of slots available as Platoon Commanders would be limited in the SAF in the immediate future after the graduation of the First Batch, comprising only the existing two SIR battalions and the yet-to-be inaugurated third and fourth battalions, both being full time National Service units. There were also Platoon Commander slots in SAFTI training companies. All of these had one thing in common: the Platoon Commanders were primarily trainers and only secondarily commanders, the difference being that short of an operational deployment, their command role was determined almost entirely by a centrally planned training schedule. Another development after the graduation of the First Batch, one which had been built into the concept, was that a large percentage went almost immediately to specialist courses of which Artillery took the most, followed by Signals, while others were already ear-marked for Commando, and Armour. Inevitably, some were given administrative

appointments such as Exercise Planning Officers in SAFTI's Doctrine Department, while others were spirited away to less transparent assignments. The upshot of this wide dispersal was that the lessons of the core curriculum, namely platoon operations, rapidly retreated into the background for some 60 % of the graduates, though they would still play a part in understanding the role of the main combat arm of the SAF as it stood then.

Approximately 132 hours were allocated for platoon training. That did not take into account administrative time, actual inflation in the execution and other non-tactical considerations. For example, while only 20 hours were allocated for 'Platoon in Defence', more than half a day was added to collect stores, fill up trenches and clean and square away equipment. Likewise for the 'Platoon Raid on an Army Camp' which required individual sections to conduct a coastal hook, march cross-country to Maju Camp and return to Pasir Laba boatshed by assault boat for the final stage of the withdrawal, the total elapsed time far exceeded the ten hours allocated in the syllabus. But for the cadets, once the training had picked up momentum, the anticipated duration and the physical stress had ceased to matter greatly.

Lessons were beginning to co-relate as the training progressed, a sign of a consolidated and purposeful syllabus. Following from the lessons on 'Appreciation of Situation' in the package on 'Introduction To Combat', and others on topography and air-photo reading, platoon training frequently required cadets to plan the execution.



Officer Cadet Victor Lam in a command role for an exercise. Also identifiable is Officer Cadet Neo Poh Chuan behind him.

Subjects from the field engineering syllabus such as field fortifications, use of booby traps and trip flares, laying of anti-tank minefields and camouflage and concealment found practical applications in platoon training.

Platoon training covered the four phases of war: Advance, Attack, Defence and Withdrawal, plus Raids. No effort was made to go into the classical thinking on these subjects such as that of Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, or Liddell-Hart and definitions were covered sparingly. Perhaps wisely, there was not so much as a hint of classical studies on war during the course, given the background of the cadets and that the objective of the whole exercise was to jump-start an army. Ambushes and raids were included as stock-in-trade of platoon operations. Practical matters like battle formations and battle drills such as selection of lines of advance and day immediate assaults respectively, were revised and expanded to take into account the larger force structure of a platoon, compared with a rifle section. Fire planning began to play an increasingly critical part in the planning of operations. The cadets were introduced to the concepts of Defensive Fire and Defensive Fire (SOS), which meant calling down fire on own positions as a last resort and the roles of the Forward Observation Officer and Mortar Fire Controllers, plus the concept of ranging. Platoon training also provided practical familiarity with 'Appreciation of Situation' and battle procedures. The platoon training phase of the first officer cadet course indelibly etched on the minds of the graduates a period of hectic activity which was physically and mentally demanding, with a sense of being constantly under scrutiny for leadership qualities and very little time to sleep, rest or recuperate.

For many cadets, the most arduous of the exercises seems to have been the platoon defence exercise. Not only was the planning elaborate, the actual move to the feature, the deployment and the digging of foxholes, weapon pits and the command post followed by the laying of D10 cables for land lines were sheer drudgery. Each platoon in 'A' Company did the exercise separately on the forward slope of Spot Height 205, facing Four Track Junction. From each platoon, a cadet struck the jackpot appointment of Platoon Commander after the appreciation of situation and had to organise his platoon for the defence, from digging shell scrapes to consolidating the position with overhead cover and fighting the defensive battle with live-firing. It is possible that the appointments changed over the exercise but nobody remembers distinctly if this was so. The later two platoons had a rougher time of it because they found themselves digging into earlier positions. There is nothing worse than partially overlaying a new foxhole position on an old covered-up one. Not only will the outline differ, but, it will also be waterlogged and filled with rotting vegetable matter. Digging a fresh foxhole was itself no fun because the issued entrenching tool was totally dysfunctional, being neither pick nor shovel, with a handle that would have preempted Archimedes from developing any theory of leverage. There were also no 'punkis'—woven rattan baskets with two handles—to carry out the soil, and the helmet outers had to suffice. There seemed to have been an issue of Asian 'changkuls' (hoes) to help dig the platoon command post and some of the weapons pits. It was utterly inexplicable that representatives of an Asiatic community with agricultural roots going back to antiquity, should have problems digging a five-foot by three-foot hole

in the ground, but it took an average of six hours of backbreaking work to do each two-man position. In accordance with the required attainment to build overhead shelters later, there was further work, filling sandbags to support corrugated iron sheets and laying on a top-cover of earth. In between, the instructors tormented everybody with stand-tos, patrol duty and reinforcement drills. There were only brief snatches of sleep on the hard ground, while one's foxhole partner did the digging. The only good moments were when rations and night-snacks arrived. There were also instances when the more playful instructors, who were not above bringing in a few cans of beer, would offer a sip or two to cadets on their rounds of the defensive positions. Fortunately, the exercise was only for about 24 hours and did not involve the complication of relief in line; even so, the anticipation of covering up, collecting stores and cleaning them before the exercise was finally over, was daunting.

The live-firing aspect of the exercise was only moderately spectacular. It was conducted at night and marked mainly with the glaring light of trip flares, star shells from the 52mm mortars, some phosphorous rounds from the IRLs and tracers from all rifles and heavy barrels, but since it was mostly firing from static positions, the adrenaline rush was rather subdued.

In the course of Platoon Training, day and night began to lose their distinction as time for work and time for rest. An operation was conducted according to the duration it would take and the best timings for execution of all or parts of it. The idea was slowly engendered that night, difficult terrain and inclement weather are good friends to be exploited although the last was unpredictable, but to be taken as a gift from the gods. Offensive action also became an axiom: a commander may execute a withdrawal, but it had to be orderly and it was a prelude to a counterattack at a time and place of his choosing. In defence, there had to be mutual support among defensive positions, offensive patrols, reserves for counterattacks, spoiling counterattacks and the fullest range of wire obstacles, minefields and fire planning. Subconsciously, there must have been a lot of leadership traits being imbued during such lessons. On the whole, despite the tough regime and constant pressure, the cadets enjoyed platoon training.

XV. WATERMANSHIP TRAINING

Almost as much training time as Platoon Training was devoted to watermanship training. It was practically a course within a course, except that one of the reasons for the long hours was transit time in boats during the execution of the exercises. Moreover, there were basics to be learnt, such as how to navigate in the open sea, how to row, how to use the outboard motors and how to form up. The emphasis on watermanship training derived from the simple rationale that Singapore being an island, the sea provided an exterior line of communications. The use of coastal hooks in small local fishing boats by the Japanese during WWII also provided a compelling incentive.



Waterborne training was a core activity: the training field camp at Pasir Ris.

As with many other things, watermanship training in the SAF was straight off the drawing board. There was no existing organisation to turn to for professional guidance, unless it was the Marine Police. The Singapore Volunteer Navy had some naval officers with experience in patrol boats and sea navigation, but none in assault boat operations. The tentative beginnings were therefore discernible in the minutes of the meetings of the General Staff Division of MID. There was also some evidence that expectations rested on the availability of an Advisor with British Navy connections, who had initially been included in the team because he had the best command of English, though it was later rumored that his naval experience was with his country's Sea Cadet Corps.

The preliminaries for watermanship training were initiated around July 1966 when several categories of boats including 'Indian' and 'Dunlop' boats were tested, and another model was pending. A decision was made on 4th August to buy 12 Zodiac PB 16 boats with 12 Johnson 40 horsepower outboard engines, but eventually, there were additional acquisitions, because, by the time watermanship training started, the kind of boats used included a version of the sampan, and aluminium assault boats. A Naval Officer, Lieutenant Ng Kim Yan, was also posted to SAFTI to cover the subject of sea navigation.⁵

The first lessons were technical handling of the outboard motors, preparing them for use, fitting them on the transom and elementary repairs and maintenance. CPT Peter Law (now Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret)) conducted these. CPT Law had been an Inspector of Police but the call of the military had been so strong that he had quit and joined an officer training programme to staff 2 SIR when it was being formed. Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Anwar Mohd Ishak, and Petty Officer (later Senior Warrant Officer) Wee Cheng Leong assisted him.⁶ The cadets remember CPT Law as a burly man with staccato speech, full of confidence and a dry sense of humour and ever ready to strip to his under-shorts to work on the motors in the water. The early motors seemed somehow prone to the problem of water getting into the carburetor or, or otherwise refusing to start even after nearly pulling the starter chord



A youthful (and wet) Major Morrice looking on as a group returns from training.

off its moorings. Probably a combination of poor quality control and inexperience, this problem would be the bane of watermanship training and as much as half an hour could be spent—going or coming—with the main body wallowing around while waiting for maverick engines to kick in. Another perennial problem was that the propeller sheer pin would perform as designed at the slightest provocation, leaving the boat dead in the water. Possibly, the idea that the cadets should be qualified in the technical handling of the outboard motors was not quite thought through. In any case, a team of boatmen from the Singapore Naval Volunteer Force (SNVF) was introduced fairly early to handle the boats since every cadet was expected to participate in the land operations after landing. The team was eventually replaced by full-time boatmen under Lieutenant Ng Kim Yan when his organisation firmed up. What was essential, however, was that the cadets needed to be able to row the boats either in case of engine failure or for stealth. But, even with the simple matter of rowing, things could get desperate. Several years after the first officer cadet course, the SAFTI QM Hamid Khan, by then Captain, confided that he had actually passed off the giant spatulas, used in military kitchens, as oars and nobody had been the wiser. The cadets had just assumed that rowing was a difficult proposition!

A company level three-day field camp was conducted at Pasir Ris beside Sungei Serangoon. The site was then still sparsely inhabited. Cadets lived in two-man bashas. Rations were from camp so there was no hassle over food. CPO Anwar and SWO Wee remember that the field camp was nothing more than that. Cadets used pit latrines and relied on ‘mandi cowboy’ i.e. a wet-towel sponge bath and everybody was thankful that the camp would last only three days, a real issue, considering the incessant training in the hot sun and salt air. Cadets had to wear steel helmets, jungle boots and solid kapok life jackets that bulged out back and front. It

was comfortable for leaning back against a tree but added to the grime and sweat and would have stood out like so many floating pillows while closing in on a landing beach if used for actual operations.

Over the three days, the main topics of instruction were basic seamanship using the three types of vessels that had been selected: the inflatable rubber dinghy, the aluminium assault boat and a monster of a sampan. In section configuration, cadets practised launching the boat, boarding, seating and handling the oars. Elementary lessons on rowing as a team took up the first morning. Instructors or boatmen from the SAFTI Boat Company generally handled the engines, but cadets took turns as well, while one in each boat would serve as the bowman to look out for obstacles in the water. Training progressed to tactical boarding from the departure point, keeping formation at sea and disembarkation at the objective. The cadets put in a lot of practice getting into formation prior to the final sprint to the beach and before departure from the objective after the operation. Because of the sensitivity of the sheer pin contacting with the beach, the order to disembark was often given some way off the shore and likewise, to embark after an operation. For raids, the boatmen would be instructed to move away from the beach after the landing and come back in on a pre-arranged signal for the withdrawal. There were lessons on organising a beach for landing by a beach party using a variety of aids to guide the boats in, the establishment of a beachhead, and how to conduct a tactical withdrawal after a mission. All lessons included night versions; in fact, the emphasis was on night operations, so practice mostly started only after it had become pitch dark, which meant many very late nights. One or two of the sampans, which were very stable, were always used as safety boats, with a signaller and medic on board, while a Marine Police boat acted as a backup and security against inadvertent intrusion by civilian craft.



A Section from Platoon 3 with CPO Anwar Mohd Ishak at the Pasir Ris Field camp.

The sampan was the most comfortable boat to sit in because it had raised benches but it required some 15 cadets to lift it. The inflatable dinghy and the assault boats allowed neither a comfortable posture nor adequate leverage for rowing, if the motor did not function. Cadets were always shifting and adjusting cramped muscles. Formation sailing invariably meant that the main body would be going around in circles until all the engines had started. To complicate life, the rifles had to be cased in long transparent waterproof polythene bags that made them awkward to handle. The glare and the heat of the open sea could be totally enervating. But, return trips at night were rather relaxing. Even with the uncomfortable seating positions, it was possible to be lulled to sleep by the purring of the outboard motors and the phosphorous wake of the boats ahead, curling and uncurling.

The lessons on elementary seamanship, principles of navigation, naval chart reading and charting a course were informative. Officers of the SNVF conducted these in classrooms in SAFTI. It was an eye-opener to Singaporeans, even though all lived on a small island and should have naturally gravitated to the exploitation of coastal waters. The lessons on sailing in formation and landing and embarkation drills were gruelling and bothersome with their many repetitions, which frequently came unstuck because of the unreliability of the outboard motors.

During the field camp, the term ‘shagged’ became a byword among the cadets by the end of the training day, which was usually around 2300 hrs. Gritty-eyed, sun-burnt, blistered, the day was not over until the boats had been beached, weapons cleaned and oiled and soaked uniforms and jungle boots hung out to dry, which was wishful thinking in the humid night.



‘Marine Commando’ WO2 Mohd Hizah bin Ahmad supposedly in his elements.

More so than at Pasir Laba, the cadets began to get a measure of their comrades-at-arms when self-interest was involved. In one famous case that seems to have gone the rounds in all the platoons instead of just his own, a trainee became notorious for skiving. He would promptly undertake to lead the way with the pressure lamp whenever his section was stuck with beaching the sampan, the three types of boats being rotated among the platoons. It was somewhat funny the first time but the humour rapidly evaporated when he habitually did the same thing throughout the camp, as if everybody expected him to play his trademark clown role anyway.

The main value of the field camp was that everybody got to know well how easy it is to screw up an operation involving boats and outboard engines. Nobody became an expert at rowing or sea-navigation, much less at handling outboard motors. There was also considerable skepticism that a formation of boats carrying as much as a platoon could escape detection in daylight over an extended route. But it was a possibility... The original programme had been more ambitious. Lessons would have included launching of the inflatable boats from larger motor vessels after moving within a mile offshore of the objective and conducting a stealthy or forced landing. But, probably because of logistics limitations, these lessons were deferred to future courses (perhaps). One of the highlights of the programme was a visit by Dr. Goh Keng Swee on 27th May, 1967 to the initial phase of an exercise where Pulau Tekong was the objective. Dr. Goh stayed on the Marine Police patrol craft and not many of the cadets were aware of his presence. What he thought of the whole matter was transmitted only to the officers, but it is believed that he approved of the programme in principle.



Dr. Goh observes a waterborne raid on Pulau Tekong on 27th May, 1967 from a police escort/safety boat.

With the basics behind, many tactical exercises were conducted around the coastal waters of Singapore. St. Patrick's School, which then used to be at the water's edge, was used for raids on Pulau Tekong. One company level raid was carried out from Tuas to Pulau Senang, which the Police had temporarily abandoned as a penal colony after the inmates had rioted and murdered the Warden and other staff, leaving a burnt out hulk. There were raids on what was still known as Pulau Blakang Mati (Sentosa Island) during which one raiding force was caught in the main shipping channel of Singapore Harbour in a tropical thunderstorm. A watermanship component was also incorporated in a final company level overnight exercise ending with live-firing at SAFTI just before the end of the course. Individual platoons converged on Spot Height 245 from Sungei Bajau and, possibly, Sungei Tengeh to RV at the FUP before executing the live-firing assault with breaching of wire obstacles. First Batch officers remember the approach phase of the exercise, but have little recollection of a company level assault on Hill 245 in connection with a watermanship exercise, partly because Hill 245 had been used for many other live-firing exercises.

XVI. FIELD ENGINEERING

Engineers had played a significant role in the Singapore Volunteer Corps from the late 1890s and a squadron of Field Engineers had been part of the SMF, though they did not have much resources or tradecraft. But, those who drew up the syllabus for the first intake must have decided that Engineers were indispensable to Infantry operations. The main subjects included in the officer cadet syllabus covered demolitions in the form of preparing and handling regular and improvised explosive devices, mine warfare and field fortifications. The subjects were well selected and taught and most of the graduates acquired a lasting knowledge of how to integrate field engineering into their operations. They also became fair hands at putting together non-electric and electric explosive circuits and as commanders, employing Field Engineers in the later stages of their careers. Naturally, the use of explosives was the more riveting of the lessons especially when it was followed by practical applications. These included fixing trip flares, making booby traps, calculating and making cutting charges, creating Amonal fields to simulate artillery fire support, making improvised bangalore torpedoes for breaching wire obstacles, and preparing a fougas for a vehicle ambush.

Probably just as important but more prosaic was the construction of low wire entanglements, double apron fences, concertinas and the design and characteristics of foxholes, GPMG and 81mm mortar emplacements.

XVII. INFANTRY CO-OPERATION WITH SUPPORTING ARMS AND OTHER SERVICES

Those who conducted these lessons were surely eternal optimists, but in 1966/67, the fact that they were included in the syllabus for officer cadet training demonstrated the confidence that pervaded the corridors of MID. Apart from the 25-pounder gun-howitzer battery that was inherited from the Singapore Volunteer Artillery (20 PDF Artillery) and the squadron of Volunteer Field Engineers (30 PDF Engineers), supporting arms and services were a very scarce commodity in the Singapore Military Forces.⁷ But, the objective of the lessons was for the cadets to note that the Infantry did not and could not fight alone in the modern battlefield, and active duty during the Confrontation had provided the personnel of the Volunteer and regular battalions with some practical experiences of co-operation in a hot-war of sorts. Most of the instruction was by way of lectures at the company level, but for lessons involving Artillery support which occupied the bulk of the programme, there was a demonstration of the guns and a sand-table exercise, followed by a lecture on the siting and deployment of Artillery and the battle procedure of a battery. Based as these lessons were on towed guns, they were obsolete at the time. The Artillery support of choice for the SAF was to be for a very long time man-portable mortars because they were seen as simple, effective and compatible with Infantry mobility in closed terrain. The idea was that mortars would move with the Infantry and go into crash action to support Infantry manoeuvres with the flexibility accorded by high trajectory in jungle terrain and against targets on reverse slopes of hill features.

There was also a self-conscious attempt by the then senior-most officer in the Engineers, CPT George Mitchell, who migrated to Australia after leaving the service as Lieutenant-Colonel, to cover co-operation with Field Engineers but it was a theoretical lecture on the ‘importance of engineering in warfare’ and a rather wishful attempt at defining the structure of engineering units. As it turned out, Officer Cadet Gurcharan Singh, who had a degree in civil engineering, was promptly hauled off into the Engineers on being commissioned and within some 36 months, took over as Chief Engineer Officer. In fact, he was sent on a Field Engineer course to Fort Belvoir in the US together with Officer Cadet Chng Teow Hua and both missed the Commissioning Parade and the Commissioning Ceremony. Teow Hua in turn became Chief Engineer Officer after Gurucharan. The Engineers received high priority and soon developed beyond all recognition with a wide range of capabilities of which the most visible for some time to come was bridging.

XVIII. COMPANY TRAINING

Towards the end of the course, there was a logical progression in field training to fit the platoon into company-level operations and the Platoon Commander into the company chain of command. As there was no immediate prospect of a tactics course at the company level for the first graduates of SAFTI to attend and most would be posted to Infantry companies in 1 and 2 SIR (and 3 and 4 which was then on the drawing board), this immersion into company level operations was something of a finishing school for the first intake.

The initial lessons were devoted to giving cadets an idea of how a Company HQ executes the operational standing orders—procedures adopted from the time a Warning Order is received to the launch of the operation—and how to work with—and employ—fire support allocated to a company from the battalion HQ. The intricacies of ‘under command’, ‘direct support’ and ‘indirect support’ had not yet been established. For the first lesson on operational planning—a company level lecture—there was a British training film covering the process. Instructors then performed a skit starting with the receipt of the Warning Order, the ‘R’ (reconnaissance) and ‘O’ (orders) Groups in action and ending with the issue of the Operation Order. The emphasis was on the concurrent activities of preparing the troops while the battle procedure—planning and organising to execute the mission was going on. Actors included OC ‘A’ Company, the 2I/C and the Platoon Commanders. The directors for the ‘drama’ came from Doctrine Department.

A subsequent classroom session addressed company battle formations, the factors influencing their selection, the differences between day and night formations, important coordinating activities like report lines during movement to objectives, taking position in the FUP and the activation of the fire plan during the approach and the attack on the objective. These were practised on the ground and covered the practical aspects of crossing obstacles (roads, streams, open spaces), tactical halts and harbouring drills. Once the technical lessons were over, a ‘day deliberate attack’, a ‘night deliberate attack’ and a ‘night deliberate attack in depth’(an objective with a number of secondary objectives in depth) were conducted with live ammunition, including the use of the IRL, the 52mm mortar and GPMG support bases, all of which had to be relocated with the advancing of the assault forces in phases. Artillery support was simulated with Amonal fields. In these exercises, while conceptually ‘A’ Company HQ was executing the operation, the demands of safety and co-ordination meant that the three platoons were operating quite independently according to an activity table. Cadets were given appointments as Platoon Commanders and Platoon NCOs while the actual Platoon Commanders and section instructors were Safety and Conducting Officers.

There were two blank firing exercises. The first was a 'company quick attack' which was based on chance encounters during an advance, the main point being the conduct of the battle procedure in field conditions, deployment of support weapons, moving into the FUP and the actual attack, followed by deployment in hasty defence on the objective. It was obviously an important variation to the deliberate battle procedure, something to hone a company in as the most likely scenario in a fluid theatre of war. The other blank exercise was a company raid on a military installation, which was cross-linked to watermanship training as part of the movement to the objective and the withdrawal included using boats.

The 'company lesson in advance' involved crossing the Mandai Forest Reserve at night. These lessons were before the introduction of the laying of white tape by the advance party, though the use of white tape was already adopted to guide the assault force in platoon and company level operations from the assembly area to the FUP. The three platoons generally followed in single file formation with the Company HQ somewhere between the first and second platoons. Those towards the rear got the worst of it; those in front would have made the route slippery wherever it was wet, especially at the tactical crossing spots of the streams in the forest reserve and, not having any positional inputs within a line of trainees stretching some 300 metres, was like traveling through a tunnel. The exercise was also used to practise passing messages backward and forward through repetition down and up the line and it was remarkable how mangled a message could get. Many cadets must have been in good humour most of the time because one of the famous messages was "Log! Log!", seemingly a friendly advice to the person immediately behind, whether there was a log obstructing the path or not; or, as if there was something that could be done about it. Apparently, based on what those close to the Company HQ reported even the OC, MAJ Morrice who made a point of joining in on these exercises, would dutifully lift his legs high over imagined obstacle in response to these alerts. This lark, which was repeated every time there was a night exercise at the company level, actually contributed to slowing down the movement. Another message that many were only too eager to believe was that "OC says long weekend this week." To this day, no one really knows where the real messages ended and where the stand-up comics took over.

Another raid on an army camp, which required the three platoons to approach from different directions including, again, crossing the Mandai forest reserve, was a demanding exercise, but it came towards the end of the course when cadets had also toughened greatly. It was the more memorable because the objective was Maju Camp, where the CO was MAJ Emile Nicholas, who had stayed back to see the attack through. He participated in a quick debrief and gave everybody a smashing night-snack before sending them on their way back to SAFTI, another six-to-eight hour slog. No one remembers a single occasion when the first intake cadets were presented with the pleasant surprise of an unplanned ride back to camp after a gruelling exercise.

XIX. ANTI-GUERILLA WARFARE

Often thought of interchangeably by the cadets as Jungle Warfare, anti-guerrilla warfare was very much in fashion with local forces. Shortly after the end of WWII, the Malayan Communist Party had taken to armed struggle in Malaya. British, Australian and New Zealand forces and British-commanded local units in peninsular Malaya had engaged in bloody operations against ‘Communist Terrorists’ (CT) as they were called. But with the appointment of Lieutenant-General, later Field Marshall Sir Gerald Templer as High Commissioner and concurrently head of operations in Kuala Lumpur (effectively assuming the role of ‘supremo’), the CT were defeated in the field and Malaya was given independence in 1957, denying the communists their main propaganda weapon of anti-colonialism. In fact, active CT cells continued to conduct sporadic attacks on soft targets till 1975/76. But, for the SMF, the more compelling interest in anti-guerrilla warfare had arisen from the experience of 2 SIR in February 1965 when Indonesian guerrillas had killed nine and wounded five men of 2 SIR in Kota Tinggi. 2 SIR had managed to even the score in March and CPT Daljeet Singh, 2I/C of ‘A’ Company, SAFII for the first intake officer cadet course, had been the hero of the search and destroy mission. Not surprisingly, to most servicemen in the 1960s, the operational mind set was anti-guerrilla warfare.

Strongly rooted in the war against the CT, anti-guerrilla warfare was mostly close terrain warfare against pockets of armed insurgents and ideological dissidents, whose objective was to challenge the current political leadership, increase their ideological support among the public, bring down the civil administration and take over the country. The theatre of operations could shift to any opportune target, provided they could withdraw to secure base camps after each strike. They maintained surreptitious logistics lifelines and used their sympathisers known as Min Yuen, as couriers. Terror tactics discouraged the population in outlying areas from co-operating with the authorities. To win a war against guerrillas, the sympathiser support network had to be destroyed, the hearts and minds of one’s own side had to be won and the enemy had to be tactically defeated in detail in the field. Because of the close terrain, the full force of conventional support elements could not be brought to bear, though aerial reconnaissance, aerial bombardment, helicopter mobility and even limited artillery support could be integrated into ground operations. But the ground operation was the critical leg of the anti-guerrilla strategy—to kill the CT and reduce their assault groups in combat in the jungle terrain of their choice. Government forces had to dominate the area of operations, knock out base camps, keep the CT off-balance so that they could not plan deliberate operations, and prove that the Government had the upper hand. Information was vital and an effective, pervasive Special Branch was a top priority. There was a lot of psychological warfare involved on both sides.

The training programme for the officer cadet course was, however, based almost entirely on ground operations at and below company level. It dealt with small unit tactics in movement,

harbouring, base-camp security, protecting installations, contact drills, quick and deliberate attacks against guerrilla camps, a variety of ambush techniques (area, chain, and linear), and cordon-and-thrust operations.

The anti-guerrilla operations were on the whole enjoyable. It was not far removed from the childhood days of playing soldiers. Blanks, thunderflashes, trip-flares and smoke grenades were used liberally and while the instructors were strict about fieldcraft, movement was more free than when doing live-firing exercises. Mosquitoes and inclement weather were problems, but a sneak smoke in ambush was always possible, as was a quick shut-eye while waiting for the ambush to be sprung.

For one anti-vehicle ambush, a fougas was used, a combination of petrol and lubricating oil in a 44-gallon drum activated by a detonator, primer and demolition block. Laid on its side in the direction of the approaching enemy, it provides a spectacular incendiary effect like a napalm bomb and sets fire to anything in its path, leaving a huge smoke ring over the site.

One of the linear ambush exercises was with live-firing. Arcs of fire were strictly designated by sticks and stout branches buried on either side of the firers. HE and phosphorous grenades were used. One platoon's ambush ended in near disaster as an instructor accidentally set off a trip flare and suddenly found himself almost inside the killing area, just feet away from a hail of M16 fire. His fieldcraft was in good shape because he practically buried himself into the ground lengthwise until other instructors, screamed orders over the melee for the firing to stop. At that point, he coolly got up, halted the withdrawal, asked the cadets to collect targets and other stores after clearing their weapons and return to camp. The incident was kept a secret for many years.

The grand finale of the anti-guerrilla package was a three-sided field camp exercise called 'Tahan Lama' like the one at the end of the section training phase in which spontaneous ambushes, patrol operations and the other drills were practised against one another's platoons. 'Enemy' infiltrators were captured and 'interrogated', and finally, each platoon mounted an attack on another platoon's camp. A good time was clearly had by all, except perhaps by the captured 'enemy', because the interrogation was not uniformly restrained.

Endnotes

- 1. From the beginning of the officer cadet phase, all cadets were required to start a bank account with a local bank to which pay was credited monthly. This did away with the fortnightly pay parades, and provided more security.*
- 2. Minutes of the General Staff Fortnightly Conference held on 21st November, 1966, sum up the situation: "The Director (General Staff) will appoint a committee to study the Safety Regulations some time next week, before sending it up to P.S. These Safety Regulations are provisional and shall come under review once every six months. They will continue to be so for 2 or 3 years."*

3. *In the British forces the equivalent of an SAF artillery battalion is designated a regiment.*
4. *Bazaar Malay for “What is this, every night “Clear! Clear!”; this place has already been cleared. Get lost!”*
5. *Minutes of the General Staff Fortnightly Conference, 25th July and 8 August, 1966.*
6. *Interview with CPO Anwar and SWO Wee on 24th September, 2004.*
7. *A note in MID records meant for all land force units under MID dated 11st January, 1967 includes only the following: 1&2 SIR, 20 PDF (Artillery), 30 PDF (Engineers), No. 4 PDF (Training Depot), 1 SAF Workshop, 50 PDF Workshop, 1 SAF Provost Company, and PDF Medical. However there were five other PDF training depots as well as 1&2 PDF battalions at the time.*

EXERCISE RED BERET

I. BASIC METTLE

Most officer cadet training is collective—the grouping of officer cadets as a platoon of trainees provides the command framework for role-play, inter-personnel relations and technical lessons, while it is as a leader of a platoon that a newly commissioned Second Lieutenant will in most cases, serve his initial assignment in the organisation. But, leadership training in the military, which is what officer cadet training ultimately boils down to, inevitably must reckon with the ability of each trainee to successfully perform tasks which draw deeply of his inner resources of self-reliance, courage, stamina and perseverance, as well as the application of knowledge, specific to the task at hand. This must be tested as objectively as possible before the trainers can be convinced that the cadet is worthy of a commission which carries legal recognition of considerable authority over other nationals.

Exercise Red Beret was to be that test, though not articulated in such definitive terms. The red beret is pretty much the universal trademark of airborne troops and the title was probably inspired by the red berets worn by the British Parachute Regiment. This may have been a factor in the choice of colour for the berets of the SAF Commando Unit when it was formed. The requirements for the exercise were made as tough as possible, given the limitations of Singapore and the permissible degree of hazards trainees could reasonably be subjected to—which, it must be said, enjoyed a wide latitude at the time. Designed to be an individual test of infiltration and evasion, cadets were required to make their way within 16 hours from Tampines or Upper Changi Road, east of Jalan Tiga Ratus to Cow Dung Hill (Spot Height 65). Although they were dropped off in pairs at the start point, the stipulation was that they were individually responsible for arriving at the end point. At Cow Dung Hill, they were to join up with the rest of their platoon, when they eventually turned up and carry out an assault on Chua Chu Kang Hill (Spot Height 286) under the command of one of their fellows who would be appointed by instructors waiting for them. The *pièce de résistance* was that the cadets would have to make a tactical withdrawal on foot to SAFTI after the assault. Each pair of trainees would be dropped off in the pre-dawn hours at different points along tracks off Tampines Road and Upper Changi Road, which were then narrow winding rural roads serving a sparse habitations of farmlands, plantations, sand quarries and detached rural homes. Each would have a prismatic compass and topographic map, twenty-four hours rations and be in full battle order with combat boots and steel helmets and a grid reference for an intermediate objective where he would be given his next checkpoint. The cadets would not know where they were being dropped off—that was for each to establish, and he would have to wait till early daylight to pick up some reference points, if required.

In the actual execution of the exercise, the final checkpoint before Cow Dung Hill was the foot of Bukit Timah Hill, Singapore's highest natural elevation at 163 metres. Cadets arriving there earlier had the opportunity to rest while waiting for nightfall. Some recollected that it was mandatory to cover the final leg at night and those who arrived at Bukit Timah were released in the order of their arrival time. The distance to Cow Dung Hill by foot was about 12 km and would take about four hours tactically. There was also some recollection also that at Bukit Timah, different platoons, which did the exercise on different days, were given different RV points in the vicinity of Cow Dung Hill to rendezvous at, because Spot Height 65 itself had become so familiar to the cadets by this stage of the training that it was not a challenge to identify under any condition.

II. BODY SEARCH

On the eve of the exercise, full packs were inspected to ensure that the SOP items were packed, while just before departure to the start points, each trainee was subjected to a body search to ensure that he was not carrying any money which could be used for 'meter-reading' i.e. use of taxis and other unauthorised transportation during map-reading exercises. To ensure that cadets moved cross-country and did not use prohibited areas, the Police Reserve Unit, since it also came under MID, was deployed in stages across the line of advance of the cadets to catch them and send them back to the last checkpoint. Exercise Controllers were also deployed for the same purpose and could award forfeits ranging from deliberately dirtying their rifles to depriving them of their boots, so that they would have to resort to using their PT shoes for the rest of the exercise, or so it was threatened.

III. OUTSMARTING THE OPPOSITION

Platoon 1 was the first to do the exercise. The limitations of doing the exercise in Singapore quickly became obvious. Among other things, shortly after being dropped off, cadets began to run into other colleagues and could form groups more or less heading towards intermediate check points in the same vicinity, while also being able to compare notes, which reduced reliance on individual map-reading skills, personal fortitude and the threat of detection by Controllers. By the time the second and third platoons did the exercise, ways to stash away some cash which would escape detection by Controllers were successfully devised, though best left unrecorded, and those who did so were able to illegally cover at least part of the way by hiring farmers' vehicles and even taxis. Cadets were also able to pre-arrange transportation with civilian friends. Regretfully, one cadet or another exploited every loophole while many eventually went along with the most dominant colleague they ran into along the way.

Perhaps, all is fair in love and war after all. But, in so far as ending up in groups is concerned, it is hard to be judgmental, given the limitations on the ground: it would have been superhuman for a cadet to deliberately detach himself and take a long way round to avoid his fellow cadets, given the time limit placed on reaching the objective and the relatively narrow routes of advance allowed them. It was also impossible not to acknowledge that the value systems of later years in the Officer Cadet School were not a major issue then. Certainly, they were not inculcated in any formal sense, whereas not reaching the objective—Cow Dung Hill—within the prescribed time, would have been to fail to accomplish the mission, an option that was actively discouraged throughout the course.

IV. A REALLY HARD GRIND

For all its limitations, Red Beret achieved its prime objectives in the majority of cases. For a start, nearly every cadet completed the gruelling slog from his start point to Chua Chu Kang, a distance of nearly 30 kilometres, in about 19 hours. They seemed to have managed to evade detection—or maybe the Controllers were being kind—although several had apparently ended up forfeiting their boots for canvas shoes, having to clean their rifles after they had been deliberately dirtied by Controllers and being dropped back at the last checkpoint to redo the leg. They braved many hazards, some actually risked being shot by installation security guards for scaling the chain-link fence and dashing across the runway of Singapore's International Airport at Paya Lebar; some swam or used improvised floatation to cross arms of the reservoirs at Mandai and Seletar to gain time; many were effectively lost but just kept moving in the general direction of SAFTI until they got some inkling of where they were or until they stumbled on a colleague or a checkpoint; the majority of each platoon eventually rendezvoused at the objective and carried out an assault of sorts on one of the highest hill features in Singapore. And, nearly all found out why 'drawers, muslin' are issued to infantrymen as the preferred under-shorts. By all accounts the most trying phase of the exercise was the tactical withdrawal after the assault on the objective. The participants reorganised on the hill under the command of the nominated platoon commander and moved out on foot in the middle of the night over a distance of about eight kilometres to SAFTI. Nearly every cadet had severe blisters on his upper thighs with the incessant rubbing of sweat-soaked trouser seams and on both feet with socks that had worn through long before reaching the objective. Each cadet finally staggered into 'A' Company square around midnight individually or in twos and threes, grudging every additional step he had to take, to collapse into his bunk after a night snack and wake up well after the sun had risen the next day. For each of the exercise platoons, what was left of the forenoon was spent cleaning weapons, packs, and other personal kit, while several reported to the Medical

Centre to have their blisters attended to. As the exercise was planned towards the end of the week, the weekends offered an opportunity for recuperation.

V. WAR STORIES

Red Beret provided a fund of anecdotes to liven up the boring interludes between the periods of frenetic activity that characterised military training. Parang-wielding farmers chased Officer Cadet Giles Miranda when they saw Reserve Unit personnel going after him. Officer Cadet Chan Seck Sung was offered a hospitable meal when he approached a farmer's house. Officer Cadet Ajit Singh of Platoon 1, which started off the exercise in a thunderstorm, was 'rewarded' for being first in his platoon to arrive at Cow Dung Hill by being appointed the commander of the attack phase on Chua Chu Kang Hill. Officer Cadet Hwee Man Lok was optimally overwhelmed with relief when he passed the gates of Nanyang University during the 'tactical' withdrawal to SAFTI after the assault. Officer Cadets Lionel Thomas and William Law, along with several others, spent the night in the Hong Kah area where Controllers picked them up the next morning. Officer Cadets Mukhtiar Singh and Chua See Tiew were attacked by hornets and had to be evacuated from the Seletar Reservoir area to the SAFTI Medical Centre.

Fortunately, nobody seemed to have lost any controlled combat equipment such as bayonet, compass or rifle magazine because there was no indication of any cadet being charged for such an offence. Most cadets had the good sense to pack detachable items of equipment inside their backpacks for the whole exercise. If anybody gave up without even trying to reach the proximity of the objective, it was a well-guarded secret. But, there were no official announcements and it is not known what part the exercise played in the final evaluation. In any case, two cadets from Platoon 3 did not do the exercise because they had been injured by shrapnel from a bangalore torpedo just before the exercise and were recuperating from surgery. So, completing Red Beret could not fairly have been made a deciding factor in the final evaluation.

PULLING TOGETHER

I. OFFICER CADET TRAINING WITHOUT FRILLS

The structure of most officer cadet schools allows for seniors to be mentors of junior cohorts by several months, as in the case of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Or, they could be mentors of cohorts several years junior to them, if the course incorporates a college degree, as in West Point. In ideal circumstances, this mentor-junior relationship encourages good leadership traits, peer learning, a higher threshold of tolerance and good grounding for the hierarchical life in the military.

II. ONE HOMOGENEOUS BODY

Fortunately or unfortunately, for the first intake in SAFTI, they were the first and therefore deprived of the experience of being subordinated to any seniors in circumstances ideal or otherwise; nor did the officer cadet training structure allow for a mixing of senior and junior cadets. The first cohort of officer cadets in 'A' Company, SAFTI, Pasir Laba, was a homogeneous body from enlistment to commission and seems to have remained largely so in spirit, despite a spread of ranks from Captain to Lieutenant-General by the time the last member of those commissioned from this cohort retired from active service, some 30 years later.¹

The demographic profile of the first intake as a whole stretched across a wide spectrum, but that too did not create polarisation into disparate groups of trainees. As applicants were required to only have passed the Senior Cambridge School Certificate, the equivalent of the GCE "O" level, at the median age of 18, the enlistees ranged from 17½ year old William Law to 28 year old Gurcharan Singh, while educational qualifications ranged from Grade 3 School Certificate to a Colombo Plan honours degree in engineering (Yeow Yew Tong). The actual profile included those who had passed the Cambridge Higher School Certificate and graduates from the Teachers' Training College, Singapore Polytechnic, Nanyang University, University of Singapore, an Australian university, and the University of Malaya (Gurcharan again). If the rest looked up to those with higher educational qualifications, there was little outward evidence of it, while those with such qualifications had little reason to feel privileged. The training was manifestly physical and the more youthful one was, the easier to stay the course, especially the obstacle course, not to mention that the Figure 11 target at 300 metres is partial to 20/20 vision.

III. A COMMON WAVELENGTH

Two other factors appear to have played a strong hand in the interpersonal relations that pervaded the life of the first intake during their training.

The first was that the trainees were all voluntary enlistees and motivated to complete the course successfully. They were training for a paying career. All recognised that they were in a military organisation and understood its dynamics: that enlistment subjected them to military law which included summary trial and punishment; that superiors were authorised to issue orders and subordinates were legally bound to comply; and that military activities were hazardous and as such, physical danger did not justify insubordination or dereliction of duty. As trainees, compared to full-fledged initiates, they would have to demonstrate good discipline or be expelled, in addition to whatever other punishment was meted out for misconduct. Consequently, the driving forces behind behaviour as trainees were self-discipline and self-control in routine activities and camp life.

The second was that throughout the course, there was no evidence that a commission would be denied to any of those who enlisted on 1st June, 1966, provided he did not 'fail' any required attainment. There was no suggestion of a final examination: each phase of the training, including sub-phases such as technical handling, was an intermediate step which had to be completed en bloc among all the trainees before the next phase was initiated. Even at the end of section training, when 114 of those who had gone through this phase were not channelled into the officer cadet phase, it was assumed to be because of logistical and staffing constraints, though of course the 140 selected for 'A' Company were more than happy to have made the first cut. The disposition of those not selected was not made known generally to their colleagues, though their close associates must have been aware, so it was assumed that they were among those deferred to a later course. It was also assumed that apart from those who had quit within the first three to six weeks of recruit training, all had passed out as section leaders at the formal passing-out ceremony on 18th November, 1966. Thus, the idea that short of serious misconduct, abject incompetence, medical incapacity, or a personal decision to drop out, those who advanced to the officer cadet phase expected to be commissioned en bloc as well. This frame of mind translated into a very high degree of cooperation and mutual support among the cadets in nearly every aspect of cadet life since there did not appear to be a competitive agenda. This, in turn, reduced the scope of intervention in day-to-day matters on disciplinary grounds by the instructors, who practically had to invent offences by the trainees, except in exceptional circumstances, to imbue amongst them a sense of the uncompromising standards expected of them as officers. No doubt, this was also a way for the instructors to show that they were a body to be reckoned with.



This was not a voluntary effort at weeding grass behind the barracks—housekeeping was not a pre-occupation of choice.

IV. THE NITTY AND THE GRITTY

That having been said, there remained basic professional habits which were the duty of trainers to inculcate in trainees. Among these, in the case of the first intake, the most critical were: keeping personal rifles to hand or account for at all times after they were drawn from the armskote; maintaining and cleaning weapons and Controlled Combat Equipment (CCE) before they were put away after training, regardless of how late it might be; staying awake on sentry duty wherever that might be; keeping the steel helmet on at rifle ranges and live-firing exercises; clearing weapons before leaving the firing point at the range or after any live-firing exercise or in circumstances where live or blank ammunition was used; making sure that no live rounds or empty cartridges were inadvertently (or advertently) retained after live-firing of any kind; carrying the issued FFD during all field training; and wearing dog tags which carried blood group, name, regimental number and religion. The practical value of these habits needs no elaboration, but trainees and perhaps all soldiers, are prone to oversight and cutting corners, especially when bone-tired or short of time. The instructors of the first intake were untiring in their vigilance throughout the course.

A second category of good habits addressed management of equipment and accommodation facilities. In the barracks, the trainees were solely responsible for daily housekeeping. Toilets, shower stalls, barrack rooms and surrounding areas had to be spotless, with beds, personal lockers and barrack room furniture being squared away to inspection standards before first parade. Individual duty personnel and duty details were posted in platoon and company routine orders. The combination of fatigue, personal idleness, procrastination, miscalculations, misplaced items and irresistible last-minute diversions turned the 0730 hrs muster parade into a race against the clock, with the prospect of a dreaded 'burnt' weekend in the balance. Additionally, there was the opprobrium of section or platoon mates to bear

*Early morning pre-muster parade
chores: cleaning the washrooms
of Platoon 1.*



if an instructor decided to make the punishment collective. Collective punishment included short-and-sharp drill, stand-by-bed and change parades, additional area cleaning and delayed release from camp on Saturdays or long weekends.

In a similar vein, there were rules—applied with varying degrees of strictness—that were undeniably based on infusing good personal habits and accountability among the officers and gentlemen-to-be. This included prompt obedience, situational awareness, punctuality, taking responsibility, thinking through and seeing beyond the immediate problem, keeping personal equipment in good repair and inspection-ready, military 4x2 haircut, smart turn-out and ‘regimental’ locker and bed layout.

V. SCORING POINTS WITH MILITARY BULL

Interestingly, it was in this last area that some first intake trainees tended to be competitive with one another. They would go to elaborate lengths to completely line their personal lockers—which were medium sized two-door wardrobes—with brown paper. Layouts would be immaculate, with each fatigue tunic and trouser ironed razor sharp and precisely stacked, civvies buttoned up on hangers, personal possessions laid out symmetrically and the whole wardrobe strewn with copious amounts of mothballs. Many also developed a fetish about shining things: brass shoulder-titles, leather boots, mess tins and water bottles. A seasoned yellow dust cloth was worth its weight in gold. Given the limited feedback on personal performance, perhaps the first intake yearned for some creative control over their fates and the opportunity to demonstrate their earnestness. Probably those who went to extreme lengths to be squeaky-clean in this area hoped to score Brownie points with the instructors which would weigh in if they fouled up elsewhere.

If, indeed, it was a chink in the armour of the instructors’ objectivity, it was a trap they set for themselves. When the trainees first reported, they came from many backgrounds. Fastidiousness in turnout, personal administration and even personal hygiene were, to say the least, varied. After setting the right tone initially, the instructors may have been wise to leave well enough alone, but they kept niggling the cadets on the fine details of these preoccupations throughout the course. In fact, a practice which made the whole exercise of caring and instantly accounting for personal issue items a counter-productive ritual among later batches of trainees, raised its insidious head from among the first intake: acquiring a spare set of those items required for display during the infamous stand-by-bed parades. Mess tins and water bottles were chromed, boots were polished to mirror brilliance, the rubber toecaps of jungle boots were heavily blacked and the jockey cap would be lined with stiffeners for a creaseless look. The issued sets of these items that were actually used on a day-to-day basis were dumped into a personal bag and left in the wardrobe and usually not inspected. Somehow, the instructors overlooked the pointlessness of the exercise at the time. On the contrary, the practice raised the expectations of the instructors and set off

a vicious cycle. In later years, as National Service attitudes began to pervade the military establishment, these practices contributed to a severe backlash against what is appropriately termed ‘military bull’ and less elegantly, ‘anal-compulsive’ behaviour by Dr. Norman Dixon in his book, *On The Psychology of Military Incompetence*, arbitrarily taking with it many other practices which were probably of intrinsic value in a military environment.²

There are those who argue that it was not pointless to insist on permanent inspection level personal standards. One unacknowledged element in all the fastidiousness is that at any point in time the individual trainee, or soldier in an active unit should be ready at a moment’s notice to deploy fully equipped instead of fumbling around for one item or another of his battle order. Another argument is that one of the objectives of a training phase is to inculcate lifelong habits and in this case, develop an uncompromising mindset towards excellence, which became the motto of SAFTI. There is certainly something in that. But in the matter of personal turnout, there are far too many exposures towards negative examples from superiors coming from varying backgrounds to make this an immutable commandment of military training. It could even have unintended negative consequences.

VI. INFORMAL COMPETITION

The fact that there was little scope for competition among the cadets is not to say that total harmony prevailed amongst them for the whole duration of the training. Friendly rivalry was common, especially in shooting and physical fitness. Although no gala sports’ day was scheduled during the course, there were several qualifying tests which stoked the competitive spirit among trainees simply because they provided the opportunity to strut one’s stuff. One was the sixty-minute ten km run in full battle order with the ten lb SLR, conducted during section training, which brought fame to Recruit Ponnosamy Kalastree, a school marathon runner. Others included the fastest times for completing the obstacle course. There were also informal personal rivalries over completing the 3-mile runs along the Pasir Laba Road and the odd soccer and hockey matches. Surprisingly, there was little effort to promote sports during the course despite all the facilities that could have been used.

A more universal activity, if only for a brief interlude, in which all trainees had to take part, was the boxing championships which WO1 ‘Tiger’ Hong Seng Mak refereed, thereby concentrating every cadet’s mind. The training was neither professional nor systematic because the basic idea was only to inculcate in each cadet the grit to face an opponent one-on-one, attack him coolly and defeat him in combat. In the first intake days, it was run on the basis of inter-platoon only, but every cadet was paired off with someone of his own weight class to identify a representative for each of the weights to take on the other two platoons. The finals were a real treat and co-operative or not, the finalists held nothing back, as photographs of the event attest.



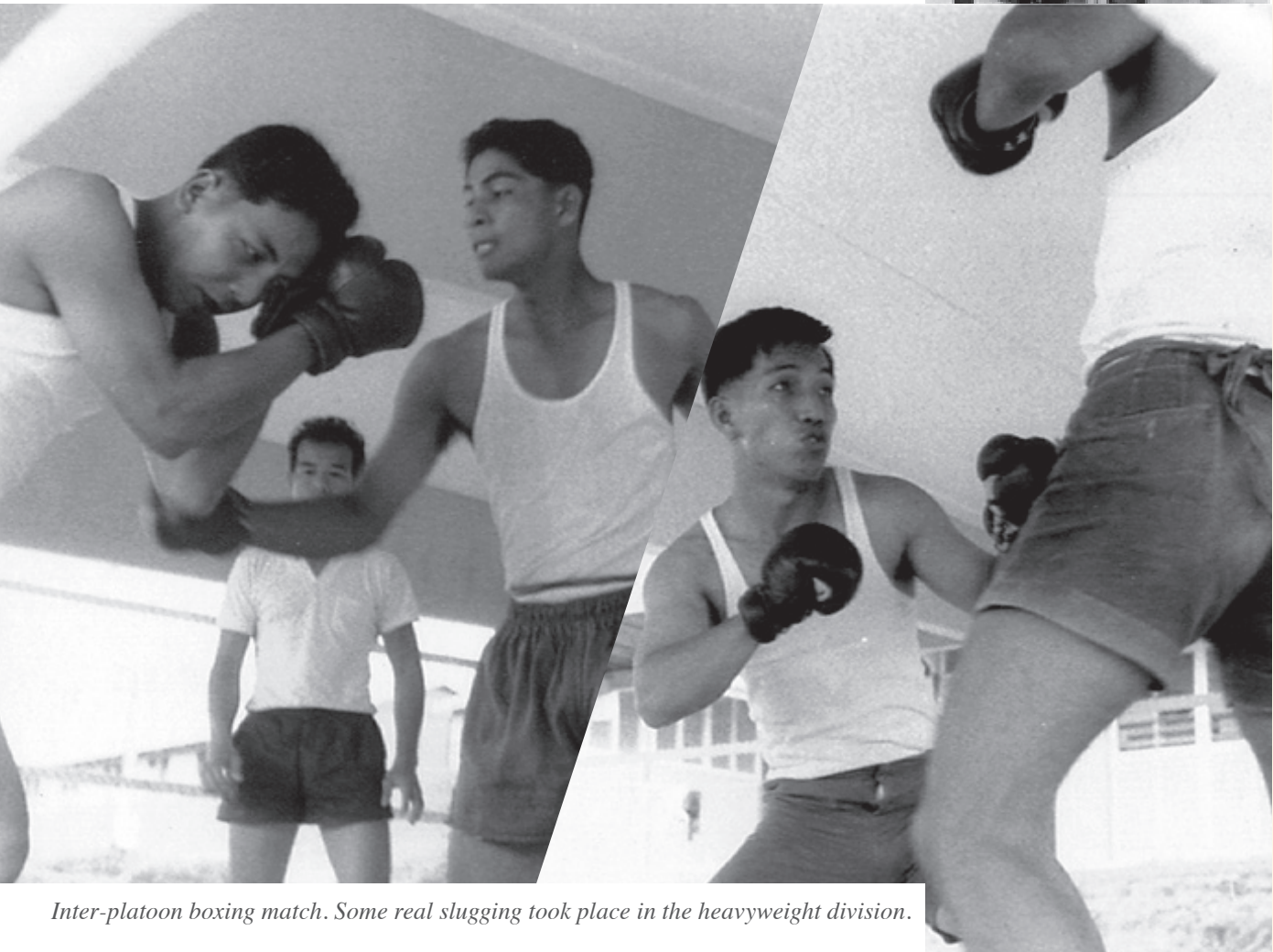
SAFTI's first eleven, 1966, LTA JJ Matthews coach.



Inter-platoon boxing champions. Platoon 3.



The inter-platoon finals for boxing with WO1 Hong Seng Mak as referee.



Inter-platoon boxing match. Some real slugging took place in the heavyweight division.



Facing an opponent in a boxing ring was seen as a test of grit.

VII. PEER LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING APPOINTMENTS

Once the cadet phase began, cadets were required to hold for one week each the appointments of Cadet Under Officer (CUO), Cadet Company Sergeant Major (Cadet CSM), Cadet Platoon Sergeant (Cadet Pl Sgt) and Cadet President Mess Committee (Cadet PMC). Except for the last, appointment, insignias were worn. It was the job of the CUO and the Cadet CSM to form up the Company Muster Parade, if any were scheduled for their week and report to WO1 Hong. Of the two, the Cadet CSM had the more demanding assignment as he was expected to emulate WO1 Hong including being directly responsible to him for discipline, drill, bearing, dress regulations, regimental behaviour and, of course, area cleaning. The CUO, on the other hand, was basically a supernumerary appointment with theoretical responsibility for all the cadet appointees. The latter also had to present the whole company to a visiting lecturer, for example and would take command of a muster parade after the Cadet CSM had formed it up. The Cadet PMC, who answered to one of the Platoon Commanders (in the case of the first intake, APT Albert Tan of Platoon 2) had to keep an eye on the menu and the service in the dining hall, as there was no cadet mess or common room. The role of the other appointment holders was the management of cadets who came under their charge in preparation for administrative and training routines such as ensuring that stores were collected and returned in good order and time. The Cadet Pl Sgt had the most onerous job of all. He had to ensure that all stores, weapons and controlled combat equipment were squared away before cadets were released for the weekend or on those nights when they were allowed to leave camp until 2359 hrs. But, he was also required to take charge of any platoon-level movement from point-to-point, with drill commands if on foot; he was responsible for coordinating the platoon's routine and non-routine activities



Even as officer cadets, there were still times when detachments had to be marched from point to point. A good view of Platoon 3 barracks with 'B' Company in the background.

throughout the week, pre-checking those reporting sick, accounting the parade strength, ensuring that tasks assigned to members of his platoon were done, etc. All except the Cadet PMC could order other cadets to perform tasks within their purview.

It is tempting to view these appointments as a planned exposure of cadets to the roles of key players in units so that they would be better able to empathise with them when they became Second Lieutenants. But, actually that would have been a bonus to the actual appointment holders only, because not everyone had a chance to hold appointments and no cadet got a chance to hold all of them. The main purpose was to get the cadets to administer themselves as much as possible and have in place a management structure after working hours. It also was a means of placing individuals who were of interest, for assessment purposes, under a microscope.

Once again, for the most part, the other cadets cooperated with the appointment holders. But, there were officious appointment holders, or those who were out of their depth in man-management. Such personalities would have usually demonstrated their tendencies in

other areas of barrack life and more graphically in exercise appointments. Where these circumstances led to harassment or victimisation by an appointment holder, the inclination was for the others to back the underdog and make their disapproval obvious. The appointment holders were far too vulnerable in their responsibilities to ignore the ground and would in due course temper their attitudes. It is not known whether the instructors deliberately evaluated conflict resolution by appointment holders because most confrontations occurred out of their sight. But, brief though the cadet appointments were, they provided valuable lessons on leadership. The reverse was also true: the majority tended to cover for a less assertive appointment holder and cooperated to make him look, if not good, at least passable in the eyes of the instructors. On the whole, however, the limited time and the large number of cadets made the idea of cadet appointment holders somewhat counter-productive as an assessment instrument. If anything, it was the cadets who benefited from a better insight of their colleagues under stress. All the same, the appointment evaluations may have provided a casting vote in the selection of those who were in contention for the prizes and other honours at the end of training.

One clear-cut responsibility applied to every trainee: every day each platoon had to provide a duty armskote-man. The duty personnel for Saturday, Sunday and holidays respectively would stay in for the 24-hour duty, during which the Duty Officer of the day, or the SAFTI Duty Field Officer, who was rostered weekly, checked the weapons at least once. Weekend and holiday armskote duty was a handy punitive award to keep trainees on their best behaviour, but among the first intake, there were several trainees who did not mind doing it because they found the barracks and no doubt the food, better than what they could expect at their residences, which in at least one case was a shared rented room. While those who had been awarded the duty as punishment did the duty, those who were on normal roster would sometimes negotiate with the resident cadets to take over. Considering the legal implications of being responsible for firearms, this practice was potentially hazardous for the substitute but fortunately, there were no incidents during the first intake course.

Exercise appointments were of more compelling interest. It was a preoccupation among trainees during the cadet days to ferret out the exercise appointments for forthcoming exercises. Why these were not officially forecasted was not clear; it may have been to both keep things flexible and to gain insight into a cadet's character by studying his spontaneous actions. But, in a surprising number of instances, those assigned the task of cleaning up the instructors' and company offices would find details in drawers or even lying forgotten on the instructors' tables the night before. This would be usually disseminated to those concerned. Perhaps, it was only human but unfortunately, there were also instances when details of inputs for field exercises were also inadvertently made available to cadets when they were left carelessly on instructors' desks overnight.

VIII. PLAYING BALL

Cadets tended to be supportive and ‘play ball’ as it was called during exercise appointments when one or the other would be assigned the role of Platoon Commander, Platoon Sergeant, Section Commander or support weapon specialist. But, unlike the relatively minor contretemps of barrack life, the stresses of fieldwork would bring out both the determination of appointment holders and the personal predispositions of the followers. There was a celebrated instance of one cadet who disappeared tactically whenever the incredibly heavy locally-made assault boat of tough tropical wood called sampan which was adopted in the early days of SAFTI training, had to be beached and camouflaged for the night at the end of watermanship training. He shall remain nameless, but he was otherwise acknowledged a sharp cookie and went on to hold key appointments although he left the service early and migrated. In another incident, a slight, otherwise non-aggressive cadet who had been appointed Platoon Sergeant for a strenuous field exercise, went ballistic with one of the biggest and toughest cadets in the course and sent him back to the exercise area in the middle of the night to recover a missing 60mm mortar, with the culprit meekly complying with the help of a friend’s motor-cycle.

There were also typical flare-ups that are part of living in close proximity with limited personal space. There were a number of cases of cadets going for one another with blunt and sharp instruments following violent disagreements. The most dramatic instance was the case of one well-known cadet with a colourful background fleeing for dear life across the parade ground with a machete-wielding platoon mate in close pursuit. Fortunately, it was after working hours, and even more fortunately, the chaser did not catch the flier or the SAF would have had one aggressive Brigadier General less.

There was also an unwritten code of honour among the cadets. They would not snitch on a fellow-cadet and they would resolve interpersonal differences among themselves as far as possible. How and when this value system developed, is impossible to ascertain but it must have had its roots in the mutual support environment that the training regime created. An illustrative example deals with the same cadet who skived during the watermanship training. Gambling was a fairly common pastime among some of the cadets. One night, a session was going on in one of the section rooms. The said cadet, who was from another section, asked to join in but was promptly rejected. Up to mischief again and still playing the clown, he climbed up the false ceiling through an access hatch with a bucket of water, navigated to the spot just above the gamblers and after lifting the gypsum board ceiling panel, dumped the pail of water on the gamblers. When they raised a hue and cry, he tried to scuttle back to his section, but in the process one of his legs went through one of the ceiling panels into the section room. Though he got away, his own section mates boycotted his attempts to cover the ceiling panel. He managed to switch the damaged panel with one from the washroom, but when he went to camouflage the damaged area in the replaced washroom panel with



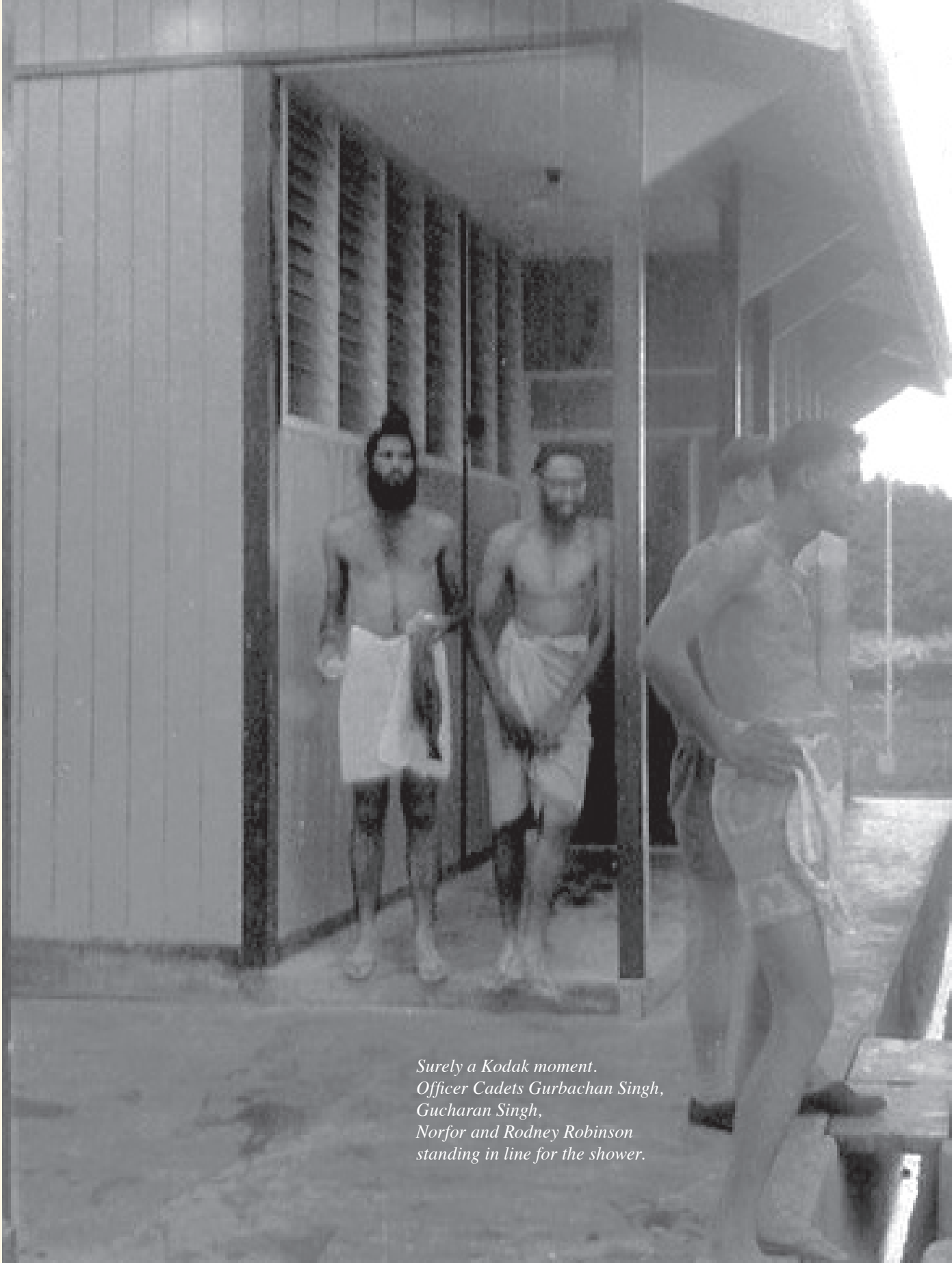
*Officer Cadets Seng Peng Khoon, Narinderpal Singh,
Ng Seng Chan and John Norfor (squatting).*



A group relaxing during lunch break.

paper and masking tape, nobody helped him either. Additionally, the gamblers, still furious, waited for him to go to bed and then emptied the bucket of water from the fire piquet on him that night. Fortunately, nobody noticed the patch-up job in the washroom ceiling and no appointment holder reported it.

A far more serious occurrence, which showed the extent to which mutual support could be stretched during the first intake training, also had to do indirectly with ceiling panels. About two weeks before the end of the whole course, Platoon 3 returned at dawn from a raid exercise and started cleaning weapons and clearing stores. In Section 12, one cadet was cleaning the Verey pistol which had acquired a patina of rust from exposure to salt air. Incredibly, there was a round in the chamber and it was set off. This was the second time that this had occurred in the same section. The first time, a couple of months earlier, the flare had whizzed past Tiger Hong as he stepped into the square, but the cadet responsible had got away with some extra duties, mainly because a part of the flare casing had hit another cadet and caused a laceration which had to be attended to by the Medical Centre. On this occasion, however, the flare went into the ceiling and set off a fire. As thick smoke built up, the fire alarm was raised. Fire piquets were activated and the fire brigade was called. The whole company evacuated to the square. The fire brigade arrived quickly and put out the fire. Investigators were told that the fire was started by an electrical short circuit and there was enough damage to the wiring on the ceiling that it was officially accepted as the cause of the fire. It was only after the commissioning of the first intake that Major John Morrice was informed of the actual situation in one Officers' Mess get-together. But, every cadet in 'A' Company had got to know of it by nightfall on the day itself. The weekly cadet



*Surely a Kodak moment.
Officer Cadets Gurbachan Singh,
Gucharan Singh,
Norfor and Rodney Robinson
standing in line for the shower.*

appointment holders were not required to submit any kind of daily report to the duty officer of the day or to the CSM. Thus, none of the misdemeanours became disciplinary issues. The instructors appear to have adopted this as a deliberate policy. If so, it was profoundly insightful. Otherwise, it would have polarised the trainees into unhealthy groups around dominant personalities bent on settling scores as the appointments went round.

IX. PRIZE WINNERS

It was a testimony to the degree of co-operation among the cadets and even during the recruit and section training phases, that very few seemed interested in topping the cohort in any area. The most intense competition, if at all, was in marksmanship, which had the advantages of being enjoyable, objective and quantifiable. But once again, strangely, after the marksmanship grading was completed in the recruit stage, it was not promoted as an official ongoing competition although there was a prize for the best shot, based on normal range periods. The only stipulation was that every cadet had to be a Marksman Class 2. There were even very limited zeroing exercises, with the last one being when the cadet phase began and cadets were issued with different rifles from those they had used as recruits. The private competitions were localised and hardly known outside the immediate circles.

There were vague rumours of who was in the running for the Sword of Honour towards the end of the course and there were a few who had been keeping their eye on the prospect, if not openly seeking the prize. But, it seemed as though the Company HQ were monitoring the candidates confidentially and the selection would be by acclamation rather than any objective criteria. It also caused quite a bit of excitement when nominees for the supernumerary appointments for the Commissioning Parade were announced. Most would rather not have been picked because of the demands that they knew these appointments entailed. But, those who were picked must have been the subject of long-term observation for their aptitude at drill and words of command and their colleagues generally approved their selection.

One of the reasons for the lack of competition was that the required attainments for the trophies, including the commission, were never formally promulgated, much less the rules. The other, was that the academic subjects such as the written Appreciation of Situation were essentially handicapped in favour of those with higher education. All the same, there was broad agreement with those who were eventually selected for the awards and not much concern, even with the order of merit listings in the various programmes for the commission events. All of that, may have contributed to the unusual degree of bonding that still persists with the graduates of the first intake who became known as the First Batch.

Endnotes

1. *LTC (RET) Timothy James De Souza, RSAF pilot, was the last First Batch officer in regular service. He retired on 23rd October, 1999.*
2. *Dixon, Norman, On The Psychology Of Military Incompetence, London: Random House, 1976, pp. 176-188; 189-195.*

STAFF AND TRAINEE DYNAMICS

I. SENSITIVE SUBJECT MATTER

Some of the contents of this chapter will seem insensitive because of their critical tone and because, despite the anonymity accorded to the individuals involved, they are likely to be identified more or less accurately. However, four factors argue strongly for the inclusion of the contents in a record of the experience of the first intake at SAFTI, Pasir Laba.

Firstly, there was never, to the knowledge of any graduate among the First Batch, any overt disrespect shown to any individual among the staff of SAFTI at any time (including Lance Corporal Amzah bin Jas, the storeman at 'A' Company who was oblivious to his real clout). The limitations exposed were taken in the spirit of live and let live. The trainees themselves were a cross-section of Singapore's eclectic population, with little claim to airs. Many had not experienced flush toilets and showers at home, latex mattresses, the luxury of two pillows, nor even three square meals a day. Their backgrounds would have ruled most out of the world's elite military academies. Besides military expertise, however flawed, being able to speak English well already placed every officer in SAFTI on a higher social plane than some 60-70% of the trainees. Regardless of how they came to be a part of the management of SAFTI, they were accepted as such and it was for the individual staff or instructor to come to terms with his role, limitations and personal predispositions in the experiment of creating Singapore's own military academy from scratch. Inevitably, for some it would be a comfortable fit, for others, a loose rattle.

Secondly, the relations between the trainees and their minders are part and parcel of the education process. They impart their own lessons—both positive and negative—especially in a leadership-training environment, as officer cadet training uniquely is. To exclude the issues that pervasively modulated the lives of the trainees is to hollow out the experience and sterilise the account of its social interaction—its richest human element. If not addressed in a record of a year's training in a highly charged atmosphere, the reader would be obliged to accept the astonishing proposition that trainees—daily subjected to uncommon stress and life-threatening hazards—submitted to those empowered to demand their unflinching compliance without privately evaluating these agents.

Thirdly, the dynamics in question are applicable in every similar situation. Hundreds of leadership and management courses are conducted in the military and in other forums in Singapore. The specifics change but the choreography is similar. Personalities get in the way of the process, they are either passengers, or enhance it. Past experiences can demonstrate the importance of selecting the right mix of trainers and preparing them and help alleviate systemic problems.

Lastly, no one has recorded the dislocation that the personnel of the Singapore Military Forces experienced with the complete change in orientation that the setting up of the SAF brought, in the wake also of the trauma of separation from Malaysia. Especially for the regular officers and NCOs of 1 and 2 SIR, for whom the military was a sole livelihood, their terms, conditions and expectations were up in the air. While on the one hand, they could contemplate better prospects, on the other, once the word got around that it was not merely a matter of expanding the armed forces but of reinventing the whole organisation, optimism gave way to apprehension of where they stood in the scheme of things. As it turned out, the vast majority were successfully co-opted and went on to advance further than they would have expected when they first enlisted, but there was a lengthy period of soul-searching with little prospect of official elucidation because nobody was the wiser.

II. A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

The local instructors of the first intake were in an invidious position, although, these being early days yet for the SAF, they may not have been aware of its full extent. The Advisors had a strong mandate to decide on nearly all aspects of the training, including the organisational structure, syllabus, doctrine, training format and even key training-related appointments. As the principal activity of the SAF for the foreseeable future would be training, this mandate had career-affecting implications and warranted tactful responses, which have never been the defining characteristic of military personnel.

The Advisors were seen rightly or wrongly as unofficially, the arbiters of military expertise for Singapore's purposes. Their appearance on the scene, seemingly consigned to history, all pre-Advisor local expertise, based on the British forces. The selection of local instructors as trainers for the first intake was based on the First Instructors' Preparatory Course, completed less than a month before the first intake reported to SAFTI.¹ Though that course was meant to provide a common denominator for personnel from a wide range of backgrounds including the Police Force and Volunteers, as well as provide methodology models for training the new enlistees based on IDF experiences, it was not a compressed version of the first officer cadet course syllabus. It was evident that quite a lot of the operational training in the officer cadet phase was being developed as the first intake was being trained. This gave the first intake trainees the impression, probably correctly, that at least in some areas, their local instructors were only one step ahead of themselves. It also left the local instructors off-balance, as they could not definitively predict what training would come up in the latter stages of the course, as they were not formulating the syllabus.

It was to turn out, over time, that the Advisors were themselves re-cycling a good deal of British material, because they would often refer the Doctrine Department of SAFTI to British field manuals when their own translations failed them under pressure of time.

After all, they had had direct links with British forces. But, it begs the question why the local officers did not immediately recognise the common source. The answer can only be speculative. The British had a different approach to officer cadet training. According to LTC (RET) Kesavan Soon, who became the Chief Instructor, SAFTI in August, 1967 and had done the full course in FMC, the emphasis was on a broad syllabus which covered an understanding of the armed forces, grooming for life as an officer, the essentials of the military craft, emphasis on character-building and in the FMC, academic classes to pass the School Certificate examinations. The Advisors, back home, on the other hand, were preparing conscripts for the command of small units (initially) actively involved in securing their territory. Accordingly, they were combat-oriented and their training methods were highly codified into battle drills that were reiterated until the principles and processes became second nature. They also standardised training material for commonality and mass production, whereas the British left it to the respective trainer to expand on the basic concepts as presented in the field manuals. For obvious reasons, Singapore adopted the Advisors' approach.

But, at the time, the local instructors were chafing under their helplessness. They could neither project mastery of operational techniques or personal military skills in their very human need to demonstrate psychological dominance over their charges. Subconsciously, the barrack room, personnel administration, the still-relevant technical areas of the old order and that old stand-by, military 'bull' must have been irresistible venues to exercise their dwindling authority. Some may have even had a worrisome glimpse of the implications of the first intake: that in raising the first intake, they were creating those earmarked to displace them in rather short order.

III. MINOR HICCUPS

A classic case of Freudian slip was evident in the approach of one Lieutenant (later Captain, now deceased). He was not martial or physical in his outlook but very forthcoming of information, approachable, urbane and contemplative. He was probably pessimistic about his own future in the service and was subliminally discouraging the first intake, which he saw as a threat. He would never tire of questioning the purpose of training 140 officer cadets ('A' Company strength), with possibly another 150 to follow. His prior experience with new infusions of officers had been cohorts of five to six per year from the FMC. To be fair, until February 1967, just five months before the First Batch was commissioned, the only inkling of the introduction of National Service had been a brief announcement by Dr. Goh Keng Swee in November, 1966. Nor was the scale of it evident until several years after it was introduced. So, he was not to know that a paradigm shift was being shaped for the SAF even as he grappled with his own future prospects.

Then, there was the curious case of a WO2 with much higher aspirations. With good reason too, considering his obvious intelligence and the fact that he was descended from an Arab

merchant family of significant historical influence in Singapore, though diminished at the time. His demeanour suggested that he did not consider many of the cadets to be suitable officer material and that he would have difficulty acknowledging them as his superiors if they were commissioned. He had some quaint notions of military bearing and discipline, coupled with a high-pitched squeak when issuing the executive component at the end of each drill command, which trainees never tired of spoofing. The trainees in his platoon were seldom sure how to accept his guidance on any issue, partly because of his offbeat take on things but mainly because many had inadvertently witnessed Tiger Hong pulling him up several times in exasperation. But he was never vicious or overbearing, always unfailingly helpful—a genuine favourite. He went on to become a WO1 himself, and retired the service early to take up a successful business career.

IV. A SERIOUS FAUX PAS

There was one issue that rankled the trainees right through from recruit to commissioning and beyond. Had they really understood the predicament of MID and Singapore as a whole at the time—that the unsolicited independence had created priorities that called for improvisations—they might have been more forgiving. But, being the young, hot-blooded inductees into the warrior class that they were, their reactions were perhaps understandable. The problem went to the very root of the challenge they had accepted from the Singapore Government to undergo the arduous training at SAFTI, which had, in quite a number of cases, included the unilateral rejection of their application to quit for those who thought it too tough to take—as initially contracted—before the first three to six weeks of training were over.

Shortly after the course started, several of the trainees noted that an applicant who had undergone the selection test but had not been among those brought to SAFTI, turned up as the Duty Officer in the barrack lines. Under the stress of the first weeks at SAFTI, the trainees drew the inevitable conclusion: he had not qualified but had been commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Volunteer Corps or People's Defence Force as it was known by then. Actually, it was also equally possible that he had qualified but he had been on the verge of getting a Volunteer commission and had chosen to go that route, except that the trainees would have then concluded that he had wimped out anyway. As a matter of fact, there were others at SAFTI with Volunteer Corps commissions and some were appointed section instructors. Director, SAFTI himself had been a Volunteer, but no one doubted his qualifications to be Director: he was a known high-flyer from the elite Administrative Service and everybody recognised that what was called for from him as Director went well beyond professional military expertise, in which case, he was by no means disadvantaged. But, for one who was believed not to have measured up to the selection criteria to appear with the coveted commission while those who had qualified were striving mightily for it, was totally unpalatable. If knowingly done, it was insensitive in the extreme to have the individual

assigned to SAFTI. It was to create a negative attitude among the graduates of SAFTI to others who had accepted a secondment to the regulars from the Volunteers, despite their personal abilities.

Instructors with Volunteer commissions were at a disadvantage, even if they had attended the Preparatory Course, because their military knowledge was based on discontinuous training camps at which the best they could hope for, was a cursory exposure to a significantly abbreviated body of knowledge and practical application. As instructors, they were caught between the regular officers—who themselves were strangers to the new doctrines promulgated by the Advisors—and the trainees, who rapidly overhauled them in basic military matters, not to mention in their physical conditioning. Any professional authority they had, dribbled away by the end of the recruit stage of the first intake training and what remained was only what the trainees were prepared to extend to their rank and perhaps their age. Unfortunately, a number of these officers seemed not to have been as conscientious about mastering the subjects of forthcoming lessons as they might have been. There were comical episodes which would leave the trainees aghast or in stitches. One such involved an instructor who asked a cadet to point to the north in the field based on the position of the sun during a lesson on navigation. The cadet did so. The instructor pulled out a prismatic compass, checked it and pointing in a direction less than 20 mills to the right of where the cadet had indicated, announced pontifically, “Not there (where the cadet had pointed), but there.” Honour satisfied, he proceeded to happily fumble through the rest of the lesson.

V. AN ECLIPSE IN THE OFFING

Some insecurity could be discerned as well among the instructors who were regulars. With the benefit of the stricter and more demanding full-time regimen of military colleges in Malaya/Malaysia and elsewhere, they had more substantial foundations to their professional expertise. Many had also advanced to the ranks of Lieutenant or Captain. They had had experiences in operations against Indonesian guerrillas during Confrontation and in 1964, the turbulent days of racial riots in Singapore. All this, plus the fact they had opted for the military as a vocation, tended to give them greater professional weight than their Volunteer counterparts. But, their trainees were not only the receptacles of the concentrated essence of the new wave, but also getting intense practical application which made them physically more hardened than the instructors and more dexterous with military equipment and knowledge.

As a matter of fact, there were remarkably few occasions when the regulars slipped and those instances showed—if anything—how demanding military leadership is. There was the case of one FMC-trained officer who lost his bearings while controlling a section raid exercise and abruptly twisted round the sleeve of his embroidered field rank insignias to hide them on the underside of his epaulettes and announced that he was now a private, implying

that he expected the trainees to find their way out. It would have been marginally effective instruction if he had been genuinely testing the trainees but their consensus was that he had tanked. Similarly, another Second Lieutenant, with a permanently dyspeptic disposition—also during a raid through the Mandai forest reserve at night, became so negatively charged that he abnegated his responsibilities to his trainees and appointed one to take over and get them out of there as best he could.

Generally, however, the trainees respected the NCOs and officers at Pasir Laba and they in turn proved worthy of that respect. They must have had considerable inkling of their predicament, but they kept it to themselves and pursued their responsibilities conscientiously. There was not one instance of victimisation or bullying, whereas there were many instances of compassionate support and understanding. From recruit days to the Commissioning Parade, the Platoon Commanders, Officer Commanding 'A' Company, Officer Commanding 'B' Company (recruit and section leader phases), the Company 2I/Cs, and the NCOs of each platoon earned the respect and in many cases, the lasting affection of the trainees.

VI. UNCOMMON PROFESSIONALISM: NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

During the recruit and section leader training phases, NCOs who were section instructors often dropped in on their section in the barracks after duty hours to pass time with the trainees, as well as to provide feedback and professional guidance on matters within their purview. In 'B' Company where all the section instructors were NCOs, they would turn up in blue PT shorts, bare-bodied and wearing the cheap canvas PT shoes (which was of brown canvas but blackened with Kiwi shoe polish as a standing order) and coolly deposit themselves supine on a trainee's immaculate bed. In most cases, they were forthright, full of risqué jokes and anecdotes, but good company. Many had curious perspectives on things, messy home lives and frequently, impecunious lifestyles. Their personalities, while unique individually, invariably carried an aura of nonchalance towards the inevitable vicissitudes of military life. They were changeable in their interactions with the trainees: joking one moment and smiling tigers the next, they made an art of controlling trainees by keeping them off-balance. Their biggest weakness was that they did not have the confidence to go beyond what was in the lesson format when they were instructing. Quite probably, the culture in the SMF had not encouraged them to take the initiative in terms of professional knowledge, but rather go by the book. It would put many of them at a disadvantage with potential officer cadet trainees, and even more so with the National Servicemen whom they would encounter before long.

Among themselves, they behaved differently than when officers were present. Most were always ready for a lark. During patrolling exercises and other field camps, they were not

above ‘liberating’ a free-ranging chicken or two for dinner, chatting up the kampong girls, or pulling one off against the officers. They managed the mix of races among themselves and the trainees with easy camaraderie and pointed but friendly racist barbs.

There were occasions when the NCOs in general, would adopt irregular practices in their interactions with trainees. These came up when they wanted to apply some informal pressure on one or several of them short of putting them on a charge. In theory, under military law, as a safeguard against abuse of authority, no form of punishment may be imposed without the accused being charged under the SAF Act. Following the charge, a Junior Disciplinary Officer, a Senior Disciplinary Officer, or a Superior Commander can deal with the case under summary disciplinary proceedings. At the risk of more serious outcomes, the accused can opt for a formal court martial if he or she feels that a fair hearing may not be forthcoming from a summary proceeding. Summary proceedings are designed to expedite justice and usually if the accused is guilty, he or she admits to the charge, agrees to accept the Disciplinary Officer’s punishment which can range from a fine by way of pay stoppage, to detention in a unit guard room or a military detention barrack. But, even with this fast-track process, for some offences—perhaps better described as misdemeanours—the process may be onerous. Immediate superiors frequently need to get their subordinates into line several times a day when training a large body of trainees involved in complex teamwork activities. Recognising this, the military has officially endorsed minor punishments such as extra drill, the immediate execution of several push-ups or chin-ups, or a run around the square or other forfeits, so long as they don’t go over the top.

The NCOs would come up with various forfeits: a favourite was to order the trainee to run up Good Morning Hill (Spot Height 205), shout “Good Morning!” loudly enough to be heard below (hence the name of the hill, together with the fact that it was also one of the destinations for the 5 BX runs at dawn) and come back to the training shed; another was to trim the grass at the edge of a portion of the parade square with a pair of scissors; another favourite was an assignment to catch 50 or 100 grasshoppers for several NCOs’ pet birds, and Officer Cadet Chen Yew Peng, who also kept birds, became quite proficient in this. But, the trainees understood the minor punishments for the forfeit system it was and hardly resented it at any stage of the training. They also recognised it, as officers-to-be, as a useful tool to keep soldiers focused and on the ball in circumstances where there were temptations for minds to stray.

The Platoon Sergeants—who were the more senior Staff Sergeants and WO2s—presented a sterner mien in keeping with their need to manage their Platoon NCOs and the trainees, while also administering the platoon. Sometimes, their limited education showed through because unlike the soldiers they were used to in the regular units, all the trainees of the first intake were better qualified than they. But, they carried themselves well and the trainees gave them the respect they deserved, subject in rare instances, to an appeal to the Platoon

Commander, especially when the weekend leave was threatened. No Platoon Commander, on the other hand, lightly overruled his NCOs' decisions.

VII. UNCOMMON PROFESSIONALISM: COMPANY WARRANT OFFICERS

As a whole, the NCOs who were posted to SAFTI must have been the best senior NCOs in the SAF, but even so, it is remarkable that there should have been such a large crop of high calibre NCOs from so small a base as two regular infantry battalions. One can imagine what a wrench it must have been to the Commanding Officers of 1 and 2 SIR and HQ 1 Brigade to give up their 'backbone' personnel, as NCOs have long been regarded in the military. The eagle-eyed Company Warrant Officers of 'A' and 'B' Companies were especially impressive. Their personalities and professionalism—perhaps the best local manifestation of the British military establishment—shone through. No first intake trainee dared to match wits with them and there was a palpable hush in each of the two company premises when they were known to be present. On their daily walkabouts prior to first parade or after the trainees had departed for field training, it was a foregone conclusion that they would spot any shortcoming in area cleaning or barrack-room layout or any other sin of omission or commission the trainees may have been guilty of the previous night. The consequences could range from a relatively tolerable hour of short-and-sharp extra drill at noon, to the bitter confinement to barracks for the weekend.

If the actions of then WO1 'Tiger' Hong Seng Mak, CWO 'A' Company during officer cadet training were representative of Regimental Sergeant Majors in the SAF, they were in a class by themselves. Among the most dreaded sounds in 'A' Company lines was the whiplash yell "You there, Officer Cadet!!" from the CWO's office. But for all his inscrutability and unapproachability, Tiger was a man with a mission. Officer Cadet Ng Seng Chan relates how, when he was Cadet Company Sergeant Major for one week, Tiger seemed to have had it in for him. One of the Cadet CSM's jobs was to ensure the spotlessness of the barrack premises and every day for the first few days, Tiger would take him to task over two things: sloppiness in toilet and shower stalls cleaning, evidence of which Seng Chan was at a loss to find; and the inevitable presence of cigarette butts behind a particular section of Platoon 3 barrack block. The sloppiness, it turned out, was the staining of the back inside wall of the toilet bowls, which Tiger demonstrated by donning a rubber glove and wiping off a sample to offer close evidence to Seng Chan's nostrils. As for the cigarette butts, Tiger seemed to be able to zero in on several which Seng Chan would invariably miss, even when he specifically searched for them at the suspect location. Seng Chan's initial attempts at warning the cadets and Platoon I/Cs produced no respite. In frustration, one morning he fell in the whole company well before muster parade and ordered some ten minutes of short-and-sharp to draw the attention of the cadets to the problem.

Unnoticed, Tiger emerged from his office to openly congratulate him on his remedy. According to Seng Chan, the result was a triple disappearing act that Houdini himself might have found incredible: the toilet stains, the cigarette butts and Tiger's adverse observations during area inspections. Seng Chan was picked as Supernumerary Platoon Commander, Platoon 3 for the Commissioning Parade, a star billing in Tiger's own star show of the course.

Tiger was the first NCO in the SAF (post-SAFTI first intake) to be appointed Lieutenant (and later promoted to Captain) directly, to near universal approval, despite having been accused in the interim, under questionable circumstances, of using physical force on a National Serviceman for a misdemeanour. He was such a large presence in the officer cadet days that despite the nervousness he evoked—or because of it—he merited the frontispiece of the sole edition of the journal of the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute, 'THE SAFTIRIAN,' produced by the first intake cadets.

The anxiety of running foul of the CWO was more intense during the pre-officer cadet days perhaps, because the trainees were still green and the CWO actively wanted to shape their military outlook. In the later years of the SAF, many 'traditional' practices such as ceremonial drill, immaculate turnout, spit and polish and summary minor punishments were significantly curtailed on the grounds that the tradition of completely deconstructing a trainee



WO2 Baba, WO2 Mohd Mizah Bin Ahmad, Puan Mizah and WO1 Hong Seng Mak.



WO1 'Tiger' Hong Seng Mak



WO1 Harry Lim

prior to remoulding him (or her) into some sort of military automaton was not acceptable, or at least not through mindless military ‘bull.’ It must be said that the ‘deconstruction/reconstruction’ theory was highly exaggerated and seems rooted in the preference of later generations of officers and civilian administrators to level down military practices to a low common denominator which was easier to demand of conscripts. Certainly, among the first intake, there was no sense that individuality as such was being suppressed. What was evident was that the whole establishment made it a point to eliminate a civilian laissez-faire approach in a military environment. This meant benchmarking standards from the shine of the boots, to the tautness of bed sheets and to the level of attention during training and everything in between. As in kendo or taekwondo, the rituals were mainly to hardwire the mind. The CWOs, in particular, made a point of keeping out of the way except in matters that were strictly within their purview. But, they demanded certain standards in military bearing and conduct, in area cleaning and in drill movements. One thing both CWOs (‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies) made clear was that the parade square was hallowed ground and not to be treated as a pedestrian mall: during duty hours, it took a reckless trainee indeed to saunter across one. Another was that drill was an exercise in precision.

VIII. UNCOMMON PROFESSIONALISM: OFFICERS

Officers tended to remain aloof during the recruit and section training days almost certainly because they would have to make objective assessments about selection for the officer cadet phase. The generous age limit for the first intake of recruits, due to both urgency and to seed the SAF with officers of post-secondary education, had created a unique situation where many of the trainers were training their schoolmates and even seniors. There was also anecdotal evidence to suggest that MID had admonished the trainers to handle enlistees with post-secondary education more sensitively; or, it could have been natural prudence. The training company officers thus sought to avoid fraternising with the trainees because of the obvious risk of showing partiality to any school contacts among the trainees. They were more relaxed during the officer cadet phase since, by then, the first cut had been made and there was a general sense that the cadets were making the grade on their own merits. In fact, by the last few weeks of training, both trainees and instructors had begun to smudge the distinction in the relationship and speak to one another on more equal terms.

But unwittingly, many left their mark on impressionable young minds. One was Clarence Tan, the ex- Malaysian Special Service Unit officer, always game for anything, always with a smile on his face, compactly built and smartly turned out, was a natural model; especially as he had been featured in the recruitment brochure beside his shiny sports car. Another was Cedric ‘Butch’ Klienman, who looked like a poster boy and impressed all the recruits with his clipped English diction, his Herbert Johnson peak cap and his general air of military efficiency. Then, there was burly Deputy Superintendent of Police, T. E. Ricketts, OC ‘B’ Company, with his fighting face, Police Reserve Unit beret and perpetual jungle boots, who



LTA Robert Wee



2LT Lim Hau Kee



CPT Jagrup Singh

was a permanent fixture up front. There was also diminutive Edward Chan who could bring a vehicle convoy to a screeching halt with one glare directed at the lead driver, but was always way ahead of the game. FMC graduate Syed Ibrahim was super-fit, immaculately turned out and guaranteed to add a two-kilometre run to the end of any exercise in the SAFTI vicinity for the sake of physical fitness. Goh Lye Choon was the affable, combined-school athlete whose rolling gait and spoonerisms belied his outstanding fitness and competence. And, John Morrice, OC 'A' Company for both the initial and the officer cadet phases, who, for all his bow-legged drill and hair-trigger temper, never took his eyes off the ball. Then, there was Albert Tan, with his helicopter vision, who would have taught the German General Staff a thing or two about staff work. There was also Royston Desker, the roly-poly FMC boxer and hockey player who was ready for anti-establishment prank as long as he had his ten bottles of Coca-Cola a day. There were many others: Peter-Panish Naranjan Singh who could scoot up the steepest hill and not break out a drop of sweat, but could also lose part of his little finger after sticking it into the mouth of a python he was teasing; ebullient Abdullah "Dollah" Ghani, with his deep bass voice and hyperactive hormones, for whom Adjutant SAFTI thoughtfully reserved a week or two of extra duty every three months; the soft-spoken Shari Ngaimin who moved with the grace of a panther and, as they would say at a later age, had 'pects' to die for; the intense and conscientious Surjit Singh who was always prepared for his lessons and led by moral suasion; the equally conscientious, weedy Alan Lie, probably the friendliest instructor in camp, who as one wit would have it, would not get wet if he ran sideways through a rain shower; the ever cool, gravel-voiced tactician, Jagrup Singh who was never in No. 3 dress when field fatigues would do and whose idea of military spotlessness was to scrape yesterday's mud off his combat boots with a stick while cadets were being inspected for turn-out at the company muster parade; the gregarious, introspective James Chan of the restless, seeking mind; the dapper, unpredictable Robert Wee, whose generous soul always invited manipulation by cadets; George 'GPMG' Ho Yat Yuen, whose staccato speech style must have been influenced by the general purpose machine gun in burst fire, of which he was a specialist; and 'A' Company 2 I/C, Daljeet Singh, who had levelled the score as the leader of the platoon that first made contact with Indonesian guerrillas who had killed nine soldiers from 2 SIR. And many platoon Seconds-in-Command and section instructors, who left their indelible impressions, but are too numerous to list.

IX. CONTACTS WITH SAFTI HQ STAFF

There was one group of officers and NCOs from among whom the trainees had direct contact only with a few and that too, infrequently: the HQ staff, including Director, SAFTI, then LTC Kirpa Ram Vij, his Second-in-Command, MAJ John Tan; Adjutant SAFTI, initially CPT R. Ramachandra and later, CPT Thomas Teo Teck Hee; WO1 Sng Cheng Chye, first Regimental Sergeant Major SAFTI; the Doctrine Department Staff headed by CPT Edward Yong; Training Department staff including CPT Michael Seth, Chief Instructor and CPT Kesavan Soon; the photographer, 2LT M. Jeremiah and cameraman Staff Sergeant Harris and the Physical Training



2LT Michael Jeremiah



2LT John Teo



*Inspector
Chin Chee Chean*



2LT Abdullah Ghani

instructors, Staff Sergeant Lim Boon Chor, Sergeant Justin Hendricks, Corporal Pachimuthu (seconded from the Police Force) and Lance Corporal Raffif bin Senan led by WO2 Kutalib; the Training Aids Officer, Lieutenant Soaidy bin Haji Ali; the Quartermaster (QM) Lieutenant Hamid Khan; SAFTI's Equivalent of the Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant (RQMS), WO2 John Chin; the Motor Transport Officer (MTO), LTA Koong Yue Hong and the Medical Officer (MO), CPT (Dr.) Seah Cheng Hock.



LTA Mokhtar, who was replaced by WO2 Hong Seng Mak as CWO 'A' Company after he was commissioned.



*LTA Koong Yue Hong
MTO SAFTI*



*WO2 John Chin
RQMS SAFTI*



*WO1 Sng Cheng Chye
RMS SAFTI*



*MAJ John Tan,
2IC SAFTI.*

Inspector Chin.

*Govindarasu,
Officer Cadet.*

2LT Amin.



LTA Soaidy bin Haji Ali.

Among these, it could be said that the MO knew many trainees intimately in a professional way, sometimes because they were genuinely in need of medical attention and sometimes because he was a ticket to avoid some tough training. But, it was always a risk to “report sick”. Trainees had to pack their backpacks according to a prescribed list of personal effects, and report to the duty NCO who would march them as a group to the medical centre. Those reporting sick were exempted from 5 BX and muster parade that morning and would have avoided duty until after the MO had seen them, which could be late morning. Woe betide any diagnosed as “M&D” (medicine and duty), because it was shorthand for malingering and invited all sorts of unhappy consequences like weekend duty, not to mention an unsavoury record out of keeping with an officer’s ethical code. There was one medical problem a trainee would have avoided bringing to Captain (Dr) Seah, except as a last resort. Venereal infections were in those days a military offence. It is highly unlikely that over the thirteen months of training, no first intake trainee had contracted a problem, but to those who knew him, CPT (Dr) Seah was his own man, as well as a man of the world and in all likelihood, he would have treated the cases and kept the details to himself, so long as it did not get out of hand.

LTA Hamid Khan, who had been awarded a Quartermaster Commission, was generally considered a magician who could pull a 3-ton truck out of a top hat. How he did his accounting remained a mystery and eventually required a total item-by-item physical accounting on SAFTI main square, some five years later. Lieutenant Koong Yue Hong, the Motor Transport Officer was public enemy No.1 (when in fact he should have been awarded a Meritorious Service Medal) because the transport fleet of SAFTI, a hodgepodge of makes, sizes and mechanical conditions, was about 60% off the road at any one time through overuse, under-



LTA Hamid Khan, QM SAFTI.

servicing and lack of spare parts, leaving voraciously hungry and tired trainees in the middle of nowhere, waiting for rations and transport back to camp.

Perhaps fortunately, for the first intake, they hardly ever encountered SAFTI's Regimental Sergeant Major, WO1 Sng Cheng Chye. He had been a Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant before being appointed informally as the Sergeant Major for the First Instructors' Preparatory Course. Like Tiger, WO1 Sng was instantly recognisable as the master of all he surveyed—which was pretty much the case in those days when the RSM was the Commander's right hand man for discipline and camp area management. Sporting the trademark style of RSMs with the peak of his cap almost down to the bridge of the nose and the long pace stick with burnished brass mountings stuck under the left armpit, held precisely parallel to the ground by the open thumb and forefinger of the left hand, WO 1 Sng drew attention from a considerable distance. This gave lesser mortals, which included subalterns in those days, a chance to pull themselves up, put their headgear in order or get into step if moving as a body, as mitigating factors in any of the admonishments that were de rigueur from a passing RSM; except that a subaltern would first get a crisp salute which he would have to return as crisply before being duly advised of his shortcoming. Inche (the Malay equivalent of the honorific "Mister" that RSMs were entitled to) Sng was an impeccable dresser: every laundered crease in his tunic and trousers stood to attention the whole day. His calf-high, leather boots with single cross-straps at the top in addition to high-laced uppers, soles braced with steel insets, would gleam as he paced in measured heel-toe steps which never seemed to vary unless he was coming your way, in which case it was too fast. He was well spoken, firm, efficient, and an expert at drill and military ceremony. Although Tiger Hong mainly designed the Commissioning Parade of the First Batch, Inche Sng choreographed nearly all the other

joint parades at SAFTI, at which he would be the Parade Sergeant Major forming up the parade to hand it over to the Parade Second-in-Command. Rejecting a direct commission to the rank of Lieutenant some years later, Inche Sng went on to become the first Sergeant Major of SAF.

The first intake was also fortunate that they were kept out of the way of Adjutant, SAFTI. The Adjutant was and remained an institution in Commonwealth armed forces, his routine job covering manpower, administration and overall camp discipline and was the principal staff officer to the Commanding Officer. The SAF has stopped using this appointment title in favour of Manpower Officer or S1, but with vastly reduced authority. An Adjutant's job description did not officially include being a nemesis to subalterns, but in the regimental system, he was entrusted with nurturing and grooming young officers in the corporate image of the armed forces and of the regiment in particular. He presided over unit readiness, the dress code, ration states, personal morals, mess etiquette, military law and summary punishments, unit anniversaries, unit histories, promotion ceremonies, leave, even personal finances and permission to marry. Most important of all, he presided over the duty officer schedule, which meant 24 hours at a stretch per duty and spot checks during the wee hours of the morning. As a nurturing process it worked—painfully. Within months, a young officer knew the unit inside out. A subaltern reporting for duty, punctually, to the second, could expect to 'take' three or five or 14 for the most novel of reasons, which meant keeping on one's toes, and one's wits about one. The Adjutant's powers were too awesome to last in the National Service SAF.



First Adjutant SAFTI CPT R Ramachandra with LTA Earl Hope Robeson and CPT Syed Hashim Algoffrey.

SAFTI's first Adjutant was CPT R. Ramachandra, a mobilised Volunteer, who moved to another appointment shortly after the training at SAFTI began. He was replaced by CPT (later Major, retired) Thomas Teo Teck Hee, dapper and affable, but intimidating nonetheless.

For the first intake of trainees, Director, SAFTI, LTC Kirpa Ram Vij was a looming presence who was rarely seen, except during visits to field exercises, or as host for VIP visitors and senior guest lecturers and of course, during important functions and ceremonies such as the official opening of SAFTI on 18th June, 1966. The most important VIP visitor was the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew who came very early in the programme to uncompromisingly reinforce a message from the Permanent Secretary, MID, Mr. George Bogaars, when an exodus threatened among the trainees because they perceived the course as too demanding. LTC "Kip," as he was popularly known, had been seconded from the Administrative Service where his substantive appointment had been Deputy Secretary. Trained in Organisation and Methods (O&M) and with his Volunteer interest, he was handpicked by Dr. Goh, lately his political boss at the Ministry of Finance, for bringing together the various strands that setting up SAFTI and kicking off its first intake would entail. He had been earmarked early for a major role in the embryonic SAF. As Director, SAFTI, his work was cut out for him and the first intake was only one of his extensive responsibilities, which he largely delegated to the officers commanding 'A' and 'B' companies. But, by not forcing his presence on the trainees and trainers in an environment where a lesser personality might have been tempted to flaunt his Superior Commander's status, he provided much needed detachment to the trainees in a rather claustrophobic, abrasive hierarchy.

X. TWO ILLUSTRATIVE DISCIPLINARY CASE STUDIES

The training of the first intake of officers in SAFTI was a novel experiment by any standards. Everybody concerned subscribed to the idea that a key element of the training was to imbue the trainees with military discipline that would remain their hallmark throughout their careers. But, the complexities of disciplinary issues can never be anticipated. Nor can the adjudication of any disciplinary incident be deemed impeccable. Both the offence and the verdict are subject to extenuating circumstances. Blind justice is a fairy tale. The following case studies are food for thought and only that.

The Gambling Incident. No one would argue that if gambling outside authorised gaming houses is against the civil law, gambling in premises used to train the future military officers of the country can't possibly be countenanced. But, surely the intent of the law against gambling is to prevent illegal gambling dens rather than to pre-empt eternal damnation. To put it another way, adult males who are confined to military barracks between Last Post and Reveille, can be expected to seek diversions, among which a game of cards is likely to be high on the preferred list. But, for a small group of cadets from Platoon 2, just two weeks before the commissioning parade, luck ran out, when the Duty Officer, a weapons specialist

Warrant Officer, dropped in during his rounds. A cadet from another platoon observed the commotion. A fellow cadet, who had been a Police Inspector in civilian life, was appealing strenuously to the Duty Officer who was then seen to line up a number of cadets on the parade square, address them and eventually dismiss them. Next morning, the ex-Police Officer explained to the observer that the Duty Officer had caught him and some others playing poker in one of the section rooms of Platoon 2. They were expecting the worst but it turned out that the Duty Officer chose to quash the case. (The ex-Police Inspector went on to become a favourite choice as defending officer in court martial). However, the cadets had to give up their stakes and donate the money to charity. The Warrant Officer had apparently picked up evidence of activity in the section room although the door and the windows opening to the parade square had been locked. He posted the duty Cadet Under Officer outside the door and went round the back, where the louvers were open, and spotted several cadets around the table playing poker. Shouting “Freeze!” he went round the front again. The cadets managed to take the money off the table, but otherwise froze as ordered and accepted that they had been caught red-handed.

Was the good Warrant Officer safeguarding a vested interest by avoiding a strict enforcement of a code of ethics, because within days at least some of the guilty cadets would be elevated by their commission, to potentially be among his immediate superiors? While this is an issue in an institution where a future generation of bosses is being nurtured, no first intake cadet would have thought that of this particular NCO, who was considered rock steady and an eminently reasonable man. On the contrary, his reputation rose to new heights with every cadet who learnt of the incident, as they saw in the man, someone who was instinctively above petty misanthropy. The lesson was a positive one and helped mould tolerance and forbearance among the trainees.

Bad Timing. The course would end in three weeks. The previous two days had been a harrowing time of long-range raids and withdrawals. Bone-tired, Section 11, Platoon 3 with their instructor, beached its assault boats at the boatshed end of Pasir Laba Road in the half-light of dawn and transferred equipment—support weapons, radio sets and packs—to the waiting 3-ton truck. The M16 rifles had been encased in transparent plastic sleeves against saltwater corrosion and they had been laid aside while the other equipment was being sorted out. Lying on the grass, the plastic sleeves tended to conceal the weapons as dew formed. Section 11 was tightly knit and the rule was to share the chores. While some were transferring training stores to the 3-tonner, others were doing the same with personal issue items. When everything seemed squared away, Section 11 mounted the 3-tonner and moved off to the SAFTI complex.

When the 3-tonner was unloaded, one of the cadets realised that his rifle was missing. As this was as close to a cardinal sin as one could get in SAFTI, he grabbed a lift on a friend’s motorcycle and sped to the boatshed. Rifle recovered, the pair sped back. In the meantime, pandemonium had broken loose in ‘A’ Company. At the Section 12 end of Platoon 3, a fire

had started above the gypsum board ceiling when for the second time during the course, somebody from the same section had let off a Verrey Pistol round while cleaning it. The SOP fire drill had been initiated. All the platoons had fallen in outside their respective barracks. Platoon 3's roll call showed that two cadets were missing. They arrived soon after the fire was put out, which was done in short order by the Fire Brigade and the company fire-piquet, but in the meantime, Section 11 had had to explain to the Platoon Commander and its section instructor why the cadets in question had missed the roll call. The matter would have ended there had the section instructor not mentioned the incident in the Officers' Mess. It was apparently picked up by an Advisor who appears to have presented the lack of attention to a personal rifle as something to be dealt with sternly, never mind that the owner had taken immediate action to recover it when he realised the situation. Against the inclination of local officers, the Advisor pressed for disciplinary action. The upshot was that the cadet was denied his commission with the First Batch and reverted to Sergeant at a summary trial. He was enrolled in and commissioned with the third batch of officer cadets.

That was a lesson the first intake could have done without. It raised too many questions.

All the section's rifles had been laid aside while the cadets were carrying out an order to sort out training stores. Cadets had divided the task of loading up the 3-tonner among themselves as a group effort. No individual was responsible directly for any one task. The rifle had not been lost, but administratively separated from the owner while he was carrying out another given assignment. He had himself realised the situation and taken remedial action. The section instructor involved had not seen it as an offence; indeed all the local officers from the Platoon Commander of Platoon 3 to OC 'A' Company had seen the incident as an administrative oversight by the whole group. For this incident to be used to send the message that each soldier should look after his rifle was highly contrived, while the more serious incident of the morning was allowed to pass without retribution.

There should have been 118 graduates and not 117 in the First Batch. But, it was to be the only occasion when the Advisors were allowed to hold sway in the judicial affairs of the SAF and so perhaps the cadet's sacrifice was not in vain.

Endnotes

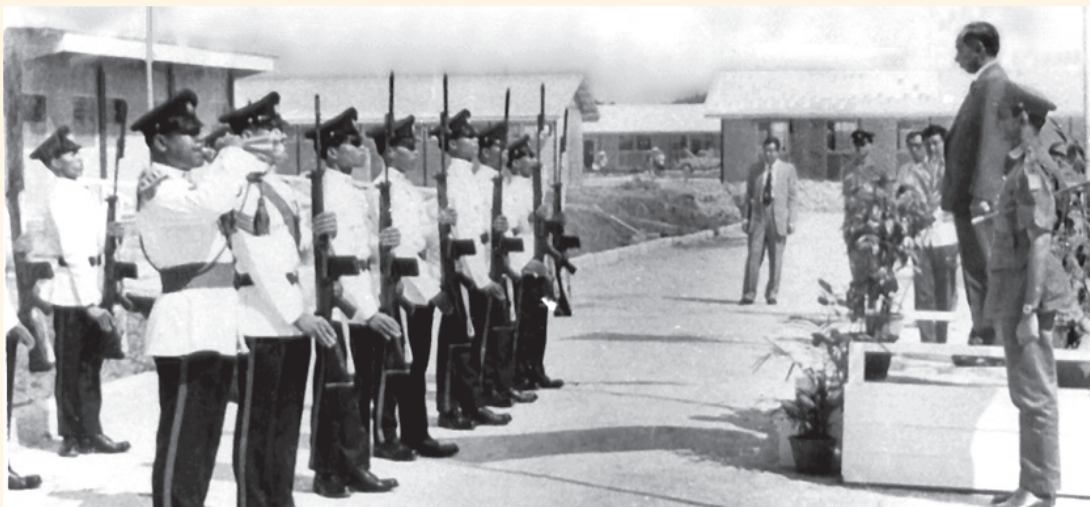
1. Please refer to Appendix II at page 363 for a first-hand account of the First Instructors' Preparatory Course by a trainee of the course, COL (RET) Goh Lye Choon.

DRILL AND POP REHEARSALS

I. MILITARY BULL OR DEFINING TRAIT?

Drill was not an insignificant subject during the officer cadet phase. Fifty periods were allocated to it. From a present day perspective, it is hard to decide whether drill should have been given so much prominence. There was as yet no clear-cut model for the routine of the SAF. Even though by February 1967, National Service had been publicly announced by then-PM Lee Kuan Yew, the impact it would have on unit life was anybody's guess. Under British administration, and to a great extent under Malaysia, peacetime unit life was essentially a half-day of training and administration, with the other half mostly spent in sports, competitions in soldierly skills and a variety of time-fillers designed to bond the unit, or provide for the self-improvement of servicemen. In terms of public accountability, the military was a reclusive affair until troops were deployed in earnest or appeared on ceremonial occasions. In the latter case, without any clear evidence of a correlation, except perhaps with Gurkha units, smartness in drill was somehow equated with competence in combat.

But, the officer cadet drill package addressed the role drill played in unit administration. The lessons included sentry drill, guard mounting, sword drill, colour drill and the Company Commander's parade. This objective was never articulated as such; drill was left to the NCOs under the CWO and its purpose was so self-evident to them that they did not see any need for an explanation. While the cadets could readily appreciate the usefulness of the other lessons, the role of the Company Commander's parade was less evident. In fact, it was a kind of power interface (*à la* school assembly), a format within which the Company



Ceremonial drill was a routine in military life in SMF days.

Commander interacted with his command as a whole. Through the parade, he could check on his men, including his subordinate commanders, make his presence felt, display his ability to control them by words of command, allow him to present his company to best advantage to his superiors and provide a venue for praise, admonishment or punishment, all within a choreographed framework of orchestrated movement or frozen immobility. In a regular unit, where spare time was not usually at a premium, drill could be a focal point of formal interpersonal relationship and the military being the military, it naturally got compulsive about perfecting the format.

The ceremonial aspect of drill however was—and remains—pure showmanship, a kind of martial line dancing. At its best, it stirs spectators and participants alike and is invariably evocative. Trooping of Colours, the Beating of the Retreat, a Sovereign's Review, or a passing out parade in full ceremonials is a memorable experience. In bygone days, a parade was a call to arms and a way to seduce youth to sign up to fight for a cause. It is the essence of pomp and circumstance, as the evergreen marches of Elgar or Sousa attest.

Drill is tough training. It demands undivided attention by the marchers for the duration. It represents the inculcation of discipline as, for example, maintaining total stillness (including of the eyeballs) while at attention. Except for specialised performances for public entertainment, the physical skills are not particularly demanding. But, the troops must be able to manipulate their weapons and accoutrements, including rifle, bayonet, sword and Regimental Colours according to the prescribed drill movements, while stationary or on the march and in slow or standard time without breaking formation. Everything comes together only when, under the persistent supervision of the Parade Sergeant Major over countless iterations, those on parade develop a neural network which makes them function as one. Good drill is immediately recognisable: five to six hundred steel-studded heels crashing as one to attention, the single flash of hands cutting away from rifles flipped up to the 'rusok' (shoulder), the smooth pivot into review order of platoon after platoon at the point of wheeling, the instantaneous, rock-solid stop of the whole parade on the order to halt, the electric crack of every palm on the handguard for the rifle salute and the unconscious swagger of the troops as they groove to the beat of the band.

That is the vision of a good Sergeant Major when he takes drill lessons. For many in the first intake and perhaps, for even more after them, the sonorous Malay words of command were not recognised for their literal meanings but as cues for specific actions, which, with repetition, began to produce Pavlovian responses. Inattention brought eyeball-to-eyeball contact with the presiding instructor or his assistant and the prospect of a 'burnt' weekend. If the instructor felt that inattention was more widespread, he would resort to an instant attention-grabber: 10, maybe 20 minutes of 'short-and-sharp' immediately or, worse, after duty. Drill never qualified as a favourite lesson. But, it was to turn out that some would find their *métier* in drill.

II. TIGER TERRITORY

Drill in 'A' Company was the personal fiefdom of Company Warrant Officer, WO1 'Tiger' Hong. Tiger had come from 1 SIR and his association with then MAJ John Morrice, OC 'A' Company, went back to the time when he had asked to be transferred out of clerical duties in the unit to combat assignment and ended up in LTA Morrice's platoon. Partly due to fortuitous turns of events, but mainly due to his own drive, energy and ability, he had become Section Leader, Platoon Sergeant and Company Sergeant Major in blinding succession. Excelling in sports, especially in marathon walking and boxing (SMF bantam weight champion and qualified South East Asia Games referee), his rapid advancement made him an obvious candidate for the First Instructors' Preparatory Course. Initially assigned to 'B' Company for two or three weeks, once again circumstances intervened: WO1 Mokhtar, the first CWO of 'A' Company, was granted a Quartermaster Commission and Tiger succeeded him. Drill was religion to Tiger: when he was present in 'A' Company premises, no cadet would dare saunter across the parade square. If one had to be on it, he had better march, or run or he would hear the dreaded summons: "You there, Officer Cadet!"

The format of the company parade during officer cadet days essentially meant platoons forming up under their respective Cadet Platoon Sergeants who reported to the Cadet Sergeant Major, who in turn reported to the Cadet Under-Officer, who in turn reported to the Inspecting Officer. The CUO would then issue the command for open order to permit inspection by rows and about face. This was a practice by the cadet appointment holders on mornings that a company muster parade was stipulated in the training programme. Forming up the whole company by trainees had not been required during the recruit and section training phases. In fact, whereas drill had been a process of inculcating precise drill movements and orderly assembly or movement of the troops from point-to-point in pre-officer cadet training, in the officer cadet phase, drill focused on the roles played by officers in a variety of regimental duties or ceremonial occasions. The passing out parade would be effectively the last time cadets would form up as a peer group in a marching body. From the time they marched off the parade ground at the Commissioning Parade, they would only appear on parade in an individual capacity, as a leader of a body of troops, as a Parade 2I/C or as a Colour Ensign (a role which is restricted to a Second Lieutenant).

Sentry Drill and Guard Mounting applied directly to the expected tasks of a subaltern in a unit, as Duty Officer and Duty Field Officer, both of which involved mounting, checking, turning out and dismounting the unit guards, as well as the required surprise and mandatory 2200 hrs Staff Parades during the duty period. Cadets were subsequently assigned as SAFTI guards for one night in pickets as camp quarterguards during which they manned the guardroom and did sentry and prowler duty to get a feel of what guard duty entailed.

The lessons on Foot and Arms Drill, Sword Drill and Colour Drill were oriented towards ceremonial parades in general. They mentally prepared the cadets for the intensive rehearsals for the passing out parade, still interminable months away. The foot and arms drill included a good deal of slow march, a source of much sarcastic intervention by the drill instructors and amusement among the cadets themselves. It is unnatural to keep one's back upright, chin up, left hand immobile and advance on the balls of one's feet (without tiptoeing) while keeping in time with the rest of the platoon at about half the speed of a normal step. There were many 'zombies' and 'Hermans' (after a popular TV serial character called Herman the Monster) lurching around the parade square during the initial lessons, but by the time the passing out parade came about, a modicum of grace had developed.

III. RALLYING TO THE FLAG

*“A moth-eaten rag on a worm-eaten pole,
It does not look likely to stir a man's soul.
‘Tis the deeds that were done ‘neath the moth-eaten rag,
When the pole was a staff and the rag was a flag.”*

~ Sir Edward Hamley on seeing the old Colours of the 32nd Foot in Monmouth Church ~

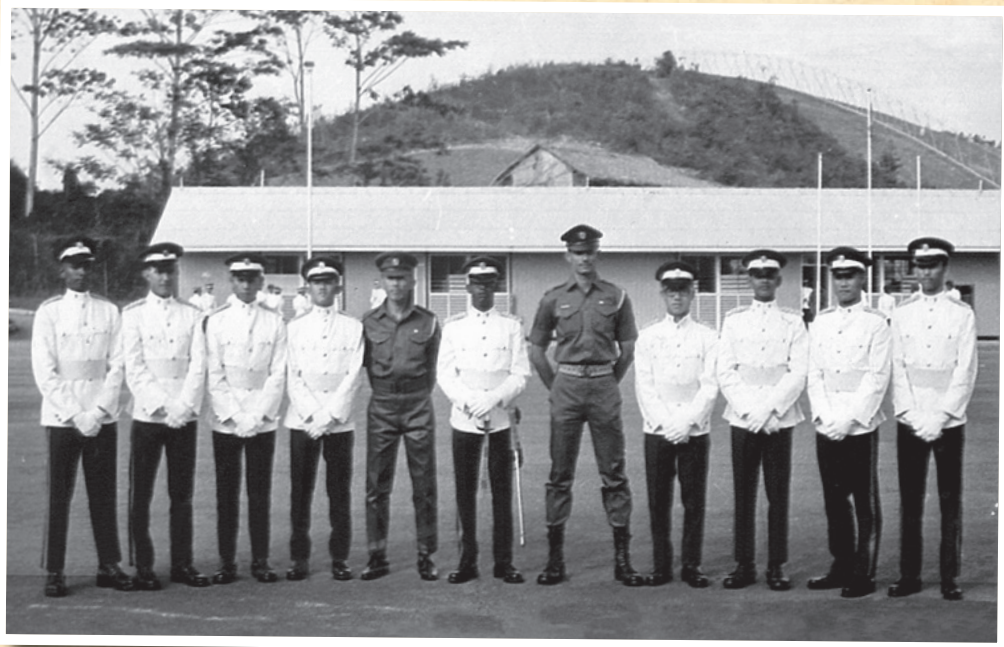
In early 1967, there were precious few swords in the SAF and Regimental Colours were limited to the Volunteers (by then called PDF) and the two regular battalions. But, the British drill formats were very much alive because of a busy ceremonial calendar under British and Malaysian administrations and the nearly wholesale adoption of British drill on both sides of the Causeway. It had been assumed that the swords would remain the Wilkinson swords that were then the standard issue for officers, though they were a collective pool to be signed out from the armskote when the need arose. They were heavy and long, very substantially made and awkward for small-framed Asian officers. But, in any case, as there weren't enough to go round, Tiger arranged for the SAFTI Training Aids Section run by LTA Soaidy bin Haji Ali to produce flat sticks of approximate dimensions as substitutes. There were no scabbards however, and the enterprising WO2 Mizah of Platoon 1 found himself suddenly facing an apoplectic Tiger when he decided conscientiously to start the training as if the swords were sheathed, by asking his cadets to stick the pieces of wood in their belts. Not that it would have worked: the sheathed sword has its basket facing the rear and the first moves for unsheathing the sword are to free the scabbard from a hook on the belt, grasp the sheath just below the hilt with the left hand and turn the basket sideways, clockwise, so that the right hand can grasp the hilt in preparation to draw the blade. The next step is to loop the sword upright so that the right thumb is directly in line with the nose, before cutting the hand to the right, elbow at right angles from the waist and sword upright parallel to the body, edge facing forward. It was easier to draw the sword than to replace it in its scabbard while looking straight ahead and directing the tip of the blade into the mouth of the scabbard. Fortunately, there are few occasions when a drawn sword has to be sheathed on parade. Sword drill was

quite a thrill because it represented exclusive officer status and adolescence had not quite deserted many of the cadets. There was considerable melodrama associated with wearing a sword belt, the sword salute and the idea of the sword being a symbol of authority.

The real problem with Colour drill was the urge to impress upon new initiates into the armed forces the sanctity of unit Colours. It is first cousin to the hype associated with ‘sacred’ icons among triads. One could not help wondering how many of those already serving in the units would have been prepared to die, guarding their Colours in battle as they historically used to when battlefields were affairs of massed troops charging massed troops across open fields. The last British regiment to carry its Colours into battle was the 58th Regiment of Foot at Laing Nek in South Africa in January 1881 during the Boer War—but to little avail as the regiment was defeated. But, boys will be boys and the instructors for the first intake enjoyed indulging in the iconic image of the Colours during the training, although strictly speaking, it was to have nothing to do with the passing out parade because there were as yet no SAFTI Colours to go on parade. To do the instructors justice, however, in the early days of the SAF, Dr. Goh Keng Swee regarded unit Colours as a means of instilling commitment and loyalty among National Servicemen, in particular. He had a thing about the dynamics and brotherhood of triads. Colours were presented to nearly every unit shortly after formation at solemn consecration ceremonies at which all the major faiths were represented to bless the Colours. Frequently, the President or a senior Cabinet Minister would be the Officiating Officer and Guest of Honour. The First Batch was thus able to oversee the preparations for such parades from a position of vantage.

The ritual of casing and uncasing of the Colours apply strictly whenever the Colours are taken from their official display site in a unit, traditionally the Officers’ Mess and returned. When uncased, all service personnel who pass by are expected to salute or pay respect to the Colours. As such, all drill rehearsals are conducted with simulated Colours by, typically a blanket on a pole, though with a standard casing. Once again, Tiger managed to supply enough such training aids for the colour drill sessions. But, there were not enough slings to go round and since, in any case, the lessons were to familiarise the cadets and not make them proficient, the cadets trained mainly on casing, uncasing and dressing the Colours, inserting the Colours into the stirrup of the sling and withdrawing it and lowering the Colours. In the latter case, sweeping the Colours in a slow arc over a wet parade square would leave the blanket soaking wet and a problem to raise again with one hand, not to mention inserting the ‘pike’ into the stirrup guided only by feel of the left hand without looking down.

Advanced lessons integrated the format for the Colour Party on parade, the roles of the Colour Ensign and Escorts and the Parade and Contingent Commanders with rifle drill, sword drill and colour drill.



Section 12 dressed for the Commissioning Parade, with WO1 Hong Seng Mak and Platoon Warrant Officer, Platoon 3, WO2 Omar Alsagoff. Officer Cadet Titus Stephen with sword.



Section 6, with WO1 Hong Seng Mak (who may be photographed with all 12 sections) and Platoon Warrant Officer, Platoon 2, WO2 Ong Hui Peng. Officer Cadet Ng Seng Chan with sword.

IV. THE TOUGHEST ASSIGNMENTS

The days moved on towards the final ten to eight weeks before the end of the course and the Commissioning Parade. Somewhere at that point, Tiger, in consultation with the Platoon NCOs and the 'A' company officers, nominated Officer Cadets S. Purushothaman, Khoo Kong Ngian, Ng Seng Chan and Titus Stephen as 'supernumeraries' for the Commissioning Parade, thereby signaling their clear-cut success in the course and began to rehearse them for their roles as, Cadet Parade Commander and Cadet Platoon Commanders of Platoons 1, 2 and 3, respectively. When asked in an interview in March 2005, Tiger insisted that no alternate supernumeraries were appointed and indeed, the cadets did not see anybody else practising the words of command off duty. It was either a sign of extreme foolhardiness or confidence in the availability of the only nominees on the day of the Commissioning Parade. Tiger's only concession to the guaranteed availability of the supernumeraries was that he gave them advice on how to prevent losing their voice with some home remedies. But, the rest of the cadets were treated to the amusing spectacle of four of their fellows conscientiously shouting out into the empty parade square at night, the words of command that essentially amounted to the cadets managing the parade themselves after the instructor staff fell out. If any other cadets envied them, it was not apparent. The chosen ones were recognised as enjoying drill and being natty in their turnout. The attitude of the majority was "Rather you than me, chum!"

The Cadet Platoon Commander of Platoon 3 for the Commissioning Parade, Titus Stephen, who left the service as Lieutenant-Colonel in 1988 after commanding a brigade that he molded into the Best Combat Unit for the year, recalls his selection for the job and the preparations that went into it.

"I don't know how the decision process worked. Obviously, it must have involved the Platoon Sergeant, WO2 Omar Alsagoff, the Platoon Commander, CPT Goh Lye Choon, the Company Warrant Officer, WO1 Hong Seng Mak, the Company 2I/C CPT Daljeet Singh, and the Company Commander, MAJ John Morrice. All my dealings on the matter were with Inche Omar. It began when he sent for me and one or two others (I cannot recall who they were now) from Platoon 3 and informed us that one of us would be selected as the Cadet Platoon Commander for the Commissioning Parade because of the standard of our drill, good command voice, smart turnout and overall good performance in the course. The selection for the Cadet Parade Commander took a separate path. We were told that he (Inche Omar), our Platoon Commander, WO1 Hong and MAJ Morrice would be keeping an eye on us and our performance on and off the parade square and only one would be selected. We were given some parade commands to practise for a test.

Inche Omar conducted some training sessions followed by the test. For the test, we stood at one corner of the parade square and shouted out the commands with the selectors positioned at the opposite corner across the square. I cannot recall whether the test was at the platoon or company level. But Inche Omar and WO1 Hong were there. A few days later, Inche Omar congratulated me on my selection. The conversation took place on the corridor outside my section's room. I guess CPT Goh must have told him to do so. In those days anything to do with parades and drill was a Sergeant Major's responsibility. Officers did not get involved, except to go on parade after the NCOs had done all the work—a British Army throwback.

Soon after that conversation, Inche Omar gave me the Commissioning Parade commands in writing to learn by heart and briefed me on the form of the parade. Inche Omar tutored, advised, gave tips, encouraged and trained me personally. The four of us (the Cadet Parade Commander and the three Cadet Platoon Commanders) also had several practice and training sessions with WO1 Hong, sometimes with WO1 Sng Cheng Chye (RSM, SAFTI) present. We also did some dry runs of the whole parade without the troops.

Besides the sessions with Inche Omar, I did some basic practice of my own. It comprised learning the words of command by heart, committing the form of parade to memory and shouting out the words of command. Shouting the words of command took place mostly at night, on the parade square. I would stay back in camp during the last weeks of the course instead of going out when there was no night training. On instructions from Inche Omar and WO1 Hong, I also took to drinking honey water which was supposed to help keep my voice in peak form.”



Officer Cadets Khoo Kong Ngian and Jimmy Koh with CPT Jagrup Singh.

V. LOOKING SPIFFY

Next came the visit by the tailors to take measurements for the ceremonial or No. 1 Dress as it is traditionally designated. It consisted of a high-necked jacket of mid-thigh length with full-length sleeves and navy-blue trousers with red stripes down each external side-seam. All the buttons on the jacket were of brass. No formation signs are worn with ceremonial dress. A maroon cummerbund with a tassel that went round the waist over the sword belt, if worn, was then part of the dress ensemble, though for the first Commissioning Parade, the cummerbund was canary-yellow. A pair of brass collar dogs of the respective arms, in this case Infantry only, was affixed to the collar. It turned out that the collar dogs were not ordered in mirror image pairs and this situation remained for about a year after the First Batch was commissioned. Epaulettes were of gold braid sans shoulder titles. The ensemble was completed with a pair of snow white gloves. The cadets would be issued with their first peak caps—of ceremonial blue with red piping—but to be worn with a white band until after the Commissioning Parade. The cap badge was standard SIR with the motto “Yang Pertama Dan Utama” (First and Foremost). Boots at this stage were leather sole combat boots with steel studs as worn by the rank-and-file. There was to be a fitting later, but no chance of full dress rehearsals in the personally tailored No. 1 Dress. They were delivered dangerously close to the parade and had to be sent for laundering. Working up to the full dress rehearsals was done in No.3 Dress, but for the actual full dress rehearsals of which there were two or three very stressful ones, including the officers who would be on parade until the cadets took over, No.1 Dress uniforms were borrowed from 1 and 2 SIR.

The cadets would go on parade with leather-soled combat boots, but for the Commissioning Ceremony two days later, as officers in No.1 Dress, the dress code called for George boots. LTA Hamid Khan, the QM was seen to dash into ‘A’ Company square on the day before the Commissioning Parade in a utility vehicle. He got out and announced loudly that he was delivering the George boots. It was rash of him, but he was fighting against an inflexible deadline. After the Commissioning Parade, the newly commissioned officers would go home and report directly to the Istana two days later for the Commissioning Ceremony with their invited guests, so this was the last chance he would have for distributing the boots. As soon as the cadets heard his announcement, they mobbed the vehicle and LTA Hamid lost control. The cadets had the good sense to realise that they had better get themselves organised or they would be the ultimate losers, so they quietened down when he started screaming for order. Fortunately, the boots had been tagged with the cadets names according to size and so they eventually got distributed, because most of the cadets were then in the company premises.

VI. DESIGNING A RITUAL

The POP rehearsals initially involved the three platoons and were conducted in the newly completed parade ground of what was to become the School of Section Leaders, with the occasional one in the old main square beside the QM/MT complex. Closer to the date of the parade, 'B' and 'C' Companies joined for combined rehearsals and the venue had to be the parade ground of the School of Section Leaders, where the POP would take place on 16th July, 1966. Tiger choreographed the parade in conjunction with SAFTI RSM Sng Cheng Chye, as three subunits of SAFTI were involved and the function would be a presentation by SAFTI as a whole. It was almost entirely adopted from the Commissioning Parade at the Federation Military College, which itself was a copy of the Sandhurst model. The concept was that the supporting contingents ('B' and 'C' Companies) were next in succession to take over from the current cohort of officer cadets, as the latter marched off, leaving the parade ground to them. At the start of the parade, the Contingent Commanders would be the commanders of the cadet platoons, with OC 'A' and his 2I/C as the Parade Commander and Parade 2I/C respectively and SAFTI RSM as the Parade Sergeant Major. After the inspection by the Reviewing Officer, the cadet supernumeraries would take over.

It was a complicated parade. There were slow and quick times and wheeling into review order as part of the march past, followed by an advance in review order for a final salute by the cadets. There would be the presentation of the Sword of Honour and the cadets would have to split into a single line on either side of the review stand as they marched off the square to the traditional strains of Auld Lang Syne. The SIR Band led by LTA Abdullah, ARCM, would be in attendance and was present for all the final rehearsals. Interestingly, even ironically, one of the two scores for the inspection by the Reviewing Officer, was to be the Triumphal March from Aida, which had been adopted as the national anthem of Egypt, which had declined to take up the request to help train the SAF. If this was an oversight, it had escaped the eagle eye of the Reviewing Officer, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, an aficionado of classical music, who was to create the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. Then again, it may not have been an oversight.

A NEW BEGINNING

I. THE LAST MINUTE RUSH

Suddenly, time began to run out in the officer cadet course and things started to bunch together. The written tests, especially the ‘Appreciation of Situation’, were behind the cadets and the anticipation of the great event—SAFTI’s first Commissioning Parade—was everywhere. The cadets were not directly involved in the preparations for the parade other than for the rehearsals, except sadly for those who would not be commissioned. At Institute HQ and MID there was much to do: agreeing to the date, approving the pass list, preparing the Commissioning Certificates with the President’s signature, clearing the guest list for the parade and the Commissioning Ceremony at the Istana, acquiring swords for the new officers for presentation at the Commissioning Ceremony by the President, arranging for the Commissioning Ball and deciding the postings of the new Second Lieutenants. Into this melee were thrown three additional complications for IHQ. The first was a Guest Day Open House on 1st, 2nd and 3rd July. The second, a demonstration of a battalion attack on 11th July for selected members of the public, but with a guest list that included Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Cabinet Ministers and representatives of influential social, economic and political establishments, and the third, a separate demonstration of watermanship at Jurong River on 13th July.

The Guest Day was relatively simple to organise because it was mainly a matter of showing the guests what happened in SAFTI on a typical day. It was coordinated by MAJ John Tan, 2I/C, SAFTI, not LTC John Tan, who became Camp Commandant, SAFTI circa 1991. The Singapore public had, up till now, such a limited exposure to life in a military camp and what soldiers did, that everything inside the camp was a revelation. The invitation was extended mainly to schools, the People’s Association, Community Centres, the parents of trainees in SAFTI, undergraduates and polytechnic students and institutions that would help promote National Service that would start in August 1967. Some sensationalism was in order, to impress guests about the toughness of soldiers, their daring and the deadly skills they were trained to acquire. This was supplied by the standard obstacle course, the crossing of wire obstacles, the rifle range and firepower demonstrations. Though it meant that the weekend was ‘burnt’ for most of the cadets, the compensation was that they could wallow in the admiration of young ladies when they gave presentations or led guided tours of the barrack rooms and facilities. Officer Cadet Ajit Singh Nagpal, for example, had the enviable task of lobbing live fragmentation, phosphorous and assault grenades from behind a sandbag bunker and then come out firing live rounds after the grenades exploded. No doubt, parents and future wives were impressed by the tidiness of the barrack rooms, bed and locker layouts and the gleam of the floors, urinals and toilets in the washrooms. They may also have been reassured about the standards of army culinary skills from what they were offered for

refreshments, though by July 1967, as far as regular fare was concerned, army cooking still demanded the sauce of ravenous appetites that field training induced.

II. THE FIRST BATTALION ATTACK OF THE SAF

The battalion live-firing demonstration on 11th July, the Tuesday before the Commissioning Parade weekend, had more far-reaching implications. By now, the cadets had completed the training objectives of the syllabus. The final days were spent mostly in the could-know areas of training, including national education visits to commercial complexes like the Jurong Shipyard and the Mobil Refinery, or learning how to carry themselves as officers at cocktail parties and how to use cutlery at a western dinner. It was thus an opportune time, with a company-worth of highly trained cadets, to delve into the next phase of the development of the SAF as a whole. Of immediate interest, was the progression from company-level operations to battalion-level operations. Singapore's political leadership needed to know what such operations entailed so as to initiate the equipping, manning and doctrinal development of the basic self-sustaining echelon in the Infantry. Then, there was the urgent consideration of acquiring weapons and other hardware, including weapons to support battalion-level operations, which would be integrated into the battalion's table of establishment. And, these were just baby steps in 1967. With the commissioning of the First Batch in July, the leadership core of the arms and services was poised to go into specialist training within weeks. There was a need to define that training and the parameters of the arms and services to which these trainees would be assigned.



81mm mortar preparatory fire on first objective for battalion attack demonstration.

The battalion live demonstration was a combination of several things: publicising live-firing as a training methodology; a demonstration of firepower; a demonstration of command and control of Infantry sub-units in a phased attack; a demonstration of how well the trainees, especially the officer cadets, of SAFTI had been trained. All the key people, particularly Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Goh Keng Swee, important parliamentarians and senior MID decision-makers would be present.

The final tactical training exercise of the officer cadet module was completed around two weeks prior to commissioning. Preparations were initiated for the officer cadets and 'B' and 'C' Companies to rehearse a battalion attack to be led by Major Richard Jambu, Commander Designate, 2nd Singapore Infantry Brigade, with officers from the three companies acting as commanders of subunits and support bases. Two objectives—Spot Height 175 and Spot Height 205—straddling Pasir Laba Road, were to be assaulted with live-firing including breaching of wire obstacles with bangalore torpedoes and supported by Artillery. This would be followed by a flanking attack on another feature, Spot Height 210 (Bunker Hill), due north of Spot Height 175, by a platoon from the 205 objective, using blank rounds



VIP guests at the battalion attack demonstrations.

and thunderflashes with mortar fire simulated by an Amonal field. In the meantime, a ramp had been bulldozed to the top of (another) Spot Height 210 in Lam Kiong Estate, where a covered temporary grandstand had been built. It gave a good view of the whole proceedings. Loudspeakers would broadcast the radio traffic during the 'operation.' In an open area before the grandstand, there was a weapons and equipment display where visitors would get a briefing on each item, some of which were already in use, while others were being considered for adoption by the SAF. A small-scale firepower demonstration was also included.

The rehearsals were demanding and repetitive. From 'A' Company, only those who had passed the course would participate. Though only the two initial objectives would be engaged with live-firing, for the first time the assault would be preceded by 81mm mortar fire on the objectives, supplied by the Mortar Platoon of 2 SIR, which CPT Daljeet Singh had commanded in 1965. There were three companies to be coordinated by the battalion tactical HQ through their approach to respective forming-up places and the assault on their designated objectives. The pace would have to be fairly cracking if the spectators were to be impressed and their attention spans locked in. The follow-on attack on Spot Height 210 would come over its steep eastern slope and it was tough going through the scrub vegetation known locally as 'belukar,' which covered most of the hill features in the Pasir Laba area.

Except for a minor incident where one of the cadets in the assault force on Spot Height 210, Martin Choo Kok Kye, sustained fairly extensive burns on one arm from the Amonal field, the event was a great success. It was a fine day and everybody in SAFTI was determined to be at his best for the Prime Minister and the Minister for Interior and Defence. All the spectators were duly impressed by the combat readiness of the troops and what had been achieved within the space of 13 months since SAFTI took in its first trainees. The Advisors had justified the faith vested in them. The air of purpose among SAFTI personnel was infectious and a far cry from the laid back days of pre-independence military life in Singapore. For the cadets, it was the final hurdle cleared, as it was 'B' Company who provided the watermanship demonstration at the Jurong River.

III. A CHANGE OF TONE

Of the 140 who started training as officer cadets on 28th November, 1966 in 'A' Company after section training, 23 were not granted a commission with the First Batch. One of them was the cadet who had been summarily dismissed from the course about two weeks before it ended for having left his rifle behind at the Pasir Laba boatshed after an exercise. Some of the others would repeat the course successfully with later batches, as did the dismissed cadet who had been appointed Sergeant. Some would quit the SAF and some would stay on as Sergeants to achieve rapid promotion in the NCO ranks, working with their commissioned colleagues in SAFTI, units and various HQs. Some would go for specialist courses. All those who were not commissioned were informed privately at interviews by their Platoon

Commanders and departed SAFTI the weekend prior to that of the Commissioning Parade. Three weeks before the Commissioning Parade, Officer Cadet Chan Seck Sung had left for Ranger training at the US Army Infantry School, Fort Georgia, United States, as a Second Lieutenant. He was accompanying CPT Clarence Tan, who was tipped to head the SAF's Commando Battalion. A week after that, Officer Cadets Gurcharan Singh and Chng Teow Hua left for a Field Engineer course in Fort Belvoir, in the United States.

During the last three months of the course, CPT Daljeet Singh had put together an editorial board of cadets headed by Managing Editor, Hwee Man Lok to produce *'THE SAFTIRIAN'*, the first journal of SAFTI. It would only be 36 pages and funded solely by advertisements, of which those of Mr. Kartar Singh, housing and furnishing supplier and the legendary Mr. Teng Chai Foo, the principal caterer for SAFTI and numerous other SAF camps in later years, comprised the bulk. It covered a range of subjects of no particular theme from "Athenian Military Organisation in Perspective" to "Some Thoughts on Political Evolution", the Editorial Board having to settle for anything it could wring out of cadets who would rather fight than write. The best piece in the 'journal' was Man Lok's editorial, which reads as fresh today as it did in 1967.

The main contribution, despite Man Lok's hope that *'THE SAFTIRIAN'* would develop into a permanent medium for the free exchange of views and ideas, was the launch within the SAF of WO1 Hong Seng Mak's famous sobriquet of 'Tiger', with a full page photograph of the dreaded, but admired, Company Warrant Officer in a place of honour facing the Foreword by Director, SAFTI, LTC Vij. To Man Lok and the Secretary of the Editorial Board, the publication was memorable also because they were excused from participating in the battalion attack demonstration on the grounds that the deadline for printing was long overdue. Regrettably, there is no evidence that the subsequent batches in 'A' Company continued the idea of a journal. But in 1968, SAFTI produced what also appears to have been a single edition attempt at an institute annual with the name *THE SCIMITAR*.

There was a noticeable change in the atmosphere of 'A' Company during the last two weeks of the course. It was probably a bewildering experience for the pre-First Batch regulars of the SAF to be in charge of a cohort of 117 men, who had been given the most comprehensive and rugged training in commanding troops that they had ever seen, on the threshold of their graduation to the coveted commission. In a matter of days, these graduates would outrank their NCO instructors and be on par with the subalterns, with the prospect, as already indicated by the departure of Chan Seck Sung, Gurcharan Singh and Chng Teow Hua for prestigious training courses overseas, of overtaking many of them. Moreover, there already was in the works, plans for groups among the graduates to attend specialist training on a large scale in Artillery, Signals and Armour, which would open new avenues for rapid advancement in the ranks, but be mostly closed to those without such training. Some uncomfortable turbulence was about to upset the current hierarchy in the SAF.

The NCOs, as has ever been their wont, would take it in their stride and rapidly switch roles from instructors to loyal subordinates of those of their trainees assigned to be their superiors. Though they would keep their thoughts to themselves, they would have an inside track on the strengths and weaknesses of their new bosses. For the immediate future, after the Commissioning Parade, they would exercise an old tradition of claiming \$5 or \$10 from each new Second Lieutenant on receiving his very first salute from a subordinate. Where this ‘tradition’ came from is anybody’s guess, but it was a brilliant invention as it made the inversion of status one last forfeit, which both parties accepted with equanimity.

Thus, for the last two weeks, there were no serious threats of punishment for minor misdemeanors. In any case, what could they be? The cadets would have to clear out of ‘A’ Company, if not SAFTI altogether so, extra duties would be academic. And, extra duties of what? A Second Lieutenant as armskote man? For their part, the graduates were not about to tempt Providence. They were mainly concerned with getting their No. 1 Dress properly fitted and laundered, their leather-soled combat boots shining like liquid ebony, their peak caps shaped just so and their ceremonial gloves snow white. But, there were rehearsals and rehearsals, a bearable aggravation now that the end was in sight, especially since it was to be a triumphal parade. There was much speculation about their immediate future as the postings were made known towards the end of the last week, each wondering what it presaged, why they were selected for such and such, how they would cope and some, perhaps, entertaining visions of grandeur.

On Saturday, 15th July, each graduating cadet received sets of metal rank insignias or ‘pips’ as they were called. One pair was of the solid brass that was the official issue of the time, later changed to anodised alloy material that did not need to be polished and another, was the silver and red version for the ceremonial No. 1 Dress as well as the mess kit. It was an ecstatic moment for most cadets: solid material evidence that they had made it. It was in these high spirits that they proceeded to another benchmark event: cocktails at the Officers’ Mess, that holiest of holies—hosted by the officers—in civilian dress and not in No. 3 dress to signify their initiation to membership. But, in all the small talk between the officers and the cadets, the cadets studiously avoided any kind of familiarity and never once forgot to say “Sir.”

And, just as well. The camaraderie of the Officers’ Mess was rudely shattered by what followed later in the evening. Perhaps, as a last fling of their rapidly evaporating authority over the cadets, some junior instructors decided to conduct an unscheduled and informal haircut inspection the evening before the Commissioning Parade. It was well-intentioned and may have been initiated by the Company HQ so that the cadets would look smart. But, it went beyond good intentions when some of the instructors decided to cut the hair of some of the cadets by themselves. There were tense moments when, in one platoon, the affected cadets proposed to shave themselves completely bald. The intervention of a more

sober instructor prevented an ugly incident and the cadets were mollified with the corrective handiwork of talented barrack room barbers who had picked up their skills from last-minute favours to colleagues before muster parades over the preceding 13 months. Some went to Jurong Town and Tuas Village for a fix-up job.

IV. COMMISSIONING DAY

Before dawn on 16th July, instructors from each of the three platoons got every cadet out of bed for a run. This was unexpected as the Commissioning Parade was due to commence at 1000 hrs, and the contingents to march on at 0935 hrs. The three platoons went through the back gate between 'A' and 'B' companies and up Good Morning Hill. 2LT Abdullah Ghani led Platoon 3 to the top and ordered the cadets to sit around him and watch the sunrise. Demonstrating the potential that would take him to the rank of Major General in the Malaysian Armed Forces later, he talked eloquently about the significance of the day, training of officers, the commission and the future, as he saw it, of the SAF. It was not profound but simple and sincere and the cadets felt uplifted by it. 'A' Company HQ had apparently programmed this little pep talk, as it was also conducted by the respective instructors of the other two platoons.

The three platoons hurried back to the barracks for morning ablutions and drawing of rifles, everyone in a pitch of excitement, full of goodwill towards one another, including sworn enemies. Grabbing a quick breakfast, the last they would share together—though by no means special to mark the occasion, the cadet PMC having missed the chance—they were back at the barracks. Nearly everyone had to pack his personal kit to take home when he left camp that day, though some had permission to stay on later and even for a couple of days. Several were also staying behind in SAFTI as instructors in 'B' and 'C' companies and as staff officers in Institute HQ. The latter merely made arrangements to transfer their kit to the officers' bunks beside the Officers' Mess. For those who were assigned outside SAFTI, the issued items, less what had become personal like boots and uniforms, had already been collected over the last two days and the individual 1033 forms duly amended. About 30 years later, some would be surprised at what they had been issued and remained as such in the books, requiring deductions from the last pay, or serious negotiations with Logistics Division. Once the clearing of lockers was taken care of, there was the satisfying business of dressing in No.1 Dress and taking photographs with section mates and section instructors, section mates and Platoon Commanders, close buddies and section instructors, close buddies, section instructors and Platoon Commanders and numerous other configurations and finally with any popular member of 'A' Company HQ who happened to be available. Setting in already was a touch of nostalgia. Suddenly, it was time to fall in as platoons on 'A' Company square, and the coveted single 'pip', then a square pyramid with sunburst ridged sides and a truncated flat top with the crescent and five stars embossed on it, was only three hours away.

“In a month’s time, National Servicemen will be called up. They will form the 3rd and 4th Battalions of the Singapore Infantry Regiment. All officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Battalions will be citizens of Singapore. There will be no officers from overseas.

It is to ensure that the Singapore Armed Forces will be officered entirely by the citizens of Singapore that the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) was established. In January 1966, work commenced on the building and training facilities of the Infantry School. These were completed in a record time of six months, thanks to the devoted efforts of P.W.D. architects and engineers in charge of the project. While the buildings were going up, the training commenced of SAFTI instructors drawn from officers and NCOs of 1st and 2nd Singapore Infantry Regiment (SIR), the Police Force, and the People’s Defence Force and a primary school in Jurong was borrowed for this purpose from the Ministry of Education. Invaluable assistance was received in the design of the school, the preparation of the instructors’ courses, the syllabus and training programmes in SAFTI itself, from members of the Israeli Defence Force mission.

Today, we see the reward of eighteen months of intense effort put in by the staff of SAFTI and twelve months of sweat and toil by the Officer Cadets. Despite the difficulties, unavoidable in any pioneering effort and the rigors of the training programme—perhaps because of these—it has been an exciting, even exhilarating experience, in which every member of SAFTI, instructors and trainees, has given his utmost to achieve a common aim, to produce good commanders for the Singapore Army.”

Thus read the foreword of the programme for the Commissioning Parade of the First Officer Cadet Course, copies of which were available at the company lines. Those cadets who laid their hands on them read them avidly, but others were far too excited to care since they already knew the contents from the full-dress rehearsals and they were now going to execute the contents for the final time and for real.

In the meantime, their guests and those invited officially by MID and SAFTI were arriving, the nervous ones trickling in first to make sure they had a parking space if they owned a car, and then streaming in as 0900 hrs approached. The car park area was the SAFTI MT Park, which had been cleared of the usual military vehicles and MPs and RPs were controlling traffic. The reception after the parade would be on the sports field in front of the Officers’ Mess. A huge marquee had been raised beside the mess. There was no opportunity for the cadets to greet their personal guests as they arrived that morning, but they had had plenty of time the previous evenings to brief them on the arrangements.



'A' Company officers and supporting contingents commanders.

Back in 'A' Company, the Platoon Sergeants, more properly called Platoon Warrant Officers, as they were all 2WOs, cast their eyes critically on their respective charges one last time. The three platoons would never form up again in the square and the Warrant Officers would never be able to 'demand' anything of the individuals. The next time they entered the company lines, they would be officers or 'Tuans', a term still very much in use in the SAF and the Warrant Officers would have to salute them before addressing them. It was a bittersweet change in relations on both sides of the equation but all the same, the heartbeat of the caste system of life in the Army. For the moment, though, as each Warrant Officer checked each member of his platoon, his judgment of his 'turnout' would be authoritative. They fussed over the straightness of the SIR pattern ceremonial blue peak caps with red piping around the crown and a virginal white band above the peak (to be removed after the parade); checked that the empty gold-braided ceremonial epaulets, with white undersides, were taut and level on each shoulder, that the high collar was properly hooked around each neck, that the crossed bayonet infantry collar dogs were upright and that the yellow cummerbund was snug around the waist. Satisfied, they let the supernumeraries turn each platoon into the order of march and with Platoon 3 leading, the first 'A' Company of SAFTI to be commissioned moved up the driveway of the company lines for the last time. But, Officer Cadet Martin Choo was not with his platoon. Although dressed in his ceremonial uniform, his hand, which had received the burns from the Amonal field during the live-firing demonstration, was in a sling and Martin would be a spectator at his own Commissioning Parade.

The parade was on the huge parade ground, hastily constructed across the road from the guardroom by the special section of the P.W.D set up for SAF projects. The parade ground was then believed by P.W.D. to be the largest in South East Asia, according to Dr. Goh's personal specification to Chelliah Tiruchelvarayan, Chartered Quantity Surveyor. It was to be the parade ground of the future School of Infantry Section Leaders and each of its corners would eventually be bracketed by an L-shaped, 3-storey company barrack block which, in turn was the prototype for new Infantry battalions. For the moment, however, the parade would be held against the backdrop of Peng Kang Hill and the view was clear all round over the low-rise of SAFTI in 1967. The cadets had already spent many hours on the parade ground for the rehearsals and could pretty much locate their position to within a few inches when they formed up. On the eastern edge of the square stretched a multi-tiered pavilion split in the centre by a reviewing stand with space on either side for the cadets to exit in two single files as they marched off. The pavilion, the tall lamp posts and the fencing across the parade ground along Pasir Laba Road to the guardhouse, were festooned with bright, multi-coloured buntings and Singapore flags and pennants. Marker flags on short stands were placed at various points along the route of the march past for the contingent commanders to initiate appropriate orders such as "Eyes Right" or "Open (or Close) Order."

Early spectators were being ushered into place by SAFTI servicewomen and trainees not involved in the parade. VVIP guests were still arriving, with military personnel—Defence

Attachés prominent among them—dressed in full ceremonials. Not having had much to do with the military in Singapore before independence, for the local spectators, it was another unique experience because though the guests of the cadets might have attended the basic and section training passing out parades, they had not seen one in ceremonial dress (though ‘B’ and ‘C’ Companies were in No. 3 dress with camouflaged helmet liners). The spectacle would get even more intriguing shortly.

As there were many contingents, the road between the parade ground and what would be the field next to the future School of Infantry Weapons, was part of the assembly area. ‘A’ Company looped around the single storey blocks that then served as the Institute HQ, turned left on the main road leading from the Guardroom and then right, on to the SIW field road. Ahead of them, waiting to march on were ‘B’ and ‘C’ companies. The SIR Band was already on the parade ground. MAJ Morrice, the Parade Commander, CPT Daljeet Singh, the Platoon Commanders for ‘A’ Company (CPT Jagrup Singh, LTA Alan Lai Ie Hoat who was standing in for CPT Albert Tan, and CPT Goh Lye Choon) and the respective commanders of the supporting contingents (CPT Jimmy Yap Chee Wan for ‘B’ Company, CPT Raymond Tan Kwang Meng for ‘C’ Company) were standing by, together with their commissioned supernumeraries, LTA Naranjan Singh (‘B’ Company) and LTA Joe Heng Boon Chuan (‘C’ Company). As subalterns, these latter two officers would take over from the Commanders of ‘B’ and ‘C’ companies when the command of the parade passed to the cadet supernumeraries after the inspection by Dr. Goh. The right markers for each contingent were also standing by. At 0935 hrs, RSM Sng ordered the right markers on parade. He then gave the order for the contingents to march on. At the command, the band struck up ‘Berjuang’ (Malay for ‘struggle,’ in commemoration of the struggle cadets had undergone for their commissions). The contingents marched on, ‘C’ and ‘B’ companies leading. ‘A’ Company followed the cadet supernumeraries with their swords sheathed at this stage. When Platoon 3 was lined up with its marker, Officer Cadet Titus Stephen halted it. In their turn, Platoons 2 and 1 came to a halt. The band stopped. RSM



Dr. Goh Keng Swee inspected each row of the three platoons, preceded by Stick Orderlies. Visible in front of the platoons are (left to right) LTA Alan Lai (Platoon 2), CPT Jagrup Singh (Platoon 1) and CPT Daljeet Singh (Parade 2I/C).

Sng then ordered the whole parade to face the front. He then gave the order to dress by the right. Stick orderlies strode stiffly on to the parade ground beside each contingent, checking and straightening out the rows, one by one from the far right, facing the reviewing stand. When each row was ruler straight, the stick orderlies would shout 'Diam' (Malay for 'Keep Still') until all the rows were dressed. RSM Sng ordered the 'Pandan Hadapan' and faced the front himself. CPT Daljeet Singh marched on and RSM Sng handed over the parade to him. CPT Singh gave the orders for the officers to come on parade, then the whole parade to order arms and stand at ease. MAJ Morrice then appeared in front of the reviewing stand and marched to position. CPT Singh brought the parade to attention, reported to him, handed over command and took his position at the far right in front of Platoon 1. MAJ Morrice ordered the parade to stand at ease while waiting for Dr. Goh.

All this was pure drama for the spectators, not having been hitherto invited to a grandstand view of a Commissioning Parade and certainly not with a vested interest in the activities, as they had in this case, with a relative or personal representative on parade. It was also the first Commissioning Parade in Singapore, though there had been Commissioning Ceremonies for the Volunteer Corps and PDF. But, these had been restricted affairs that did not match the pomp and circumstance of this one with full dress uniforms and all the trimmings. Many were amused by the words and the form of delivery of the commands and were highly impressed by the clockwork precision of the contingents when they executed the various orders in perfect unison. They probably did not reflect on the time, effort and aggravation that went into the rehearsals.

Dr. Goh's arrival was preceded by a palpable electric charge of expectancy among the spectators, who by now had stopped straggling in. Preceded by motorcycle outriders, Dr. Goh's motorcade could be seen swinging into Pasir Laba Road towards the guardhouse. Major Morrice, whose back was to Pasir Laba Road, acting on a pre-arranged signal, got the parade to attention and shoulder arms. Dr. Goh's motorcade swept up to the rear of the reviewing stand and Director, SAFTI advanced to greet him with a salute as a Regimental Policeman opened the door of the car. Director, SAFTI ushered Dr. Goh to the leading edge of the reviewing stand and moved a step back. In the meantime, the Master of Ceremonies had requested all spectators to stand. As soon as Dr. Goh was in position, MAJ Morrice gave the order for a General Salute, with the band playing "Hormat Senjata" and the parade presenting arms. MAJ Morrice then returned the parade to shoulder arms and order arms in turn, reported to Dr. Goh and invited him to inspect the officer cadet contingent. The Master of Ceremonies prompted the spectators to resume their seats. Two stick orderlies—who had stationed themselves on either side of the reviewing stand—moved into position to lead the inspection party made up of Dr. Goh and MAJ Morrice in front and Director, SAFTI behind. The inspection party went through all the three ranks of the officer cadet contingent while the band played two slow marches: the Triumphal March from Aida (Verdi) and A Trumpet Piece (H. T. Scull). When they returned to the reviewing stand, MAJ Morrice saluted and resumed his position at the front and centre of the parade.



Platoon 2 in close order and on slow march, supernumerary Parade Platoon Commanding Officer Cadet Ng Seng Chan leading.



Platoon 2 opening order in slow time in preparation to march past the reviewing stand.



The first local Sword of Honour, foreground. Platoon 1 marches past in review order. Supernumerary Parade Commander, Officer Cadet S. Purushotaman leading, with supernumerary Parade Platoon Commander Officer Cadet Khoo Kong Ngian following.

Now came a dramatic turn of events: MAJ Morrice ordered the cadet supernumeraries to take over. MAJ Morrice himself, CPT Daljeet Singh, the commanders of the three officer cadet platoons and the contingent commanders of ‘B’ and ‘C’ companies smartly marched off. The cadet supernumeraries, now with swords drawn for the first time, marched into position together with the commissioned supernumeraries for ‘B’ and ‘C’ companies in front of their respective platoons and contingents. The cadets were on their own, directly under the gimlet eye of their Minister and the worth and reputation of SAFTI were in their hands alone. For Director, SAFTI, the instructors and the Israeli Advisors, it was the moment of truth. One fumble or misstep during the complex manoeuvres that were to follow and Singapore itself, on show before assembled foreign dignitaries and military representatives, would be disgraced. Could the First Batch of SAFTI pull it off?

V. A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

They could and did. RSM Sng, WO1 Hong Seng Mak, the Platoon Warrant Officers, and ‘A’ Company HQ had done a superlative job of preparing the cadet supernumeraries and the cadets themselves for this unforgiving litmus test. Officer Cadet Purushothaman brought the parade to shoulder arms and as if born to the task, marched up to Dr. Goh and sought permission for the parade to march past in slow and quick time. He returned to his position, turned the contingents to the right and marched to the head of Platoon 1, in front of Officer Cadet Khoo Kong Ngian. It was Khoo’s privilege to issue the order for the parade to commence the march and automatically strike up the band on that command. The contingents



His moment of glory. Officer Cadet Kwan Yue Yeong, first Sword of Honour winner.



Their part in the Comissioning Parade over, the First Batch from SAFTI metamorphose into Second Lieutenants as they file past Dr. Goh on both sides of the reviewing stand to the strains of Auld Lang Syne.



Another view of the same showing the huge turnout of spectators.

of Ceremonies announced that Yue Yeong had won the coveted prize. Yue Yeong came to attention at his location in Platoon 3, handed his rifle to the cadet on his right, stepped forward and marched up to Dr. Goh. His personal drill befitting his claim to the top spot on the first regular officer cadet course in Singapore, he saluted, stepped forward, received the sword (which would pass from winner to winner) stepped back, saluted again and marched to place the sword on the table positioned to receive it. He then marched back to his place, recovered his rifle and stood at ease. All this, to thunderous applause. It was the only award to be made at the Commissioning Parade. Every other award would have to wait for the Commissioning Ball.

The Master of Ceremonies announced that Dr. Goh would now give his address and invited him to the microphone on the reviewing stand. Normally a dour man in public, Dr. Goh was generous in his praises for what the Commissioning Parade represented. He expressed the deep satisfaction he had derived each time he and the officials from MID had visited SAFTI over the past year, from the “evidence of robust growth” where just ten months before there had been only scattered farms and orchards in what was virtually Singapore’s ‘wild west.’ He singled out the fact that SAFTI staff and instructors had overcome their lack of any previous experience through sheer hard work and application to bring about this first Commissioning Parade. Of the cadets, he said the course had demanded the utmost in physical and mental effort and had set “a stern test of character.” He regarded the first Commissioning Parade as the most significant event (in the SAF) since SAFTI’s birth. He



Newly minted 2LT Chen Yew Ping with his parents, sisters and brothers outside the marquee set up for the reception beside the Officers’ Mess.

went on to say that the Director, staff and instructors of SAFTI had done an excellent job and that they had been fortunate to have at their disposal the wealth of expertise of the IDF Advisors. He expressed his personal appreciation of the instructors and Advisors for “such a splendid achievement in so short a time.”

The speech contained many messages for many recipients but most of all, it was a statement of intent about how seriously the Government took Singapore’s security. Dr. Goh was convinced that SAFTI provided a training programme for officers of the SAF superior to any that was available at the time, the key considerations being that it was customised for Singapore’s own manpower pool and for the local terrain and secondly, in the numbers needed for the forthcoming introduction of National Service and the build-up of the SAF. Little or no restrictions had been placed on the training regimen of the First Batch and the Advisors had transferred their own current ‘hot war’ training techniques and combat experiences to the SAF. The result had been a compact and rigorous curriculum requiring hands-on supervision by local instructors. It had emphasised night training, live-firing and a very high level of physical fitness. The First Batch had proven that a multi-racial, educationally heterogeneous intake of Singaporeans, without a martial background could absorb this skills training, thus laying the ground for a citizen armed forces. This first Commissioning Parade was thus proof of concept, a turnkey operation and ample evidence that Singapore could undertake the management of its own military security.

The speech ended. Purushothaman gave the command for the cadets (only) to close order and then form two ranks from the three they were in. Odd numbers took one step forward and even, one step back, in one single fluid move. Purushothaman then advanced to Dr. Goh and received permission for the cadets to march off parade. Returning to his position, he ordered the cadets to face inward to the centre and followed with the command to march off parade in slow time. The band struck up the traditional Auld Lang Syne and the cadets led by Purushothaman and the cadet supernumeraries each turned right or left at the centre to form two single files that glided past in slow march either side of the reviewing stand where Dr. Goh and Director, SAFTI stood.

Suddenly, it was all over, bar the shouting. To be sure, there was the icing on the cake yet to come: the Commissioning Ceremony at the Istana, where each First Batch officer would receive his Commission and his sword from the President of the Republic, Inche Yusof bin Ishak himself. But, the moment each passed beyond the reviewing stand on which Dr. Goh was standing, with Director, SAFTI beside him, they were Second Lieutenants (and gentlemen) in the SAF by Act of Parliament. It was all they could do to stop running back to ‘A’ Company to deposit the rifles in the armskote and rush back to the Officers’ Mess to join their guests for the reception. They did not see the end of the parade, when the supporting contingents and the SIR Band marched off and the guests were ushered to the marquee and perhaps callously, they could not care less, such was the sense of release and arrival.

At 'A' Company lines, there were one or two NCOs who managed to claim their gratuity for the first salute but most were at the reception. Individually and in groups, the newly minted officers hurried towards the Officers' Mess, searching out girlfriends, wives, siblings and parents. There was a barrage of flash bulbs popping (the electronic flash was still to come). Instructors, now a little lost for words, sought out their erstwhile charges to congratulate them. VIPs and VVIPs came up to make conversation, to be introduced to guests, to enquire into postings and preferences and perhaps talent-spot if they were senior officers in the SAF. 2LT Kwan Yue Yeong was the toast of the occasion and was passed from one senior official to another, the first home grown regular Sword of Honour winner, set for meteoric rise. The SAFTI establishment was in great good spirits, basking in the warmth of praises from the Minister for Interior and Defence and the senior-most officers of MID for a job truly well done and publicly acknowledged. Those in the know, recognised the benchmark achievement for what it was and the ripples it made in the neighbourhood. The Defence Attaches and Advisors would each give his own spin in his reports. Speculation about what the First Batch of SAFTI presaged would be rife this day and the days to follow, in the neighbouring national capitals.

As the forenoon wore on, clusters of guests and their personal Second Lieutenants started to drift away after Dr. Goh left. Some of the new officers went back to 'A' company to change out of their ceremonial dress into civvies as they had to take taxis or buses home. A few of those whose guests had driven to SAFTI went off in ceremonial dress to photo salons for a formal portrait or professional group photographs with the family. Soon, all the VVIPs were gone and the rest dispersed. SAFTI returned to its usual Sunday afternoon somnolence. The contractors would arrive the next day to dismantle and cart away the spectator stands and the marquee, leaving behind an eerie emptiness on the parade square, on which history had been made but, which history would all too soon forget.

VI. DINING WITH THE PRESIDENT

It was the first time any of the First Batch officers from SAFTI had stepped into the Istana Negara Singapura, the official residence of the President of the Republic of Singapore, or in Malay, Yang di-Pertuan Negara. Before Malaysia, the British Governors of Singapore stayed at the Istana. Then, it had been known as Government House. Started in 1867 and completed in 1869, its grounds can accommodate 40 football fields. Over time additional buildings had been added. The grounds have always been well tended, with different occupants giving them their personal touches. It has always been a world unto itself, not a casual destination for the man in the street. To receive the Commission from the hands of the President himself at the Istana and thereafter to be hosted by him for cocktails and dinner in the splendid grounds was to scale the heights of social acceptability. But, it made sense in 1967. The Armed Forces swore fealty to the Head of State, the apogee of a soldier's loyalty in whose name the Armed Forces acted for national security. The status of officer-ship, acquired by a Commission,

was deemed to be secured by an Act of Parliament, and could only be withdrawn through due process which included, finally, the formal approval of the President, not by administrative fiat. Only the first few batches of officers from SAFTI were accorded this privilege. When the Singapore Armed Forces Act superseded the Singapore Army Act in 1972, the status of officer was deemed an appointment, to cope with the deluge of Second Lieutenants through the National Service channel.

Each First Batch officer had earlier been given gold-edged invitation cards with the President's coat of arms. It was an invitation to each officer's two primary guests to attend both the Commissioning Ceremony and the dinner. The top cadets were also given a similar invitation card for a limited number of additional guests to attend the function. The dress code was lounge suit or national dress, while military and police were to be in No. 1 ceremonials, as the



2LT Lee Song Chong, Best Cadet Platoon 1 receiving his sword and Commissioning Certificate from President Yusof bin Ishak at the Istana. On the far left is then MAJ Winston Choo Wee Leong and far right Lieutenant Commander Brignandan Singh Soin, ADCs to President Yusof.



*2LT Timothy De Souza, Best Cadet Platoon 2,
receiving his sword and Commissioning Certificate from President Yusof bin Ishak.*

new officers were to receive swords, which were not worn with mess ceremonials or mess kit as they were commonly called. The First Batch had earlier informed SAFTI who was going to turn up as their guests, as SAFTI had had to prepare the seating plan. But, the lists issued to cadets at SAFTI went only as far down as Table 12, which corresponded with the top 12 new officers in the order of merit, 2LT Kwan Yue Yeong being at Table 1 with the President. Next in order of protocol were 2LT Lee Song Chong, Best Cadet, Platoon 1, at the table hosted by the Speaker of Parliament, Dr. Yeoh Ghim Seng. Dr. Goh Keng Swee hosted 2LT Timothy De Souza, Best Cadet, Platoon 2 and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. S. Rajaratnam, hosted 2LT Hee Kam Yong, Best Cadet, Platoon 3. If 2LT Gurcharan Singh had been in Singapore, he would have been on the second table as the Best Officer Cadet of the course. As it was, he, together with Second Lieutenants Chan Seck Sung and Chng Teow Hua were listed in absentia. There were 45 tables in all, for the ten-course Chinese dinner catered by a halal Chinese restaurant on contract with the Istana. Although the fair-weather programme was for the dinner to be on the lawn, not taking risks with the Singapore weather, there were provisions for the dining to be held indoors. But the cocktails would be held in the huge dining area inside the main building, while the ceremony itself was to be in a reception hall adjoining it.

The new officers and their personal guests arrived at the Istana on their own, either in private cars or taxis. Not many First Batch officers or their families could afford a private car in 1967, but many arranged for someone to drop them off at the back gate or someone with a car to come as their guest. The majority arrived through the back gate at Cavenagh Road, but those who arrived by taxis and dropped off at the main gate at Orchard Road took the scenic route up Edinburgh Road—the main driveway—or used a mini-bus shuttle service that had been provided. But, it was a pleasant walk for those who chose to take it on that fine evening through the park-like Istana grounds. Private cars were ushered into parking lots off the sides of the driveways when they spilled over the limited reserved parking areas. Male guest mostly wore lounge suits, though some merely came in long sleeves and tie because, once again, not every male private guest considered a lounge suit a priority in his limited wardrobe those days. Among male guests, some Malay gentlemen wore national dress while among the women, the dress code ranged from semi-formal evening wear to traditional cheongsam, baju-kurong and sari.

The arrangements were for the Commissioning Ceremony to be conducted first with the dinner—preceded by cocktails—to follow. The ceremony would consist of a speech by the President, invocations by religious leaders, the presentation of the Commission and the personal sword to each new officer by the President and a speech by then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. It was the first time in the SAF that religious leaders were invited to conduct prayers at commencements such as the Commissioning Ceremony, the official opening of new military installations or presentation of Colours, but it was to prove the start of a tradition. On this first occasion, there were Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh clerics only and their prayers and invocations were in the language of the religion, though

the Hindu priest went on to give an English translation. In arranging for the invocations, the religious leaders had been requested to keep within strict time limits.

The ceremony was conducted in the reception room still traditionally used for the accreditation of Ambassadors and High Commissioners to Singapore, or the formal reception by the President of visiting dignitaries. Seating for all the guests and the new officers had been arranged on either side of a central aisle in the relatively narrow room. At the head of the room was a low stage on which the presentation would be made, with seats for senior government officials. The new officers were to sit together in the order in which they would be called. A briefing had been given. They would stand up in rows, approach the President one-by-one as each was called, mount the stage, salute, step up, collect the certificate tied with a ribbon to the sword, step back, salute again and return directly to their seats. Their personal guests would witness the ceremony from their own sections of the seating arrangements.

By 1845 hrs, all guests had been ushered into the reception room. Dr. Goh arrived at 1855 hrs and a few minutes later, Mr. Lee, everybody rising to receive them in turn. At 1900 hrs, the President was escorted in by his two ADCs, MAJ Winston Choo and, Lieutenant Commander Brignandan (Brig) Singh Soin of the Volunteer Navy. Everyone stood and when the President faced the room from the stage, the National Anthem was played by the SIR Band, which would also provide music during the dinner, in addition to a choir. The President's address was brief but pithy. He pronounced the day as historic as it was the day that he, on behalf of the people of Singapore, conferred on 117 young men, commissions in the Republic's Army. President Ishak referred to the live-firing exercise conducted on 11th July as the 'baptism of fire' which qualified them to shoulder their heavy tasks as officers. He expected them to inculcate in National Servicemen the same high standards of training and discipline they had received. He announced the promulgation of a Code of Conduct that they would be held to and reminded them that each would, if required, be expected to make the supreme sacrifice for his country and his fellowmen. He concluded by saying that the sword they were about to receive was a symbol of the trust placed on them and they were to live by the ideals for which it was given. The religious leaders then individually proceeded with their invocations, led by the Buddhist priest. Though the contents were not clear to the uninitiated, the English version of the Hindu invocation and that of the Christian priest suggested that they were all similarly praying that the new officers would receive the protection of the Almighty in the performance of their duties and appealed to Him to endow them with courage and fortitude in combat. No one could help noticing that the Sikh invocation seemed to end in a loud war cry.

Led by 2LT Kwan Yue Yeong, 114 newly commissioned officers, including the injured Martin Choo were individually called up to receive their commissions and ceremonial swords, while the three sent overseas were called in absentia.

From then on, the official ceremonial sword would no longer be Wilkinson but a handier, and more affordable one from Thailand. Arrangements had been made with the official photographers to take a commemorative photograph of each cadet receiving his commission and sword from the President. In keeping with the times, they were black and white. Incredibly, no provisions had been made to provide a copy to the new officers, though they could order one from the photographers. Some had the gumption to arrange with the accredited photographers or their friends to take family group photographs with the Istana as the backdrop during the cocktails or after the dinner.

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's speech contained a bombshell. He announced that on this very day, in London, the British Government had stated that by the middle-70s, Britain would want to leave its bases in Singapore and Malaysia. In fact, Britain accelerated the pull-out to 1971 and substitute their local presence with defence assistance in the form of mobile forces sent by air and sea. Mr. Lee proceeded to chart out a schedule by which time Singapore would need to "build all the sinews we can so that we will not just be passengers in any defence alliance." But his main concern was to challenge the First Batch to find within themselves the military qualities that distinguished tough soldiers from the weak. He talked about how many Commonwealth troops had been worth one Imperial Japanese Army soldier during the battle for Malaya in the last war. He seared the minds of the new officers with the rhetorical question: "What is the conversion rate between the various armed forces?" He challenged them to demonstrate the qualities of leadership that would establish Singapore's reputation as a hardy and well organised people and participate in the transformation of a "rootless society of migrant stock into a closely knit community determined to dig our toes in into our own corner of Asia." It was an abrupt immersion into the core issues of their avocation for the First Batch.

Cocktails followed, and once again 2LT Kwan Yue Yeong was the toast of the occasion. The new officers had deposited their peak caps and scrolls on a table provided for the purpose and excitedly attached their swords to their belts as instructed to do. Now, they mixed self-consciously with members of Singapore's social elite and its senior-most political leadership. The wives of the two or three new officers and parents, siblings or girlfriends were mostly shy and tended toward monosyllabic responses to polite ice-breakers the VIPs offered them. The eclectic social mix represented by the First Batch was hardly likely to elicit brilliant cocktail or dinner-table conversation. It was enough that they were present at a grand and momentous event at the most exclusive address in the country and their representatives had qualified to gain them entry into it, however briefly. For many, it was the sole opportunity of a lifetime. After about half an hour of cocktails, dinner was announced and everybody went to their tables. The detailed seating plans had been posted in the Istana foyer so the seating was quickly settled. The new officers had to fumble around getting their swords out of the way as they sat. Dinner was universally pronounced excellent, given that not many could say that their dinners to date had been accompanied by music from a military band and a velvety-voiced choir singing local favourites.

In due course, there was a roll of drums to announce the National Anthem, after which the President departed, followed by the Prime Minister, Dr. Goh and other VVIPs. It was time for the rest to disperse. Those new officers who had come by taxi merely went home by taxi in their ceremonial dress, each carrying a sword and accompanied by their personal guests.

VII. THE COMMISSIONING BALL

The Commissioning Ball was something of an anti-climax after the grandness of the parade and the ceremony, but it is traditional in officer candidate schools to hold a formal ball after each commissioning. Usually the graduating cadets would be responsible for the arrangements, but SAFTI undertook to manage the one for the First Batch. It was held at the Singapore Conference Hall in Shenton Way on 22nd July. The Guest of Honour was Director, SAFTI. Attendance was optional though there was a lot of peer and official pressure for the new officers to attend. Nearly all the instructors of 'A' Company, representatives from IHQ, and others who had been closely involved in earlier training like MAJ T. E. Ricketts attended. The dress code was lounge suit and there was a multi-course Chinese dinner. A dance band had been engaged.



2LT Lee Song Chong collects his 2nd prize from Director, SAFTI.



MAJ Ricketts and 2LT Subandie with their wives at the Commissioning Ball.

Many of the new officers were not adept at dancing, nor had the year just spent in SAFTI been conducive to relationships with girls for the majority. Bringing a partner to a benchmark event like their Commissioning Ball was potentially fraught with serious implications, so quite a number came stag, or brought along someone convenient who did not necessarily dance or make other claims on them. Some used the services of their close barrack mates to arrange dates for them. Although there were many wallflowers hanging around that night, there was enthusiastic dancing all the same and the function went on until 0200 hrs the following morning. The highlight of the event, however, was the formal presentation of various official awards won by individuals during the course, which had not been included in the preceding commissioning functions.

And that was that. The First Batch of SAFTI was let loose on the SAF.

EPILOGUE

I. BREAKING IN THE FIRST BATCH

It had not been planned for the new officers from SAFTI to replace or otherwise sideline the existing corps, but to complement it. Looking back at the chronology of the creation of SAFTI, the fact that National Service was officially mooted only in November 1966 and legislated in Parliament in March 1967, suggests that the officer output from SAFTI had been intended to initiate and sustain Dr. Goh Keng Swee's original idea of about 12 infantry battalions and the supporting arms and services they entailed rather than lay the foundation for National Service. Likewise, while some of the pre-First Batch officers of the SAF may have been anxious and perhaps instinctively right in the long term about SAFTI graduates displacing them, there is no evidence to suggest that this was an official strategy. The existing officer corps was mostly well under middle age and except for the few graduates from among the 2,500-3,000 who applied for SAFTI's first intake, its educational profile was comparable. In fact, counting the mobilised Volunteers, there was proportionately a stronger representation of higher education than the pre-National Service batches from SAFTI. As the First Batch filtered upward through the SAF, their predecessors moved up correspondingly through the ranks and assumed command of the new establishments that were created, though inevitably, several were bypassed.

But in July 1967, the First Batch officers only had the vista of endless possibilities before them. They were savoring the status of being commissioned officers with responsible assignments, staffs to supervise, the Officers' Mess to socialise in and the privilege of individual quarters in the camps they were assigned to. Several had already applied for the generous government loan to buy cars, while some were contemplating matrimony and purchase of homes. All were running in their new personalities as leaders. And, all were finding that dealing with their fellow-officers as superiors, peers or subordinates rather than trainees could be both a rewarding experience and a bruising one. Even the solidarity they had become used to from amongst their erstwhile barrack-mates in 'A' Company was breaking down and being replaced by subtle jockeying for advancement.

A large proportion of the First Batch was posted to the basic training courses for officers for Artillery and Armour, for which SAFTI was the temporary venue. The School of Signals, School of Infantry Support Weapons and the School of Physical Training, also in SAFTI, absorbed some. SAFTI's new cohorts of officer cadets and section leaders—'A', 'B' and 'C' companies—got another piece of the First Batch pie and several others were given staff officer assignments in SAFTI HQ. The bulk of the remainder was sent as Platoon Commanders to 1 and 2 SIR, and the newly formed 3 and 4 SIR. There were no assignments to the Navy, the main consideration being that a conversion course for commissioned

officers was not available. At the time, Navy Officers got their commission directly through a midshipman school, which did not then exist locally. It was only in March 1968 that four trainees were sent overseas for midshipman training to form the core of the new naval force.

Three of the First Batch became fighter pilots: Gary Yeo Ping Yong, John Steven Peter Norfor and Timothy James De Souza. In August 1967, MID had initially selected 21 First Batch graduates with credits in science, mathematics and English in the Senior Cambridge examinations, but after the medicals, only Malcolm Alphonso, Leong Kwai Wah, Patrick Choy Choon Tow, Gary Yeo and John Norfor remained. While working in MID departments, they carried out their Provisional Pilot License training in Paya Lebar Airport. Another recruitment exercise was conducted in March 1968 during which Timothy De Souza and Ng Seng Chan were selected, together with about 30 direct civilian applicants. Eventually, Gary Yeo, John Norfor and Timothy were sent to the UK for fighter training in Hunters. In due course, two more First Batch officers joined the RSAF as pilots: Wan Siang Hau as a transport pilot and K.S. Rajan as a helicopter pilot. Leong Kwai Wah became an Air Traffic Control Officer.

For those among the First Batch who did not have to undergo a further stint as trainees immediately, the Adjutant of their unit tended to dominate their regimental life with the duty roster, rations checks, keeping an eye on the swill collector, who could be in cahoots with the cooks, the spot-checks at night (time selection being based on rolling dice in the presence of the Adjutant, who was not above over-ruling the outcome) and of course, extra duties for offences. But otherwise, their responsibilities were fulfilling and mostly outdoors work. Much of it was in fact teaching: peacetime unit life was training and with the induction of the first National Service intake in August 1967, SAF land force units were launched on the perpetual training cycle of operationally ready National Servicemen which is now a rite of passage among male Singapore citizens.

The First Batch provided the core of the Infantry, Armour, Artillery and Signals formations. The Infantry officers were posted directly to Infantry assignments, including SAFTI, while those earmarked for the other formations after commissioning, were enrolled in respective specialist courses. On their return from Fort Belvoir, Gurcharan Singh and Chng Teow Hua set up the School of Engineers, while Chan Seck Sung, who had gone to the Ranger Course at the Army Infantry School, USA with CPT Clarence Tan for Ranger training, set up the first School of Commandos in SAFTI, with Clarence being appointed the Chief Commando Officer. Among the first converts to the Commando were First Batch officers Tham Chee Onn and Boon Hon Lin, both of whom like Seck Sung retired from the service eventually as Lieutenant-Colonels. Another pioneer organisation created with First Batch graduates was the School of Combat Intelligence, also in SAFTI, headed by then CPT Jimmy Yap. Two First batch officers, Second Lieutenants Khoo Hung Kim and 'Belukar' Kwang Kwok Yeow were sent to Australia to attend the Basic Intelligence Officers' Course at Woodside, Adelaide, before returning to prepare lesson plans under an Advisor.

Another First Batch officer, Quek Koh Eng attended the Advanced Intelligence Officer Course in Australia in 1968 and then returned to attend the SAF Basic Intelligence Course.

Victor Lam and Low Yong Heng specialised early in physical training. Victor and Yong Heng attended a basic PT course in the FARELF School of Physical Training in Tanglin Barracks and Yong Heng also attended a Keep Fit course conducted in SAFTI. Both helped then CPT Kesavan Soon, who had represented Singapore in athletics at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956, set up the School of PT in SAFTI. Victor later attended the Advanced Physical Education and Recreational Training in Aldershot, UK while Yong Heng did the same course with the Royal New Zealand Air Force in Auckland.

In August 1968, one year after being commissioned, all the First Batch officers were promoted Lieutenants, following the British practice and the rest by 1st March, 1969. By end-1968, the School of Advanced Training for Officers (SATO) had been setup in SAFTI and had conducted its first course. The students included COL Kirpa Ram Vij and other senior officers, but also 12 officers from the First Batch, followed by more in the subsequent courses. On 1st October, 1969, 21 First Batch officers were promoted to Captain. In the meantime, one of the graduates had already resigned as a Lieutenant and left to work in the motor industry. One of the other graduates decided to leave within a month of his promotion to Captain, while he was on the SATO course. There were several other early resignations among promising First Batch officers in the next few years. Their grounds varied but some included migration to other countries and all who left entirely on their own volition must have felt that the military life they had courted hard enough to cope with the training in SAFTI, had somehow lost its gloss. On the other hand, by 1970, Gurcharan Singh had become the Senior Engineer Officer, an early title for the head of a service, sometimes referred to as SSSO or Senior Specialist Staff Officer. In May 1970, Guru and Kwan Yue Yeong were promoted to Major, the first among the First Batch. Yue Yeong appropriately became CO, Officer Cadet School that year. He was given command of 6 SIR in May 1971. In 1972, he was appointed honorary ADC to Princess Anne when Queen Elizabeth II visited Singapore—for the first time. Eng Song King, the Nantah graduate, was promoted to Major in 1971 and given the command of 1 SIR in 1972. A further batch of First Batch officers was promoted Major in 1972, while in that exercise Guru was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel.

The professional standing of the First Batch officers in the SAF, perhaps not universally subscribed to, was reflected in the selection of five First Batch officers to participate in the high-visibility Exercise Bersatu Padu (Solid Unity) in 1970. Under the command of then MAJ James Teo, with MAJ Naranjan Singh as his 2I/C, Captains Chin Chow Yoon, M.C. Pillay, and Dennis Tan Eng Joo were appointed rifle Company Commanders. Then LTA S. Purushothaman was appointed Support Company Commander, along with CPT Balbir Singh as the Battalion General Staff Officer in 5 SIR. By the time of the actual exercise, Balbir switched places with Chow Yoon. Another First Batch officer, Khoo Hung Kim, then Lieutenant, was the Intelligence Officer. The umpire organisation headed by

LTC John Morrice, included six First Batch officers—Captains Richard Townsend and Giles Miranda and Lieutenants Allen Walters, Martin Choo and William Law. It was the first Five Power Defence Arrangements exercise, presaging the formal withdrawal of British forces from Singapore. Preparations for the division level exercise included all the Company Commanders and General Service Officers attending the Jungle Warfare School in Kota Tinggi and subsequently, the whole battalion training in jungle operations in the Jemulang area of peninsular Malaysia. The exercise itself was conducted in Ulu Terengganu.

5 SIR distinguished itself, necessary so as a National Service battalion, a concept new to South East Asian forces. Its performance probably gave rise to optimism among Singapore Government leaders that the graduates of SAF'II were living up to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's hopes as expressed in his Commissioning Ceremony speech on 18th July, 1967, that the SAF would be able to out-perform the opposition. As a matter of fact, the SAF showed early signs of being able to do well. In the years following the introduction of National Service, the SAF continued to conduct an annual small arms meet among all its units. Invitations were also extended to the neighbouring military forces. Despite a very high National Service component, or maybe because of it, the SAF tended to sweep the medals.

Another indication of the status of the First Batch—or perhaps SAF'II training, since post-First Batch officers replaced them over time—was the appointment of several of them as Military Personnel Assistants (MPS) to the Minister for Defence, the First Permanent Secretary of MINDEF and Staff Officer to Director General Staff/Chief of Defence Force. From the First Batch, Chin Chow Yoon and Ha Weng Kong, were appointed Military Personal Secretary to Minister and the First Permanent Secretary respectively. Mr. Pang Tee Pow had taken over from Mr. George Bogaars as First Permanent Secretary. Hee Kam Yong took over from Ha Weng Kong as MPS to First Permanent Secretary. M.C. Pillay was Staff Officer to Brigadier Kirpa Ram Vij, Director, General Staff. He was succeeded by Dennis Tan Eng Joo.

II. BRUSHES WITH REALITY

As Second Lieutenants, each First Batch officer would have his own brushes with reality in the profession he had chosen. Apart from the common trials and tribulations of life in general, there were the experiences that are associated with one that by definition, demands navigation off the beaten track in more than a figurative sense. The most dramatic case was one in which a First Batch officer happened to be the Duty Officer in SAF'II. It was the fateful Sunday on 14th July, 1968, when the first School of Artillery course for officers was conducting a 120mm mortar live-firing exercise with Ritz Farm in Area C as the impact area. The usual safety precautions had been observed: boat patrols, sirens, the closure of the ingress roads, the hoisting of red flags and clearance with Tengah Air Base. Eighteen bombs were fired between 1230 hrs

and 1400 hrs. Tragically, a large group of Boyanese villagers accompanied by some Orang Laut, living in Kampong Bereh on the banks of Sungei Poyan, had gone to Ritz Farm to collect durians and rambutans, which were in season. Around 1430 hrs, a duty officer from SAFTI went to the tactical HQ for the exercise to inform the Chief of Artillery, then MAJ Mancharan Singh Gill that the police had informed SAFTI Operations Centre that there were reports of casualties among the people of Kampong Bereh. The SAFTI Duty Officer found himself in the thick of the developments, which included the visit of the Permanent Secretary, the Director, General Staff, Director, SAFTI and other senior officials from MID and also a visit to the site which gave him a first hand view of the obscene effects of Artillery fire. Another First Batch officer was resting in his bunk in SAFTI because he had taken part in a National Day Parade rehearsal earlier. MAJ Morrice, who may have been the duty field officer of SAFTI that week, knocked on his door and asked him to help with the evacuation of the casualties and the officer had the gruesome task of bringing back the bodies of four dead villagers from Ritz Farm to SAFTI. A delegation was sent down to the Boyanese village where nine wounded villagers including five women had been evacuated by Marine Police boat. The villagers were disinclined to provide the full facts of what had happened on the ground, probably for the unfounded fear of prosecution for trespassing into a prohibited area. The Coroner's Inquiry in January 1969 concluded that the villagers had only themselves to blame as they had a history of deliberately trespassing into the live-firing area even when live-firing was going on. However, SAFTI decided to eliminate further temptation by destroying as much of the fruit trees as possible in the live-firing area after the incident.

III. IMPACT OF NATIONAL SERVICE

With the introduction of National Service, the military environment moved out from behind the screen of impervious camp fences to centre stage in Singapore. The mystique of military life rapidly evaporated. The exclusivity of a commission or non-commissioned rank was diluted by the mass-production of National Service officers and NCOs. Indeed, the early resistance to universal male conscription was so strong that the very idea of military service was trashed by many enlistees, especially those with higher education inducted under the provisions to conscript graduates, or drop-outs of tertiary educational institutions and newly recruited civil servants. To compound the problem, there was initially a policy for those who were commissioned to serve three years of full-time service versus two for those who were not. Many, particularly graduates, exploited this yawning loophole by under-performing during the recruit and section training phases, to rule themselves out as officer candidates.

National Service brought in a representative cross-section of the male population of 18-year olds. The armed forces thus ceased to be the preserve of the lesser educated or those with a predisposition for a martial life. Almost immediately, military traditions came under siege because only enforcement and not endorsement supplied the incentive

to comply with concerns such as taut bed-sheets, razor sharp creases on uniforms, spit-shined boots and ruler-straight dressing on the parade ground. Superiors were no longer preaching to the congregation. The congregation, in fact, would gladly have burned down the church, as it were. But 'military bull' extended beyond being sticklers for literally squaring things away. Over time, with an uncritical audience of lesser-educated Volunteer and career enlistees, the military had accumulated much questionable lore as tradecraft. With National Service, in the course of training, instructors would often stray into the military equivalent of old wives tales with highly educated and often mature trainees who were neither intimidated, gullible nor forgiving. Mere legislated authority could not long withstand the assault of skepticism. The outcome was invariably a resort to the prerogative of rank and the imposition of punitive measures to restore bruised egos, thus adding to the simmering discontent.

One of the developments of National Service was a hugely misguided attempt at social engineering within the SAF. In 1968, MID ruled that the Officers' Mess should cease to exist as such and should be an All Ranks' Club, since National Service should be seen as egalitarian. The idea also incorporated the concept that officers should take their meals in a common dining hall and should queue with the men to get their food. The impact was quite disastrous. It served immediately to deny the officers and the NCOs a respite from the troops they were with the whole day, a chance to relax with their colleagues and a place for private interaction. On the other hand, the troops were not thrilled with the arrangement of having to relax under the eye of their superiors either. No one minded very much the idea of a common dining hall compared with the previous practice of officers being served their meals in the Officers' Mess, usually requiring them to make a monthly contribution for an enhanced meal. With National Service officers in the Officers' Mess asking for additional funds for food was unacceptable. And, the regulars appreciated the value of being seen not to have extra perks especially when it came to food. However, as with the All Ranks Club, the idea of queuing up with the men in the dining hall was mutually awkward, if entirely appropriate in the field. In the latter case, it had also become a practice anyway for commanders and instructors to eat only after the troops had been fed. The revolutionary arrangements lasted longer than they should have because they had to be gradually chipped away until the Officers' and the NCO (Warrant Officers and Specialists) Messes were reintroduced. In due course, special tables were reserved for Officers and Senior NCOs in the dining halls and a variety of arrangements adopted for them to be served.

On the whole, the First Batch officers, as the pioneer Platoon Commanders of National Servicemen, including those assigned to the respective support arms and services when they graduated from the specialist courses, found their roles challenging. They had signed up for a career in a regular army and nothing in their training had prepared them for the dynamics of commanding conscripts. During the initial years, several ran into problems not only with enlisted men, but also National Service officers. There were instances of serious insubordination and even mass Absence Without Leave (AWOL) and MINDEF,

despite reservations about the root causes for the offences, had to come down hard on the perpetrators to prevent the widespread undermining of authority.

But, whereas there had been no preparation for National Service in the training of the First Batch officers, the curriculum and tenor of their course as a whole seemed to have instilled a ‘can-do’ spirit and a high degree of justifiable self-esteem among nearly all the graduates. In particular, they were inclined to lead from the front, work conscientiously and keep a cool head. What they lacked in intellectual depth, they often made up in situational awareness. Anecdotally, they managed to pick up the respect of many National Service enlistees who went on to become prominent citizens.

IV. SAF RISING

The SAF had a very steep learning curve in the years following the commissioning of the First Batch. The battalion attack demonstration of 11th July, 1967 by SAFTI was the precursor to the introduction of battalion level operational training in the Infantry unit training cycle that commenced with the first National Service intake. At the time, each SIR battalion received one company-worth of recruits who graduated from basic through section, platoon and company training, making way every six months to a new intake over the two-year cycle for enlisted men. By the end of the second year, the battalion would have four rifle companies in various stages of training, while selected personnel were given training in battalion support weapons to make up the three platoons of the support company, namely the 81mm Mortar, the 106mm Recoilless Rifle and the Pioneer Platoon (a kind of “Engineer Lite”). Each rifle company also had, as part of its establishment, three General Purpose Machine Guns and an anti-tank rocket launcher section. Other personnel from each intake were absorbed into the HQ Company establishment as medical orderlies, cooks, storemen, Regimental Police, Motor Transport (MT) personnel and clerical staff. The full-time National Service cycle in the Infantry ended with a battalion level exercise in which the current recruit company would not participate. With the creation of Armour, Artillery, Engineers and Signals battalions, National Servicemen began to be sent for recruit training to these units as well.¹ Armour, being an assault arm like the Infantry, compared to a support arm, eventually developed its own unit training cycle. The support arms and in time, the logistics services, developed their own training cycles, which were incorporated into formation-level exercises where they attained their full application. The first battalion-level exercises began by the time the first National Servicemen were due to complete their full-time training in August 1969 and by 1971, the SAF was already embarking on brigade-level exercises. In effect, the land forces training cycle was translating into routine annual and bi-annual large scale exercises which provided the template for the development of operational systems and procedures. As the other services came online, they were integrated to upgrade the scope to joint operations.

In the meantime, significant developments were taking place in the SAF. The 3rd Infantry Brigade (3SIB) was formed and headquartered in Ulu Pandan Camp, previously the home of 1 SIR. 1 SIR was relocated to Guillemard Camp, opposite Maju Secondary School and, together with 3 and 4 SIR in Bedok, was housed in the new-model Infantry battalion camp. The nuclei of 3 and 4 SIR were initially housed in HDB blocks in Taman Jurong Camp. 2 SIR, as the nucleus of 3 SIB, was grouped with the recently formed 5 and 6 SIR. In the background there was the hush-hush Area 3 Command and the putative Divisional Headquarters in Jurong, indicative of the hectic pace at which the SAF was growing. Also reflecting this pace was the build-up of the other formations, which, by the early 1970s, were already churning out National Service gunners, armour troopers, signalers and commandos into what was then called the Reserves. In 1970, the first Reservist, later designated as Operationally Ready National Servicemen or ORNS in-camp training was conducted, with full-time officers holding secondary appointments.

The momentum of these developments offered opportunities for the First Batch to advance rapidly in terms of appointments, not only in the combat units but also in new establishments that were created to facilitate a full-fledged military organisation with the complex management dynamics of National Service. But, unlike the British forces, ranks were not automatically conferred with appointments. From the rank of Captain, promotions seemed to have been cautiously offered and this policy—if it was one—applied to the pre-First Batch officers as well. The first Commanders of Area 3 Command which was the defacto Division HQ were only full Colonels, while Director, General Staff was, for a long time, a one-star appointment. It was only from 1972 (Gurcharan in 1972, Chan Jwee Kay and Chng Teow Hua in 1973) that the first graduates of SAFTI were promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel. In the meantime, pre-First Batch officers were given plenty of opportunities to prove themselves. Nearly every top command appointment was held by them, as were appointments such as heads of MINDEF departments, as MID became known with the divestment of Home Affairs into a separate ministry in 1970. The responsibility of command was recognised with major upward revisions of pay, leave eligibility, staff cars, drivers, free telephones and even official quarters in prestigious government residences. Though none of the First Batch got to stay in one of these, they were offered equal opportunity with the civil service to acquire apartments in up-market HUDC estates with attractive long-term loans. Additionally, the SAF purpose-built Normanton Park for SAF Officers and built and rented out another block of flats, which became known as SAFTI Hilton, directly opposite the entrance to SAFTI.

Opportunities for overseas training increasingly began to go to First Batch officers rather than their predecessors, usually followed by a higher appointment. The chosen ones included specialist courses in the United States, United Kingdom and France. By the early 1970s, the First Batch was due for the benchmark staff college courses and the plums were the Leavenworth and Camberly Staff College courses. But, they were invariably the first candidates for the Malaysian, Indonesian, Thai and Philippines staff college courses that were also taken up when offered by the host countries. Being selected for an overseas course instead of

the local Command and Staff College, which conducted its first course in Fort Canning in 1972, was considered promising career-wise. Meanwhile, the first tentative steps were made to set up training camps or bases overseas. Periodic large-scale land force exercises were also negotiated with Australia and New Zealand. Establishing overseas training bases provided alternative pioneering opportunities for First Batch officers.

V. SHIFTING SANDS ALONG CAREER PATHS

By about the mid-1970s, the First Batch was shaking out into some sort of rank order among themselves and the overall hierarchy in the SAF, but the frontrunners from the succeeding batches in SAFTI were already catching up. At the same time, MINDEF was enticing National Service officers, especially those with good degrees, with both contract and full career opportunities. The Government generally embarked on a programme of installing, throughout the civil service, advanced management policies for which top university graduates were indispensable, especially systems engineers. Compulsory National Service for male graduates under the tertiary institutions category ensured MINDEF of their services for two years at least, though this tended to be in field duties. The loophole created by stipulating three years full-time service for officers was plugged around 1970 by a revised provision that *all* National Servicemen with Higher School Certificate (GCE 'A' level) and above would have to serve two and a half years regardless. This made a commission worth trying for, though many diehards remained until employers began to see the failure to qualify for a commission as a black mark. But, the new policy provided MINDEF a better catchment of officers to fill the growing regular establishment, which in turn began to impact the hitherto elite status that the First Batch had been enjoying.

A more serious squeeze was applied to their expectations at the end of 1970, when the first five national level scholarship (Public Service Commission and President's Scholars) awardees were inducted into National Service. From then on, every year would see a number of such enlistees, to which would be added additional members as the Government opened up more scholarships—such as the SAF Scholarship—the winners of which would be announced after later selection exercises. The terms for the scholars included provisions for them to serve their bond in the SAF and stay on if they chose. The scholars automatically became the *crème de la crème* of the SAF and could reasonably expect to attain the rank of Colonel within ten years after they returned from their degree studies. The scheme was continually massaged to include postgraduate studies and dual tracking in the Administrative Service, etc. Around the beginning of the 1980s, the issue gained notoriety due to the categorisation of career officers in the SAF into 'scholars' and 'farmers.'

As a tentative measure to keep the pre-scholar regulars onside, MINDEF put in place a scheme to upgrade some of them educationally. A cooperative degree programme was arranged with

the National University of Singapore and Duke University, North Carolina, for (eventually) two batches of officers to do a part-time degree course in History in Singapore over three years, followed by a one-year residential phase in Duke, leading to a Masters degree in History. Three First Batch officers were included in the programme, which was also extended to several pre-First Batch officers including Winston Choo, who had been promoted to Major General in his appointment as Chief of General Staff when he left for Duke. The First Batch officers then Colonels, were Ng Jui Ping, Kwan Yue Yeong and Ha Weng Kong. General Choo, Jui Peng and Yue Yeong made up the first cohort and returned successfully. Weng Kong was in the second cohort and also completed the programme successfully. There wasn't enough enthusiasm for the three-year local slog on a part-time basis for the programme to become a mainstream activity and it was dropped. Instead, MINDEF instituted a far more popular local scholar scheme for regulars who were interested in getting a tertiary education. In the meantime, another programme was also put in place. Regular officers rated as consistently good performers were classified by the Officers' Personnel Centre (OPC) as 'Wranglers' and were generally groomed for early promotion and critical appointments, with professional courses such as SATO and SCSC and their foreign equivalents, which OPC solicited with increasing frequency.

Several 'farmers' from the First Batch were to eventually break through the glass ceiling, while in addition to Brigadier Campbell, Brigadier Kirpa Ram Vij and Lieutenant-General (LG) Choo, another pre-First Batch officer, Sim Hak Kng also became Brigadier General (BG). In addition, COL M. S. Gill was appointed Deputy Chief of General Staff (DCGS) in the rank of Colonel, although Brigadier General Tan Chin Tiong, a National Service officer who had signed on had already overtaken him as DCGS and Acting Chief of General Staff (CGS) while then Major General (MG) Choo was in Duke University for a year. Apart from the fact that the scholars were not senior enough until the early eighties, MINDEF instinctively appreciated that the actual battlefield threw up issues of personality and psychology that had no direct correlation to academic qualifications. For example, it was recognised that the Gurkhas were ferocious fighters but their field officers and rank-and-file were apt to be lowly educated. Likewise, the same applied to elite forces like the Commandos and anti-terrorist teams. Moreover, even at the highest levels of command, charismatic field leadership in operations was not identical with modern management excellence, which had much to do with education, networking and general knowledge—matters that usually did not exercise the imagination of warrior-types.

By 1975, the First Batch Officers were being given senior appointments. There were not enough field appointments above battalion level in the operational chain of command, such as Brigade Commanders. In promotion exercises, pre-First Batch officers were not discriminated against and many senior field appointments went to them. But, there were opportunities in training establishments such as SAFTI. e.g. CO, Officer Cadet School, CO, SATO, Commandant SCSC and Commandant SAFTI. Some plum appointments began to open up in MINDEF, of which the highest level was that of Assistant Chiefs of General Staff (ACGS), or G1 to G6. These appointments, directly answerable to the Chief of General Staff (successor to

Director, General Staff who was then mainly the head of the Army and precursor to Chief of Defence Force,) also admitted the holders to the top policy-making body of MINDEF, namely MINDEF HQ. MINDEF HQ met weekly and each ACGS ran the gauntlet—in their respective areas of responsibilities—of the Minister for Defence and the political hierarchy, plus the two Permanent Secretaries and Directors of MINDEF Divisions. It was an arena that made or broke reputations, as well as a training forum for senior management which money could not buy.

As far as uniformed officers were concerned, the earliest configuration of MINDEF HQ provided for CGS, Commander Air Force, Commander Navy and the Assistant Chiefs of General Staff only. The ACGSs coordinated all the land force establishments, joint operations and some such as the Medical HQ, field logistics installations and Signals, which overlapped into the two other services. Commander, Air Force and Commander, Navy represented their own commands but worked with senior civilian heads of department in MINDEF such as Deputy Secretary (Air Force), while in the initial stages, the Second Permanent Secretary directly oversaw the development of the Air Force. Directors of Security and Intelligence Division, Logistics, Manpower and Finance covered all the other departments in MINDEF. As the SAF grew, the General Staff, which was essentially Army, was replaced by the Joint Staff (J-Staff) and the post of Chief of Army on a co-equal status with Chief of Air Force and Chief of Navy. Concurrently, the post of Chief of Defence Force was created and the Assistant Chiefs of General Staff were dropped from MINDEF HQ. The configuration of MINDEF HQ was altering every now and then to reflect these changes and also take into consideration new civilian appointments such as Deputy Secretary, Policy, Deputy Secretary, Administration, etc.

Among the First Batch, Eng Song King, Gurcharan Singh, Kwan Yue Yeong, Ramachandran Menon and Ng Jui Ping were appointed ACGSs in the rank of Lieutenant-Colonels, when these appointment were still included in MINDEF HQ. Menon and Jui Ping both did stints as ACGS (Personnel) and ACGS (Training). Subsequently, Jui Ping was appointed Director, Joint Operations after commanding 3rd Division and later, Patrick Choy Choon Tow, Director, Joint Intelligence, both in the rank of Brigadier General. In these capacities they were Members of MINDEF HQ. Jui Ping was later appointed Chief of Army succeeding BG Boey Tak Hap, the first scholar to hold the appointment, who left the service to head the Public Utilities Board. Before his appointment as Director, Joint Intelligence, Patrick Choy had headed the Training and Doctrine Command. In the Air Force, Gary Yeo had become the Deputy Commander and was promoted to Brigadier General in July 1989. As a group, over this period, the First Batch was at the height of its status in the SAF, being in positions to influence key areas of policy in the land forces if not the SAF as a whole. In the early 1990s, there were two appointments from among them that also offered similar scope, namely Chin Chow Yoon who headed the SAFTI MI Development Project during which tenure he was promoted to Brigadier General in July 1992 and Colin George Theseira, who commanded a Division in the course of which he was promoted to Brigadier General. In between however, several First Batch officers held key appointments: Chief of Artillery, Chief of Armour, Director, SAFTI/Chief Infantry

Officer, Infantry Brigade Commanders, Division Commanders, Chief Engineer Officer and Chief Signals Officer, the nomenclature for the designations changing over time, e.g. from Senior Artillery Officer to Chief of Artillery.

Given their educational profile, it is likely that the majority in the First Batch had not expected to rise very far in the SAF. There was nothing to indicate that the SAF would become the enormous organisation it was developing into at the stage of their careers when the more focused among them were seriously setting some career goals. With National Service, a paradigm shift had taken place. The leadership throughout had to be greatly accelerated, as a disproportionate bulk of the orbat was not in full-time service. It also had to represent current managerial principles and societal ethos compared with those of a traditional military establishment, as the majority of the National Service leadership would be represented by upwardly mobile private and public sector personalities, for whom the Armed Forces was only part-time duty. Direct recruitment as career soldiers had been superseded by contract and bond service. Officers coming in through this route, especially if they were highly qualified, were quickly processed through the intermediate levels of command to take up senior appointments commensurate with their qualifications. Before long, National Service and scholarship schemes left many of the First Batch in limbo; though perhaps well within their initial expectations.

The situation was formalised with the introduction of the Shell Appraisal System in 1980. The annual performance ranking up till then was identical to the standard government format that ultimately provided only a vague summary of how an officer had performed the preceding year. It was then left to the Officers' Personnel Centre to review previous records and attempt to shortlist the individuals deserving of promotion, depending as much on the assessor, as the assessed. With the Shell Appraisal System, which was borrowed from the petroleum company, two elements were introduced: an estimation of the officer's potential (Currently Estimated Potential or CEP) meaning the position he was likely to achieve in the organisation at age 45 and a formal rank ordering of all officers of the same rank collectively by the assessors each year as the basis for promotion. The CEP not only provided the standing of the officer among his peers, but also underwrote his career planning by OPC. The Shell system resolved the arbitrary issues that had plagued the traditional performance reporting, giving a sense of purpose to the charting of career paths in very large organisations and forcing assessors to make hard comparative choices. But, with the best of intentions, an assessor could not help being influenced by the educational qualifications of the assessed, thereby favouring the higher educated and those with prestigious scholarships. It tended to maroon the less qualified officer in the lower stratum.

Despite this, either because of the sound foundation of the First Batch officers or the fact that in joining the SAF as careerists—and in some cases at least—both, they generally took to whatever assignments were given them and did not disappoint. When the scholars

began to bypass them for unit commands, they were moved out of the chain of operational command to support services and secondary staff appointments in MINDEF, the higher formation HQs, and training establishments. Quite a number were also selected for posts of Defence Attaches in the ASEAN countries, or as overseas training base commanders, both assignments fraught with diplomatic perils. One, Chng Teow Hua, was seconded permanently to the Ministry of Home Affairs as Commander, Singapore Civil Defence Force, where he made a name for himself, setting up the SCDF almost from scratch and, more directly, during the Hotel New World disaster rescue operations.

At the end of their tenure in the SAF, five First Batch officers had become generals. Ng Jui Ping had reached the pinnacle as Chief of Defence Force with the rank of Lieutenant-General. The others were BG Gary Yeo, BG Patrick Choy, BG Chin Chow Yoon and BG Colin Theseira. Interestingly, except for Colin who was from Platoon 2, all were from Platoon 3, to the immense satisfaction of COL (RET) Goh Lye Choon, their Platoon Commander during officer cadet training, who already had the satisfaction of bagging the first Sword of Honour recipient, Kwan Yue Yeong.

VI. CAMPAIGNS AND OPERATIONS

Luckily or otherwise, no First Batch officer was required to fire a shot in anger. If there had been any kind of a shooting war, it must be presumed that the training would have taken over and the First Batch would have acquitted itself satisfactorily, maybe even with distinction. Certainly, there were in it personalities who took peacetime hazards in their stride, while most of them became professionally competent. But, to paraphrase Sun Tzu, the acme of (military) skill is to subdue the enemy without even fighting. Perhaps, something of the sort did happen, and just the creation of a very purposeful-looking SAF achieved its objective in the early uncertain days of sovereign independence. The SAF's performance in Bersatu Padu certainly showcased the ability of the SAF, despite its brief history at that point in time.

However, the First Batch and others in the early SAF barely survived two internal campaigns. The first campaign was waged to get each military camp to cultivate a plot of papaya plants and to gather the fruits to supplement rations as dessert. Presumably, the exercise would imbue servicemen with the spirit of self-sufficiency, if need be, in extended operations. The idea seemed rather preposterous and initially, it did not get the command attention that it should have. Most people thought it would pass, and units had plenty of more pressing concerns. But, they reckoned without MINDEF's penchant for monitoring the implementation of its edicts. A Logistics Division office was tasked to report to the First Permanent Secretary, the state of each papaya plantation and suddenly, there was hell to pay. The plantations were soon being monitored not only for the number of plants but also for their rate of growth and productivity. Commanders were personally called up for a very unpleasant interview with

the First Permanent Secretary and other senior officers in MINDEF. Novel schemes began to turn up. One was to assign a tree to each soldier with dire threats of what would happen to him if the tree died. There were night visits to the trees in the belief that a good dose of uric acid would aid growth. Another was to replace ailing trees with new ones from farmers in Lim Chu Kang. The farmers quickly caught on and began to grow papaya trees of varying generations to cater to MINDEF's record of the rate of growth, as well as numbers and productivity. Eventually, it became evident to MINDEF that the whole exercise was seriously counterproductive as far as the Commanders' focus was concerned and it was abandoned.

The second campaign was more relevant, if equally distracting. Units were subjected to an overall annual inspection covering operational readiness, training, manpower and logistics management. The results would count towards a unit's grading for the annual Best Unit Competition, but in any case, an underperforming unit would have to answer to MINDEF for its deficiencies. It was found that even among good units, hygiene was a serious weak spot: dirty toilets, messy barrack rooms, filthy kitchens and swill areas, stagnant water and choked drainage, etc. Nobody thought to reflect on the undermining of the RSM's authority with the introduction of National Service, as the general state of a camp was one of his direct responsibilities to the Unit Commander. In fact, RSMs had become a subdued lot after Tiger Hong was court-martialled for prodding a National Serviceman with his pace-stick. Such was his standing and professionalism in the SAF that he was only fined and reprimanded. But the outcome of the hygiene problem was to employ a middle-aged battleaxe from the Medical Service and give her the notional rank of Captain to terrorize units on a range of issues thought to represent good hygiene. The very idea of a visit from her team was enough to send Unit Commanders and OCs HQ Company into a frenzy of house-keeping. Fortunately, the good lady-Captain's strength (it will not do to call it a weakness) was in her fondness for a well-timed gin and tonic, which if served shaken but not stirred in the Officers' Mess, did wonders to dilute the Clorox in her reports. That campaign too eventually fizzled out.

There were four operations during the watch of the First Batch. The first was the spill over into Singapore of the racial riots in Malaysia that began on 13th May, 1969. Within two days, the SAF was sent out with the police for patrolling and deployed at road control points, preempting any deterioration of the situation. Even SAFTI officer cadets were deployed and the Internal Security Operations training included in the officer cadet syllabus was fully vindicated. The second was the outcome of the hijack of the PSA ferry "Laju" by representatives of the Red Brigade in 1974. Though it ended without casualties, SAF Infantry units were stationed a month at a time to protect vital installations in Singapore for several months thereafter. The third operation, code-named "Thunderstorm" involved the deployment, again of land units, to secure points of entry along Singapore's coastline by refugees from Vietnam, who came en masse in boats to seek a home in Singapore after the fall of Saigon and the withdrawal of the United States. The last was the hijack of Singapore Airlines Flight SQ 117 in 1991 when Ng Jui Ping was Chief of Army.

VII. CASUALTIES AND LOSSES

While the First Batch remained in good standing in the SAF throughout its tenure, it had its share of professional casualties. Three of its number were cashiered: one for misappropriation of funds as a Captain; one for AWOL as a Major and a third for dereliction of duty. Three others were so severely reprimanded for oversights in the course of their respective duties that they were persuaded to resign as Captains.

While the First Batch suffered no fatalities due to service, ten of its members as of this writing, have passed away from natural causes. The latest was the death of Harry Wee Bak Wah on 23rd February 2007. He had played the key role in relocating MINDEF from Upper Barracks to Tanglin. S. Purushothaman, the Cadet Parade Commander of the First Batch Commissioning Parade had died of a sudden heart attack in July 2005. He was preceded by Lien Beng Thong in February 2003; Beng Thong also succumbed to a heart attack, though while jogging. The First Batch also lost its youngest member, William Law Chee Yin, who died in a road accident in Beijing in 1996. The others are Chow Giak Piak, Dildar Singh Dhot, Oscar Raymond Pereira, Lee Hock Seng, Ha Weng Kong and Roy Chua Chye Ser from various causes.

VIII. A FAREWELL TO ARMS

LTC Timothy De Souza was the last First Batch officer to leave the service. Although he had attended and successfully completed the first Artillery Officers' Course, in 1968 he had been selected for fighter pilot training in the UK and thereafter had been with the RSAF for the whole of his career, including being Senior Staff Officer at the Five Power Integrated Air Defence Command Headquarters in Butterworth, Malaysia. Timothy retired on 31st October, 1999 at age 53. Age 50 is a cut-off under the National Service Act, because it technically ends a male Singaporean's obligation towards military mobilisation. When Timothy retired, there still were some First Batch officers who were under 50 and theoretically liable for mobilisation. But, they had left active service earlier, and either performed the full reserve service (Operationally Ready National Service) or did several years of in-camp training, before being dropped to the second tier of the reserve orbat. So Timothy's retirement was the endpoint in the journey of the First Batch officers that began on 1st June, 1966 as soldiers in the SAF.

Retired military officers can carry on as civilians if MINDEF requires their services. Currently, they can work under a variety of terms and conditions until well after 55 years, depending on the availability of the positions and the incumbents' suitability. Dispensations are possible on a year-to-year basis, for example as diplomats or administrators in government schools, or even heritage information specialists in MINDEF. In Timothy's case on his retirement from active service he was approached by MINDEF to revamp the Singapore Youth Flying Club at Seletar. He submitted his proposals based on his vast experience in flying operations and

was given the task of implementing those proposals as the General Manager of the Club. He has now relinquished the job and instead was appointed to the Presidential Council for Minority Rights as of May 2010. He is currently Chairman of the Pioneer Generation Appeals Committee, a government body which decides on appeals by Singaporeans who wish to be regarded as pioneers for the Pioneer Generation Package.

Around 1981, MINDEF introduced a policy that anyone attaining the rank of Brigadier General would be required to resign from active service at age 50. This policy in due course filtered down to promotion to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Interestingly enough, it had been a policy under the British that Majors were required to retire at age 50 and the practice had hitherto been observed in the SAF. Even more drastic policies were introduced in the late 1990s and early 2000. Full-time active officers are *now* required to retire at age 50. If they so choose (their services are required by MINDEF) they can join a non-uniformed service known as the Defence Executive Service (DXO). In the meantime, several severance packages have been provided for retraining for civilian jobs and further education. The provisions are in line with the early recognition by the Government that second careers would be the norm with extended longevity in the working population as a whole. But, the initial impetus was the notion that in military service at least, the vitality of youth was preferable to the experience of age. In any case, not long into National Service, it became obvious that in full-time units, the annual turnover of 18-year old recruits was not compatible with the leadership—in physical terms at least—of aging regulars of expanding girths.

The First Batch is now too widely scattered to be individually accounted for. One is in Canada, one in the United States, one in Belgium (since 1975), one in Malaysia, one in Laos, many in Australia and the rest in Singapore. All are on the wrong side of 65 years of age, but a large number still remain not only employed but in rewarding and challenging jobs. The defence industries very generously absorbed many of them on excellent terms. On any given day, at least five typical First Batch retirees will be on a golf course in Singapore alone, having picked up the game in the SAF mainly because of Sembawang Country Club, membership of which was made easy for serving SAF personnel. Among those who were transferred to the RSAF as pilots, none are still flying with SIA, which accepted and converted the fixed wing pilots when they were no longer qualified for operational jets.

The First Batch organised get-togethers for the fifth and tenth anniversaries of its commissioning, while the vast majority were still in service. Since 1995, it has been a practice to try and organise an annual dinner on the anniversary of the commissioning and the Temasek Club is the venue of choice because Swee Boon Chai became the General Manager after he retired from active service and still manages to keep his connections warm. A viable number turn up each year and Tiger Hong and all the instructors of 'A' Company are automatic guests, with Brigadier (RET) Kirpa Ram Vij as Guest of Honour. Old friends from the SAF, especially Lim Choon Mong, who was the original point of contact for their recruitment and whose birthday falls on 17th July, are also sought and welcomed. This book

was one of the outcomes of these anniversary functions, largely inspired by LTC (RET) Leslie Terh's *Sons and Officers. Life at Prestigious Military College*.

But, there was also a more compelling reason for the book. When it was known that Timothy was going to retire, members of the First Batch proposed organising a collective farewell from the SAF, as it would also mark the end of the millennium. The intention was to hold a grand function in SAFTI Military Institute with a state-level guest list. Obviously MINDEF had to be consulted about its feasibility and indeed its propriety. But, when the appointed First Batch representative broached the subject he was asked: "Excuse me. What is the First Batch?" The idea of the farewell function was accordingly dropped and it was agreed that a collective record of the training of the First Batch would be a more meaningful alternative.

Endnotes

- 1. The process of distributing National Servicemen in company intakes to each battalion was later changed into what became known as 'mono-intake' where up to three battalions at a time would get all the Infantry recruits for that intake and train them through the whole cycle, thereby allowing for the release of each battalion as one cohort collectively into the reserves. The system was subject to other modifications over time.*



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VOLUNTEER FORCES IN SINGAPORE

I. INTRODUCTION

In compiling this account, the Editorial Committee made extensive use of Captain T. M. Winsley's *A History of The Singapore Volunteer Corps 1854 – 1937, being also A Historical Outline of Volunteering in Malaya*, Singapore, Government Printing Office, 1938.

When the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps (SVRC) introduced Volunteer military service to Singapore in 1854, it was exclusively for and by expatriate Europeans. Its primary role was to supplement police resources to protect the expatriates from 'native' violence but it also undertook to resist the invasion of a foreign foe.¹ During WWI, by which time the Volunteer movement had been extended to locals in the Straits Settlements as well as the federated and unfederated states of the Malayan peninsula, legislation was formally passed to draft Volunteers in times of war. The Volunteers played a significant role during WWII in operations against the Japanese. The formal co-optation of the Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC) to train conscripts after the Colonial Government introduced National Service in Singapore in 1954, completed the process of integrating the Volunteers fully into the national security role. Thus, on expulsion from Malaysia in 1965, the Volunteers in the shape of the People's Defence Force (PDF) had at least an equal claim with the regular battalions—1 and 2 SIR—to being the forebears of the SAF. As such, an account of the origins of the SAF would benefit from a quick summary of the history of the Volunteers.

However, while the Volunteer movement in Singapore definitively began in 1954, and survived in one form or another, it did not have an unbroken lineage in terms of corps of service or orientation all the way back to 1854. It went through several metamorphoses leading eventually to the configuration of the 101 and 106 PDF battalions and their reservist spin-offs, 102, 103, 104, 105, and 107 PDF battalions.

In 2014, a Committee to Strengthen National Service, chaired by Dr. Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence, decided to re-introduce volunteer military service to promote national commitment to the military defence of Singapore by opening up volunteer service to those who did not have NS Commitments namely female Singaporeans, New Citizens and first generation Permanent Residents. The Singapore Armed Forces Volunteer Corps (SAFVC) was formed in February 2015. SAFVC Volunteers (SVs) would attend a two-week Basic Training Course and an additional one-week Qualification Course before they are called up for typically seven days a year to serve alongside our NS and active servicemen in a supporting capacity. SVs could serve in a variety of roles such as Auxiliary Security Trooper, Infomedia Staff, Medical Trainers, Maritime Trainers,

Defence Psychologists, Bridge Watchkeepers, Legal Specialist Staff, Airbase Civil Engineer, Naval Safety Engineer, Naval Combat/Platform Systems Engineer and Command, Control, Communications and Computers Experts. Training began in March 2015 and since its inception, had received over 1,000 applicants.

Given this development, the history of the Volunteers in Singapore remains a work in progress. But as of now the history of the Volunteers can be broadly divided into four stages. The first was when, endorsed by the authorities, they were inaugurated as a private corps strictly for Europeans, to complement police and military resources in the event of civil disorder. The second was the formalisation of the movement through legislation in the same capacity. Thirdly, its conversion from a rifle corps to an Artillery formation and fourthly, its reconstitution as a multi-service, multi-ethnic, though racially segregated movement which set the stage for full local participation as well as expansion of the Volunteer movement to other Straits Settlements and the states of peninsular Malaya. The movement continued to develop further thereafter, through the tumultuous years of the 20th Century until it became a part, respectively, of the armed services of both the confederation of Malaysia and an independent Singapore.

II. THE PRIVATE CORPS

Riots by members of the Chinese community in 1846 prompted the European expatriates in Singapore to consider raising a Volunteer militia, but no action was taken. The proposal was historic because, had it been raised, it would have been the first Volunteer force in the British Empire, including Great Britain, where the first Volunteer movement was instituted in 1859. In the event, when the SVRC was formed in 1854, it was historically the first in the British Empire anyway, if militias rallying to the opposing sides in the Civil War in England were discounted. However, Britons had enrolled in a Volunteer corps called the International Volunteer Corps in the Shanghai International Settlement in 1853 and even conducted operations on 4th April, 1854, in the Battle of Muddy Flat. But as the members of the corps had been drawn from various nationalities, it was not regarded as a British institution.²

Chinese inter-community riots broke out again in Singapore in 1854, this time more seriously, leaving behind several deaths and much damage to property. The immediate cause had been a quarrel over the actual quantity of a 'kati' of rice but the root causes were communal problems in China that tended to spill over to Singapore. On 8th July, 1854, following a well-attended Europeans-only meeting chaired by one John Purvis, a proposal for a Volunteer corps was submitted to the Governor, Colonel W. J. Butterworth with 61 signatures. The Governor General in India had apparently initiated the proposal, thereby ensuring Butterworth's concurrence.³ The mission of the corps was to assist the police in internal security and to resist foreign invasion. Butterworth was requested to set out rules and regulations for the corps.⁴ The corps was inaugurated later that year as the

SVRC, but only as a private organisation at this stage. However, the Governor became its first Colonel and Captain Ronald Macpherson of the Madras Artillery (later Colonel and also the first Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements) its first Commandant.⁵

III. LEGISLATION

On 14th February, 1857, the SVRC was presented with a set of colours prepared by Mrs. Butterworth, widow of the late Governor.⁶ On 24th June, 1857, the Singapore Volunteer Rifles Rules and Regulations were proposed and further amended and adopted subsequently at meetings held on 15th July, 22nd August and 28th September, which provided for its structure, participation, membership and promotion criteria, training schedules and financial management. 1857 also saw the transformation of the SVRC from a private body to a public institution, when the Legislative Council of India passed an act dated 18th July “to provide for the good order and discipline of certain Volunteer Corps and to invest them with certain powers.”⁷ The act brought the SVRC within the ambit of the military regulations currently in effect. On 26th November, 1860, Governor Orfeur Cavenagh officiated at a parade of the SVRC where it was accorded the right to use the motto “Primus in Indis” as the first Volunteer corps to be “enrolled in India.”⁸ It is believed that Cavenagh himself coined the motto.

In April 1867, the Straits Settlements was transferred from the East India Company to the Colonial Office. This did not produce any improvement in the management of their internal or external security by the authorities though there was considerable public debate about the defence of Singapore from external threats. Such debates did not translate into any concerted response among the Volunteers, perhaps because little had been done to integrate them in defence measures against external threats to the colony. As was evidenced throughout the history of the Corps, enthusiasm waxed and waned periodically. One striking example was when the SVRC formed a half-battery of Field Artillery in 1868 with a loan of two 12-pounder howitzers, but closed it down in 1875 due to declining interest.⁹ On the other hand, the replacement of the old Enfield rifle in 1869 by the shorter Snider carbine, created new interest and attracted more Volunteers, who enjoyed range practices at the 400-yard Race Course Range, later Farrer Park, where some snipe shooting was also possible in those days.¹⁰

IV. FROM RIFLES TO GUNS

For several years after they were formed, the SVRC drilled at the Volunteer Depot in North Bridge Road, next to the HQ of the European Police Force.¹¹ The SVRC participated in ceremonies and supported the Police and the Fire Brigade. It remained a predominantly European ‘club’ which initially included Eurasians. But, the Eurasians dropped out when the European population increased and entrenched itself as an exclusive upper crust. An extended period of relative internal stability in Singapore and peace worldwide did not offer much scope for the Volunteers to project their indispensability to the Colonial Government, and

participation was tepid. By 1887, the SVRC had dwindled to a half-company.¹² At this point, Mr. W.G. St. Clair, the editor of the Singapore Free Press, persuaded the authorities to consider reconstituting the SVRC as an artillery corps. He argued that as guns had been emplaced in many of the 'forts' which formed the defences of Singapore, artillery Volunteers could complement the regular gunners. At the same time, interest could be kept up since the guns were available for drilling and the occasional firing. The SVRC was accordingly disbanded on 16th December, 1887 and a committee set up to create an artillery corps.¹³ On 22nd February, 1888, the Singapore Volunteer Artillery or SVA was formed with 96 members. The Volunteers' motto was changed at this point from 'Primus in Indis' to 'In Oriente Primus' (First in the East).¹⁴

The SVA was well received and injected new life into the Volunteer movement. It was commanded by Major H.E. McCallum, ex-Royal Engineers, until 1897 when he was sent to Lagos as its Governor. St. Clair himself joined the SVA and while resisting advancement in rank, continued to push things along to the extent that he was thought of as the 'Father of the Corps'. Gun drills were carried out with 7-inch rifled muzzle-loaders at Fort Siloso (Blakang Mati/Sentosa Island) and Mount Palmer (beside Telok Ayer Basin overlooking the Eastern Entrance to Keppel Harbour), and 8-inch breech-loaders at Fort Tanjong Katong (Katong Park). The Mount Palmer guns were later transferred to Fort Fullerton. The first SVA camp was held over Easter 1888 at Blakang Mati.¹⁵ There was no proper drill hall and routine drills took place at the Town Hall, which was later reconstructed as the Victoria Memorial Hall and subsequently as the Victoria Concert Hall,¹⁶ while the SVA General Committee met monthly at the Singapore Cricket Pavilion, now Singapore Cricket Club. On 26th October, 1888, previous Volunteer ordinances were repealed and replaced by the Volunteer Ordinance, 1888. In 1889, money was raised from the public for four Maxim Machine Guns. Mr. Cheang Hong Lim donated \$2,500 for one entire gun. This was an ironic turn of events since the SVRC had begun in 1854 to help quell Chinese riots, but it marked a turning point of sorts in that the Chinese population of Singapore was becoming more self-confident and their commercial success made them worth courting as respectable citizens. The four guns arrived on 4th April, 1891 and the resulting Maxim Gun Company of the SVA was the first such company in the British forces, regular or auxiliary.¹⁷ In 1892, McCallum and later, St. Clair, now Lieutenant, proceeded to Pahang, West Malaysia, to lead some local troops in quelling a minor revolt there, thereby earning the SVA the distinction of participating in an actual military operation for the first time, as they chose to wear the SVA uniform on the occasion.¹⁸ In the meantime, the SVA had begun to look established enough to warrant the construction of a proper drill hall. In early 1890, McCallum, who was also Executive Engineer of the Straits Settlements Public Works Department, designed and supervised the construction of a simple utilitarian Volunteer Drill Hall at the site of Fort Fullerton,¹⁹ approximately at the old location of the Merlion. This phase of the Corps came to a close at the very beginning of the 20th Century.



*Drill Hall, SVC Beach Road.**



*HQ of the Chinese Company, SVC, at Beach Road.**



*HQ of the Malay Company, SVC (Old Jail at Bras Basah Road).**

**Photos courtesy of Government Printing Office, Singapore.*

V. TAKEOFF

The fourth major phase of the Corps—the first three being the private SVRC from 1854 to 1857, the gazetted one from 1857 to 1887 and the SVA in 1888—could be said to have begun with the addition of a rifle unit in 1900 in response to requests from certain quarters of the resident European population who preferred a non-artillery service. By now, St. Clair had become the Acting Commander of the SVA with the rank of Major. He refused to be confirmed in the appointment, nominating instead Major A. Murray, who had just been appointed from Ceylon as the Colonial Engineer. St. Clair, however, organised and equipped two rifle companies, designated the Singapore Volunteer Rifles, which he handed over to Murray when the latter assumed command.²⁰ It proved to be the beachhead for units of other arms. An SVA Bearer Section (precursor to the Field Ambulance unit) was formed on 27th April, 1901. A more significant development was the creation of a Chinese infantry company in November 1901, arising from a meeting in London of Mr. Tan Jiak Kim, a leading citizen, with Lord Onslow, Under-Secretary of State for Colonies. Among its original members were Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Mr. Song Ong Siang (later Sir), his brother Mr. Song Ong Joo and Mr. Tan Soo Bin (son of Jiak Kim and later, the first Chinese to be promoted to the rank of Major in the Volunteers).²¹ 1901 also saw the revival of Eurasian Volunteer activities in the shape of an infantry company (disbanded in February 1909 due to depletion, only to be reconstituted in July 1918). Yet another new category of Volunteers came with the Singapore Volunteer Engineers in December 1901. The incorporation of non-artillery units resulted in re-designating the Corps as the Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC).

Another notable event was that a Cadet Corps was formed at Raffles Institution in 1902 and attached to the SVC. St. Joseph's Institution and Anglo-Chinese School followed in 1906. The idea had been that the cadets would feed into the SVC, but it failed to take off and in 1918, the Cadet Corps were de-linked from the SVC.²²

VI. WORLD WAR 1

This fourth phase of the Corps' history proved eventful. Whereas the Boer War during the closing years of the nineteenth century stoked a heightened interest in enrolment among the British expatriates, which came to nothing, the World War of 1914 to 1918 dragged the Volunteers into unique operational situations. The SVC was mobilised in August 1914 and turned out 450 personnel. Though it is now not clear from where the personnel came from, a cyclist company of one cyclist section and one motorcyclist section was formed, while the bearer section was reconstituted into the Singapore Field Ambulance Company. The terms of the mobilisation included deployment for installation security and being on call. To beef up strength, the Volunteer Rifles, which had to be disbanded in 1903, was re-formed and the Veterans' Company was created, bringing the SVC strength to 687.²³

When the German commerce-raider Emden was sunk by HMAS Sydney off Cocos Island on 9th November, 1914, several German prisoners of war were sent to Tanglin Detention Barracks. This factored in the Sepoy Mutiny commencing 15th February, 1915, in which 35 Europeans and 5 Malays were killed and 11 Europeans wounded. Among other reasons for the mutiny was the fact that the 5th Battalion, Bengal Light Infantry, which included many Bengali Muslim soldiers, was being shipped out of Singapore. The battalion was in a poor state of discipline under an incompetent Commanding Officer and rumours had been deliberately spread that it was being shipped out to the main theatre of war for operations against Muslim Ottoman Turks. The mutineers were all Muslim. In fact, they were being sent to Hong Kong to replace British troops who were being redeployed and the troublemakers were, among other dubious concerns, trying to safeguard private financial operations that were rife among the Sepoys.²⁴ The mutineers raided Tanglin Detention Barracks and released most of the prisoners, leading to speculation that a German agent was involved in plotting the mutiny, Germany being one of the belligerent powers against Britain in the war. Martial Law was proclaimed and any SVC member who could be spared from installation duties and others not on duty, reported to the Drill Hall.²⁵ The Volunteers played a major role in quelling the mutiny but suffered 10 deaths and 4 wounded, including 2 officers. On 25th March, the SVA Maxim Company and the Singapore Volunteer Rifles, under Captain H. Tongue provided a firing party of 110 men for the execution of 22 mutineers out of the 41 sentenced to death by summary courts martial.²⁶

During this period, there were a slew of legislations to cope with the actual and potential manpower demands from among expatriate British citizens in the colonies for the war in Europe, such as the Reserve Force and Civil Guard Amendment Ordinance of 1916 and Civil Volunteer Amendment Ordinance of 1917.²⁷ The former allowed the General Officer Commanding to draft Volunteers as reserves and train them; the latter required compulsory parades of the Volunteers. But, the most significant legislation to be passed during this period was the Reserve Force and Civil Guard Ordinance of 16th August, 1915, as a direct result of the Mutiny. It was the first law passed in any British colony imposing compulsory local Military Service. Under it, all male British nationals between the ages of 18 and 55, not already in the forces, including Volunteer and Police, were required to undergo military training. Those between 18 and 40 could be transferred to the SVC, while those above 40 could be enrolled as a Civil Guard. This legislation brought the strength of the SVC to a record 1,379 at the end of 1915. Rather belatedly, a medical classification ordinance was also passed in 1918 for all European British subjects with the prospect of compulsory enlistment for 'Class A' personnel.

In the meantime, beginning with the formation of the Penang Volunteers in 1899, various Volunteer units had been set up in other parts of Malaya. In 1895, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang had agreed a treaty to form the Federated Malay States. In 1902, the Malay States Volunteer Rifles was formed within the FMS. In October 1901, Malacca, as part of the Straits Settlements, also set up a Malacca Company of 47 British subjects,

affiliated to the SVC, only to be disbanded in 1906. But, it was resuscitated as an independent corps in August 1915 with the designation of Malacca Volunteer Rifles. Over December and May, the following year, a Field Ambulance Section, a half-company of Chinese and a half-company of Malays were formed in Singapore. In November 1915, the Province Wellesley Volunteer Rifles comprising only Europeans was formed. In addition to the Malay States Volunteer Rifles, Malayan Volunteer Infantry units were formed in the FMS: Perak, March 1915; Selangor, 1915-1916; Pahang, April 1916; Negri Sembilan, September 1916.²⁸

Volunteer forces had also sprung up in the unfederated Malay States. The Kedah Volunteers was formed in August 1914; in Kelantan, two companies of Special Constables, also enrolled in August 1914, became the Kelantan Volunteer Rifles in August 1917; the Johor Volunteer Rifles was formed in October 1914.²⁹

The motivation for this surge in Volunteer activities was unquestionably the world war atmosphere. At the outbreak of the war in 1914, only three Volunteer Corps existed in Malaya—the SVC, the Penang Volunteers and the Malay States Volunteer Rifles. By the end of the war in 1918, there were many more—Malacca Volunteer Rifles, Province Wellesley Volunteer Rifles, Malayan Volunteer Infantry, Johor Volunteer Rifles, Kelantan Volunteer Rifles and a small detachment formed by Europeans in 1915 from the Labuan administrative district of Singapore, which came under the SVC.

At the end of 1921, the Volunteer forces in the Straits Settlements were centralised under the Volunteer Ordinance of 1921 dated 16th December. All commissions were ‘called in’ and the four corps—Singapore Volunteer Corps, the combined Penang and Province Wellesley Volunteer Corps and the Malacca Volunteer Corps were re-designated the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force or SSVF. Each corps consisted of Colour Service Volunteers, Reserve Service Volunteers and Auxiliary Service Volunteers. The Reserves were a pool of trained personnel while the Auxiliaries filled non-combat and administrative appointments.³⁰

VII. LEAD-UP TO WAR WORLD II

1922 opened a fifth phase for the Volunteers. It would eventually dump them unceremoniously into real battle against a savage enemy. Despite early recognition by London that war with Japan was highly likely and that the outcome would hinge on retaining possession of Singapore, the War Office and the governments of the day in Britain just could not get their acts together, dooming the Volunteers in Malaya and the Straits Settlements from the very start. Yet, it would also be their finest hour.

Lieutenant-Colonel F.E. Spencer, DSO, M.C., Royal Artillery, had been appointed the first Commandant, SSVF when it was formed in 1921 and was concurrently Officer Commanding SVC, with each constituent corps still retaining its local name. Once again, recruitment was

opened and many of the original members re-enlisted. The role of the SSVF was definitively stipulated as primarily internal security and secondly, assistance to, or relief of, the regular garrison in case of external aggression.³¹

The SVC acquired a Scottish Company in 1922 when enough Scots joined. In February 1922, King George V approved the grant of the title 'Royal' to the SVA and the SVE (Field Engineers). This brought about a re-designation of these units as the Singapore Royal Artillery (Volunteers) or SRA (v) and the Singapore Royal Engineers (Volunteers) or SRE (v). However, there is a confusing note in *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps 1854 – 1937* that the Engineers were first given the warrant in 1902, which was the year of their formation itself.³²

Several organisational structures were tried out over the years for the SVC and the other Straits Settlements corps. In particular, the SRA (v) units variously operated Maxim, Vickers and Lewis machine guns, 4.5 inch field howitzers, 3.7 inch mountain howitzers and in 1933, the 3 inch (20 cwt) anti-aircraft gun. Additional units included a Defence Electric Light Unit (Auxiliaries), originally formed from the Malay Volunteers in 1919, which evolved into the SRE (v) Fortress Company and an Asiatic Signal Unit; an Intelligence Platoon (1926) as part of the cyclist unit; the Eurasian Infantry Company incorporated a band; following experiments from 1927 with a Morris six-wheeler, an Armoured Car Section was set up in 1931 when the Singapore Harbour Board configured a body for a 4-ton, six-wheel Albion lorry. There also appeared in 1930 a Traffic Control Section which became a Provost Section in 1937. The biggest structural change came in 1928 when the infantry units were regrouped into the 1st Battalion and 2nd Battalion SSVF. The 1st Battalion included all the European companies and the Eurasian Company; the 2nd Battalion (under-strength) included the Chinese and Malay companies, plus a Eurasian Machine Gun Platoon. At the end of 1934, command of 'D' Company of the 1st Battalion, which was the Eurasian Company, was given



Volunteer Air Force ground elements at Seletar Camp.

to Captain H.R.S. Zehnder and the 'E' Company of the 2nd Battalion to Captain Tan Soo Bin, promoted Major on his transfer soon after to the Reserve, the first Asian Volunteer to achieve this rank. Tan was replaced by Captain Wong Siew Yuen, who was also promoted Major while holding the appointment, thereby being the first Asian to hold actual command with this rank.³³

Training and administrative facilities were gradually upgraded. The Drill Hall that McCallum had built in 1890 beside Fort Fullerton had been dismantled at the end of 1907 and set up again in reclaimed land at Beach Road, adjoining the Chinese Volunteer Club, in January 1908.³⁴ On 2nd February, 1927, the Eurasian Volunteer HQ and Club was opened in the SVC grounds in Beach Road.³⁵ On 8th March, 1932, the Governor, Sir Cecil Clementi Smith laid the foundation stone for a permanent Volunteer Corps HQ, although work had been going on for over a year. The HQ was completed and operational by October 1932, the old Drill Hall having been already demolished.³⁶ The Governor officially opened the HQ on 4th March, 1933.³⁷ The Volunteers began using the Seletar Rifle Range in 1923, relegating the Balestier Range for 30 yard shoots;³⁸ On 21st June, 1924, the Bukit Timah Range had become available³⁹ and in February 1933, the Miniature Range had been opened in the Beach Road HQ.⁴⁰ Another important facility made available to the Volunteers was a permanent Volunteer Camp, built by the Government on the coast at Telok Paku in 1937, superseding the semi-permanent one at Siglap on loan from Mr. Julian Frankel.⁴¹

The Volunteers, up to then, were represented only by land forces. A Straits Settlements Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve was set up under the Naval Volunteer Reserve Ordinance, 1934. A retired naval officer, Commander L.A.W. Johnson was appointed Commanding Officer with an establishment of 50 Officers and 200 Malay ratings. On 18th June, 1935, the SSRNVR was presented with HMS Laburnum, a Flower class frigate, for use as HQ and drill ship. In 1937, HMS Panglima, a 23-meter wooden hulled motor launch armed with a single manual 40mm Bofors gun was added as a training ship.⁴²

The Volunteer Air Force Ordinance, 1936 initiated the Straits Settlements Volunteer Air Force (SSVAF) under Squadron Leader D.S.E. Vines. The force was raised in Seletar Air Base with the enthusiastic support of the Royal Singapore Flying Club. Not much is known about the development of the SSVAF, but, as war with Japan became seemingly unavoidable, anecdotal and photographic evidence suggests that many non-European locals were enlisted for airport security, anti-aircraft weapons training and crew of the RAF squadrons based in Singapore.⁴³ In 1939, the Air Force Volunteers were centralised as the Malayan Volunteer Air Force.⁴⁴

Just before the Japanese invasion of Malaya, the Volunteer land forces in Singapore alone comprised two battalions worth of infantry, the Singapore Royal Artillery, the Singapore Royal Engineers (comprising a field (combat) company and a searchlight company), the Singapore Fortress Signal Company, the Singapore Armoured Car Company, the Singapore Field Ambulance, the Singapore Bomb Disposal Section and the Singapore Pay Section. These were

placed under the Singapore Fortress Command. Training was geared to preventing sea-borne landings, weapon handling, construction of defences, section leading and street fighting.⁴⁵

VIII. THE VOLUNTEERS IN WORLD WAR II

All Volunteer forces were mobilised on 1st December, 1941, as there were strong indications that the Japanese were about to strike, which they did at Singora and Patani in Siam (Thailand) on 8th December. The Volunteers reported to their respective concentration areas and were redeployed to their defence sectors. Every unit suffered heavy casualties in the battle for Singapore. For the Singapore Volunteers as a whole, it was mostly a matter of following the grim news of the Japanese advance down the peninsula at an alarming rate towards Singapore and brief bloody encounters on the island itself when the Japanese crossed the Straits of Johor. The SSVAF, however, did daily reconnaissance patrols in their defenceless and miscellaneous collection of light aircraft from temporary runways in Malaya and aerodromes in Singapore.⁴⁶

The Volunteer Navy probably had the hottest time of it. In 1941, the SSRNVR had become the Singapore Division of the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. With the sinking of the battleship, Prince of Wales and the battle cruiser Repulse on 10th December, the RN in the theatre comprised of some one hundred minesweepers and patrol craft under the operational command of Captain, Auxiliary Vessels and manned significantly by the SSRNVR and, separately, the so-called 'Malay Navy'.⁴⁷ On 13th February, 1942, the Laburnum was sunk. However, the Volunteers and the 'Malay Navy' were able to carry out major evacuation operations. Sixty-one ships manned by the Volunteers got through to Sumatra and Java and on to Australia and Colombo. But, an encounter with Japanese warships off Banka cost the Volunteers 173 officers and ratings of whom 53 were known killed and the rest missing in action. In addition, sometime in February, Panglima was sunk while evacuating military personnel to Australia.⁴⁸

With the surrender to the Japanese on 15th February, 1942, while some dispersed as ordered, many were identified and subjected to atrocious treatment as prisoners of war by the Japanese in Changi prison and the Siam 'Death Railway'. Many Chinese Volunteers who fell into the hands of the dreaded Kempeitei (Japanese Military Police) were lost without a trace. The Volunteers who escaped spent the rest of the Japanese occupation playing cat-and-mouse with the Japanese while some joined the Force 136 resistance movement in the jungles of Malaya.

It can be truly said of the Volunteers in Malaya and the Straits Settlements that they kept the faith.

IX. AFTER THE WAR

Many Volunteers who survived the Japanese occupation had the satisfaction of watching Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten receive the Japanese surrender at the Padang in front of City Hall, Singapore, on 12th September, 1945. The Singapore Volunteer Corps was formally disbanded in June 1946. All ranks received arrears in pay. However, the spirit continued to flourish. In 1947, the MRNVR was reformed under Commander—later Captain—F.E.W. Lammert and regular parades resumed at Beach Road. In 1948, some ex-Volunteers met under the leadership of one Lieutenant-Colonel Watson Hyatt to revive the Singapore Volunteer Corps. In mid-1950, the Singapore Wing of the Malayan Auxiliary Air Force was formed, bringing all three Volunteer forces back into existence.

Land Forces.

Following the meeting at Beach Road with Lieutenant-Colonel Hyatt, it was agreed to re-establish the Corps on integrated multi-racial lines. Recruitment began in 1949 and response was overwhelming. Everyone looked forward to celebrating the Corps centenary in 1954. On the occasion, the Governor presented the Corps with its new Colours to replace the missing one presented in 1934, which in turn had replaced the first Colours presented to the SVRC in 1857. In 1954, the Corps boasted a Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, the Singapore Royal Artillery, the Armoured Car Squadron, the Coastal Battery, the Fire Command Battery, the Field Engineer Squadron, the Signal Squadron, the 1st Infantry Battalion, SVC, the General Transport Company of the Singapore Army Service Corps and the Singapore Women's Auxiliary Corps.⁴⁹



People's Defence Force contingent at the National Day Parade.

Altogether, there were 74 Officers and 1,000 other ranks.⁵⁰ However, Singapore's first National Service Ordinance (part-time, limited by ballot and effective July 1954) was passed in 1952. As the Ordinance vested the SVC with the responsibility of training the recruits, the Volunteer title became an anomaly. The National Service Ordinance accordingly provided for the Corps to be known as the Singapore Military Forces (SMF) from July 1954 when the first 400 National Service recruits reported for training. The Infantry battalion undertook the basic training conducted over two hours on two evenings a week for five months, which was reinforced by monthly weekend camps. The servicemen were then posted to various units in the SMF. The National Service scheme proved totally unpopular as it amounted to conscription by a colonial power. It was abandoned in 1956, leading in 1957 to the creation of Singapore's first indigenous regular military unit, 1st Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment, which co-existed with the Volunteer Corps as a part of the SMF.

When Singapore merged with Malaysia on 16th September, 1963, the Volunteer Corps and the Singapore Infantry Regiment, now including 2 SIR, which had been formed in 1962, came under command of the Malaysian Ministry of Defence.

Naval Forces

In April 1947, after the Singapore Division of the MRNVR was re-formed, regular parades were held at Beach Road. In September 1948, a 90-foot motor vessel built for the Royal Navy in 1944 for fisheries patrol was presented to the Singapore Government to replace the first Panglima as a training ship. It was armed only with a 20mm gun forward and it was phased out in the early 1950s. It was replaced by a third Panglima, a 35.7 metre Ford Class large patrol



Singapore Naval Volunteer Force, then known as PDF (Sea).

craft built locally by Vosper Thornycroft in 1956. It was launched by Lady Gimson, wife of the Governor, Sir Franklin Gimson. Meanwhile, on 27th January, 1951, after modification and refit, a former 1,890-ton Japanese minelayer, *Wakataka*, built in 1942, was presented to the Singapore Government as the second HMS *Laburnum*. She was berthed at Telok Ayer Basin and became the headquarters of the MRNVR. Her propellers and rudder had been removed and she had to be towed to and from the yards for refitting. MAJ (RET) R. V. Simon of the Republic of Singapore Navy recalls that the Singapore Division also possessed HMS *Panji*, a motor launch used for ship-handling training and HMS *Canna*, a logistics-cum-workshop vessel.⁵¹ As it was unlikely that these two vessels could have survived the Japanese occupation of Singapore, they were probably acquired after the war. HMS *Panji* was reported to have been transferred to Malaysian service but not to have reverted to Singapore after separation, while there was no record of HMS *Canna*'s fate either before or after the Malaysian interregnum.

In the meantime, Malaya had become independent as the Federation of Malaya (31st August, 1957) and the Singapore Naval Volunteers had reverted to the SRNVR, the Straits Settlements having ceased to exist with the incorporation into the Federation of Malaya of Penang and Malacca. The 'Malay Navy' had become the core of the RMN, which was based in Kapal Di Raja (KD), Malaya in Woodlands, Singapore. RMN also maintained its own Volunteer Reserve, the RMNVR.

In 1962, the Singapore Women's Auxiliary Naval Service (SWANS) was created. On 16th September, 1963, with the creation of Malaysia, all Singapore naval Volunteers were transferred from the Royal Navy to Royal Malaysian Navy, becoming the Singapore Division of the RMNVR. All its ships bore the prefix KD. The Singapore Division plus one officer and 17 ratings from the SWANS was called up with other RMNVR divisions—Selangor and Penang—for operations against Indonesian Konfrontasi.

On separation from Malaysia on 9th August, 1965, the Singapore Division of the RMNVR reverted to Singapore. On 1st January, 1966, these assets were renamed the Singapore Naval Volunteer Force or SNVF and placed directly under MID, charged with Singapore's seaward defence and anti-smuggling operations. The prefixes for the ships changed to Republic of Singapore Ship or RSS. *Laburnum* was renamed *Singapura*, but *Panglima* retained its name.⁵² The SNVF also acquired RSS *Bedok*, a 40-foot ex-Police patrol boat. For a brief interval, the naval Volunteers were called People's Defence Force – Sea, but in September 1967, it was renamed the Sea Defence Command. Around this time, the *Singapura* being difficult to maintain, was sold for scrap. The Sea Defence Command also relocated from Telok Ayer Basin to Blakang Mati (Sentosa Island). On 1st December, 1968, the Sea Defence Command was renamed Maritime Command. On 24th January, 1974, the Maritime Command moved again, this time to the newly completed Naval Base at Pulau Brani. But, by now, the Volunteer Navy had become a combined regular and National Service force, which on 1st April, 1975, became an independent service named Republic of Singapore Navy.⁵³

Air Force

In mid-1950, Singapore's contribution to the pre-war MAAF was revived as the Singapore Wing of the MAAF. Pilot training for single-engine aircraft and fighter control training was available under RAF trainers. Europeans dominated the membership but between 1955 and 1958, five Singaporeans won their wings. Initially, the Wing HQ was at Beach Road Camp while pilot training was carried out at Tengah and fighter control training at Changi. For a while, Spitfire fighters were available for training but they were phased out, as were the Tiger Moths and Harvards, in favour of the Chipmunk T 10. Pilot training was relocated to Seletar in 1958. The Wing had about 300 officers and men, who put in four sessions a week with two weekdays from 1730 hrs to 2030 hrs, Saturdays from 1400 hrs to 1900 hrs and Sundays from 0800 hrs to 1400 hrs. During the Malayan Emergency, the Wing participated in anti-terrorist operations in Johor, which included terrorist camp spotting, leaflet drops and anti-infiltration reconnaissance up the east and west coast of Malay and around Singapore Island. The wing moved its HQ to Kallang in 1957 where simulated fighter interception, Link training and a proper parade ground were available. Fighter interception training was conducted at the Fighter Control Unit in Changi and 12 officers eventually qualified as controllers. The Wing also occasionally deployed in air bases in Malaya. With the end of the Malayan Emergency, the Wing was disbanded in 1960.⁵⁴ As such, unlike the land forces and the navy, the air force Volunteers had no immediate link with the air force of independent Singapore when the latter was formed.

Endnotes

1. Buckley 1965, p. 607
2. Winsley 1938, p. 2
3. Buckley 1965, p. 607
4. *ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
5. Winsley 1938, p. 4
6. *ibid.*, p. 5
7. *ibid.*, p. 6
8. Buckley 1965, p. 682.
9. Winsley 1938, p. 11
10. Winsley 1938, p. 14. *This range was abandoned in 1878 because it was too short, and the "old" Artillery Range at Balestier was taken over and served as the Volunteer Rifle Range until 1922 when the Government closed it down in the interest of public safety.*
11. *ibid.*, p.13
12. *ibid.*, p.19
13. *ibid.*, p.20
14. *ibid.*, p.22
15. *ibid.*, p.26
16. Liu 1996, pp. 45-48
17. Winsley 1938, pp. 23-31
18. *ibid.*, p. 35

19. *ibid.*, p. 29
20. *ibid.*, p. 43
21. *ibid.*, p. 43
22. *ibid.*, pp. 56-57
23. *ibid.*, p. 59
24. Murfett, *et. al.*, 1999, pp.125-138
25. Winsley 1938, p. 64
26. *ibid.*, p.65
27. *ibid.*, p.77-84
28. *ibid.*, p.82
29. *ibid.*, p.60
30. *ibid.*, p.84
31. *ibid.*, p.88
32. *ibid.*, p.49 Probably a misprint that should read 1922
33. *ibid.*, p.118
34. *ibid.*, p.54
35. *ibid.*, p.99
36. *ibid.*, p.110
37. *ibid.*, p.111
38. *ibid.*, p.92
39. *ibid.*, p.95
40. *ibid.*, p.113
41. *ibid.*, p. 124
42. Interview with MAJ (RET) R.V. Simon, RSN, on 29 Mar 2003.
43. Interview with Sekhara Varma, Rajah of Palakkad, June 2004.
44. *Our Security. Keselamatan Kita 1969. p. 15*
45. *ibid.*, pp. 11-12
46. Interview with Sekhara Varma, *op. cit.*
47. *Our Security. Keselamatan Kita 1969. p. 13. When the SSRNVR had been called up for full time service in 1939, the Royal Navy had also separately initiated the raising of a Malay Section as a part of its regular service; officers were loaned from the Admiralty and all the ratings were Malays, recruited mainly into the Seaman and Communications branches for service in minesweepers and patrol craft.*
48. *ibid.*, p. 13
49. *ibid.*, p. 12
50. *The Singapore Armed Forces, p. 37*
51. Interview with MAJ (RET) R.V. Simon, RSN, *op. cit.*
52. *Our Security. Keselamatan Kita, p. 14*
53. *MINDEF Records*
54. *Our security. Keselamatan Kita, pp. 15-16*

MEMORIES OF THE FIRST INSTRUCTORS' PREPARATORY TRAINING IN FEBRUARY, 1966

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a first-hand account by COL (RET) Goh Lye Choon, then Lieutenant, who attended an instructor's preparatory course in February 1966 to qualify as a trainer for the first intake of enlistees posted to SAFTI. This essay won the third prize in the 2015 story and essay writing competition conducted by the Singapore Armed Forces Veterans League (SAFVL) and is published by courtesy of the author and the SAFVL.

II. BACKGROUND

My military service began as an Officer Cadet with the Singapore Military Forces (SMF) in December 1961. I graduated from the Federation Military College (FMC) on 8th December, 1963 at Sungei Besi, Selangor, Malaya. This was followed by a stint in the Malaysian Armed Forces when Singapore became part of Malaysia from 16th September, 1963 to 9th August, 1965. During this period, I was with the regular 2nd Singapore Infantry Regiment (2 SIR) with operational duties in Singapore, managing internal security and protection of waterworks at Pulau and racial riots in 1964. In Johore, I was involved in anti-terrorist operations at Kota Tinggi, the East Coast, Tanjong Lompat and Pontian and Pergagau/Semprona/Sebatik Island in Sabah. My unit also conducted search and destroy operations at Tawau. When Singapore left Malaysia on 9th August, 1965, most of the Singapore military personnel returned to Singapore to help form the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

Though Singapore had left Malaysia, Dr Goh Keng Swee, then Minister for the Interior and Defence, wanted 2 SIR to complete its operational obligation in Sabah from October 1965 to February 1966. He wanted to take this opportunity for personnel from 2 SIR to gain operational experiences. He even paid a visit to the unit in Sebatik Island and at my defence location in Bergosong. He boosted the soldiers' morale when he gave instructions to double the ration allowance for all the troops in the defence frontline. In early February 1966, 2 SIR completed its mission in Sabah and the troops were on the way home by sea. At the time, I was the Battalion Intelligence Officer and had returned to Singapore with other operational staff on a Malaysian plane and landed at the Military Changi Airport after five hours of airborne journey.

III. JURONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

After 14 months of operational duties, I was looking forward to a break of 14 days' leave in Kuala Lumpur and Penang. However, this did not materialise as I was scheduled for other duties. A senior staff officer, MAJ Henry Velge directed myself and some other officers including LTA Cedric Klienman and two others, into a waiting Land Rover for urgent duty at Jurong Primary School. We had no idea why we were sent there. At Jurong Primary School, the Adjutant of the newly formed training centre, CPT Ramachandra, a returned officer from the Malaysian Reconnaissance Regiment, briefed us that we were to be the trainees of an Instructors' Preparatory Course to be conducted from 15th February, 1966. We were to report at the School Conference Room at 0800 hours for the opening ceremony and speech by the Director of the training centre, LTC Kirpa Ram Vij. We were also told that it would be a residential course which meant we were to stay in during training. After reporting, we took a short tour of the school to view the management and organisation for offices, lecture and working rooms, quartermaster store, armskote, dining hall and barracks.

Jurong Primary School was a new concrete building of four storeys in an E-shape pattern. We were its first users and would be occupying the school for the duration of the course—as such, no renovations or reconstructions were done. On material quality, the premises were far superior to the wooden, long barracks found in Temasek Camp or in most of the camps at the time. The ground floor was used for offices, store rooms and a temporary armoury for small arms. The second floor was dedicated to class and working rooms. The tables and chairs were meant for young children and we needed to adjust ourselves when using them. The third and fourth floors were designated for barracks. Officers of CPT rank and above were located on the left side of the fourth floor while the junior officers shared the right side of the fourth floor. NCOs had the third floor to themselves. The rooms were partitioned with portable wooden dividers. Senior officers were housed in a room with four beds while junior officers stayed in a room with six beds. NCOs had ten beds in a smaller room. Each of us were used to having individual rooms. Staying here meant a change for serving regular officers, that is, a loss of privacy. This had to be experienced with tolerance and patience. At this time, 2 SIR troops, returning from Sabah, were living in tents at Farrer Park as Temasek Camp, their barracks, was then occupied by the 5th Royal Malay Regiment that had been ordered to remain in their current premises by authority from Kuala Lumpur. With no proper accommodation available in the unit, the 2 SIR officers took full advantage of the temporary sleeping bunks.

IV. INTRODUCTION OF THE COURSE

On the morning of 15th February, by 0800 hrs, all trainees were assembled at the large conference room for a briefing. I saw familiar and unfamiliar faces. The ones whom I knew were from 2 SIR and 1 SIR. The officers from the Singapore Volunteer Corp (SVC) sat in a row behind us and

were looking anxious but remained quiet. There were also two new graduates, 2nd Lieutenants Abdullah Ghani and George Ho from the FMC. Further behind them, sat a large group of senior NCOs, from Sergeants to Warrant Officers, from 2 SIR and the SVC. Sitting at the left side were five senior police officers—an Inspector, an Assistant Superintendent (ASP) and three Deputy Superintendents (DSP). I was curious as to why they were there. On the other side of the room sat four ‘Caucasians’ in civilian clothing. Two appeared to be middle-aged while the other two looked much younger. I was quite perplexed with this gathering and waited eagerly for the Director to explain.

At 0815 hrs, the Director, LTC Kirpa Ram Vij and his staff entered the room. Behind him were the advisors from the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), the Chief Instructor, MAJ John Tan from 1 SIR, the second in command, mobilised SVC MAJ Ee Thian Chye, the Officer Commanding Headquarters (OC HQ) and the Adjutant, CPT Ramachandra. This was the first occasion I saw LTC Vij. Later, I learnt that he was an SVC LTA working in the Ministry of Finance and heading the Department of Organisation and Methods (O&M). Because of his O & M background, he had been handpicked by Dr Goh Keng Swee to not only manage the preparatory course but also to launch the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI). The introduction of the course was simple and straightforward. The purpose of the course was to train us as instructors for SAFTI. This would eventually lead to the build-up of the SAF. The training would take about 12 weeks to complete and would commence the next day. Altogether, 60 trainees were gathered there. There were 20 SIR officers, nine SVC mobilised officers, two fresh FMC graduates, 24 NCOs of SIR and SVC and five police officers. We were divided into three groups.

We welcomed the news that we would be paid an additional \$60 of hardship allowance, similar to the allowance that we were paid during the Konfrontasi Operation in Sabah. This would cover the general expenses that we incurred during the course.



Standing

SSG Rahman, WO Ali Pawiro, 2LT Shari, 2LT A Ghani, LTA Raymond Tan, 2LT Syed Ibrahim, LTA Cedric, SGT Tan Cheng Bong, SGT Mak, 2LT Aloysius Ng

Sitting

CPT Daljeet S, WO Richard Ong, SGT Lee Eng Tong, SGT Majid, WO Nizam, ASP Wilfred Skinner, DSP Richard Tay, 2LT Tan, CPT James Chia, WO Moktar, CPT James Teo, LTA Goh Lye Choon, LTA Earl Robson

The composition of trainees was unusual with officers, NCOs and police officers being trained together. As there were different levels of competency, I wondered how instructions would be carried out. Training would indeed be challenging considering the mix of various services and different backgrounds. The course began with an IQ test in the afternoon which many trainees were not comfortable with. With all the unexpected events that had occurred, I was confused, wondering where we were headed.

V. COMMENCEMENT OF THE COURSE

The next event of the day was the 5 Basic Exercises (BX) for physical fitness preparation. The instructors were WO Kutalib, Police Sergeant Patchimuthu and Sergeant Lim from 1 SIR. The basic physical exercises were conducted at the open ground next to the school. The trainees had to run a 3-mile route along Corporation Drive and Yung Kang Road, which was part of the newly built Jurong HDB estate. This run indicated various levels of fitness among the trainees. People like 2LTs Syed Ibrahim, Narajan Singh and George Ho were superbly fit and they were at least some hundred yards ahead. Those in their late '30s and working in offices struggled in the last hundred yards. Surprisingly, the police officers did reasonably well, especially the DSPs who were already in their '40s. A few senior NCOs walked, while others ran some of the way to complete the run. The advisors were at the end point, recording their observations of the trainees' performance.

The following day, the trainees had to participate in the endurance route march which commenced from the school to Bukit Timah Hill. This was another test to evaluate the fitness of the trainees. The march took us through the Jurong Central Estate to Jurong Road and from there, along the tracks through farms with small hilly terrains to Bukit Timah. The weather was warm in the morning and the temperature had risen to almost 32°C by the time we reached Bukit Timah. The young trainees helped the older ones and kept them company till the end. According to the instructor who planned the route, the pace he set was normal but many of us felt that it was fast; in fact, we felt faint when we arrived at the foot of Bukit Timah Hill. During the march, 2LT Earl Robson of SVC was very cheerful and sang loudly, for example, 'You Are My Sunshine' and 'Yipi Ya Ya'. SVC LTA Joe Heng happily joined in and the rest followed. This distracted us from the stress of the march. Not all trainees were issued with the proper boots for the march. Many had blisters and were limping after the march. Drinks and snacks were provided at the foot of Bukit Timah Hill but not all could enjoy this treat. When the old faithful Bedford 3-tonner arrived, there were signs of relief among some of the trainees who were limping. This forced route march was a great opportunity for the trainees to bond and develop a feeling of camaraderie.

VI. THE GROUND AROUND JURONG

At the time, the terrain at Jurong was urbanised up to Jalan Boon Lay and still rather wild up to the Tuas and the Tanjong Gul shoreline. The two main roads running parallel towards



SAFTI buildings under construction near Pasir Laba junction in 1966.

the West were Jurong Road and Jalan Ahmad Ibrahim which was under construction after Benoi Road. Between them, the ground was generally flat with patches of rubber plantation. Jurong then was quiet with a number of small durian plantations. Along both sides of Jalan Ahmad Ibrahim were hills. These included Jurong Hill, next to Bird Park, Hill 226 with a communication station, now with water tanks on top. There were also rows of hills bordering the coast at Tanjong Gul—but these had disappeared after reclamation. Towards the north to Sungei Poyan and Chua Chu Kang Road, the areas were heavily criss-crossed with cart tracks and foot paths, with Hill 286 dominating. The terrain was almost similar to that of Jurong. The north and south of these two main roads were drained by the streams from Sungei Poyan, Sungei Tengah and the Jurong River, from Tanjong Balai to Tanjong Gul. There were many water lily ponds situated near the numerous plots of vegetable, chicken and pig farms.

The development of factories in these areas had given rise to many deserted farms with overgrown vegetation, making navigation difficult. The hills were uncultivated and the vegetation covering them was natural. In between the farms were many dirt tracks and footpaths. Inland swamps were found near the Jurong River, Pasir Laba, Tuas and Tanjong Gul. There were tidal swamps from the mouth of Jurong River along its shores, up to Sungei Poyan. The area around Pasir Laba with its long ridges of hill was used by the British Forces for live firing training. This was done mostly at a four-track junction, near the foot of Snake Ridge, which was used for demolition training. At the time, the whole area around Jurong was used for field training. At the start of our course, SAFTI buildings were under construction near Pasir Laba junction. The 25m and 100m rifle ranges and the obstacle course were ready for use.

VII. UNHAPPINESS DURING TRAINING

As the course progressed into the first two weeks, most of the military trainees felt that the individual lessons conducted were not relevant to them and became rather bored. Some of us attempted to inject humour during the lessons to make up for the boredom. We felt that the training level was too basic and was more applicable to beginners. From time to time, some of the trainees expressed their unhappiness with the lessons that were conducted. The field craft lessons on personal camouflage and basic movements for reaction to enemy fire on top of Jurong Hill, had problems. During a personal camouflage lesson, it was noted that one officer just had a stem on his shoulder while another was so over-camouflaged that he appeared like a walking tree. At a basic movement lesson, very few would want to do the leopard crawl, but practised the dash to hide. The technical handling lessons on the self-loading rifle which we had been using since 1962 and the Konfrontasi Operation, were lessons for recruits. Of course, there were instances of lightheartedness during the lessons. Once, during the stripping and assembly lesson, one NCO had fixed his rifle wrongly and jokingly laughed, saying that he had an extra-long rifle. In another incident, an officer was caught wearing a toy helmet. The instructor joked with the officer telling him that he could not associate with a toy soldier. Map Reading and Compass lessons were introduced on Hill 226. Here again, the lessons were for fresh trainees. These were followed by day and night navigation exercises from Woodlands Road through Marsiling cultivated land to Sembawang Road at Gampas.

Most of the Israeli advisors were not fluent in English. They made errors in their expressions when conducting lessons. One frequent error was “Down lie” instead of “Lie down”. They were gently corrected by LTA Rajaratnam, LTA Earl Robson and 2LT James Chan. These SVC officers were English teachers by profession. Whenever they had to conduct lessons, the Israeli advisors would glance at them for approval. 2LT James Chan would react immediately with a thumbs up. This lightened the atmosphere and added humour and fun into the lessons. Though the advisors were not proficient in English, their delivery of the lessons was not affected as their instructions were driven home with clarity and simplicity.

Up until this stage, we were not really convinced that the course was really relevant to us as the lessons seemed to be too elementary. The trainees grumbled even more when they realised that they had to do basic foot drills on the open space next to the school. The next physical event was the commissioning of the obstacle course. On the day of execution, I became the first casualty in the course with severe cuts under my chin and shin when running across the swinging platform which snapped at the hinges. I was sent to the Singapore General Hospital for treatment and stitches. Later, we learned that the obstacle course items had not been tested for safety. Besides the training discomforts, the Spartan living conditions—sometimes no water for bathing—and the poor standard of food and hygiene added to our growing misery. Our daily silent protests were eventually noticed and were taken as serious feedback and brought to the attention of the management and the MID.

VIII. WHAT WENT WRONG

The build-up of the SAF was one of the most important projects in our nation-building. The preparatory course, as the starting event to facilitate this, had to succeed at all costs. The trainees' dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the course reached the ears of Mr George Bogaars, Permanent Secretary of MID. The course managers and MID decided to hold an urgent meeting with us to find out what was wrong. This extraordinary meeting was held on Wednesday, during the third week of the course. The panel who met up with the trainees comprised LTC Vij, the Israeli advisors, Mr George Bogaars and other representatives from the Ministry. The meeting started with LTC Vij giving us an opportunity to air our grievances. Quite a number of trainees stood up and spoke feelingly but, made no offensive remarks against the school or the Israeli advisors. The panel members listened attentively to every speaker from the floor. The first speaker was CPT Edward Yong, 1 SIR Adjutant, who confidently and deliberately delivered his point of view. He was puzzled as to why the training level was so low and wondered whether in the preparation of the course, the competence and military skill of the trainees were taken into consideration. Other Officers like LTA Cedric Klienman, 2 SIR Adjutant and CPT Jagrup Singh from 1 SIR, highlighted that SIR officers, SVC officers and NCOs had gone through formal training at the military colleges as regulars, local officers' courses as volunteers and NCO cadre courses. He added that while in service, many additional relevant and special courses would have enhanced our military skills. Besides these, we were involved in internal security operations during racial riots, anti-terrorist operations in Johore and defence operations in Sabah. The trainees felt that the training that we had undergone so far was not appropriate and, to some extent, not relevant. SVC LTA A Rajaratnam, aged 35 years, who had been teaching for 12 years, said that if the old SLR rifle could be replaced with a new type, there would be no objections even having to learn the fundamentals. He went on to emphasise that new techniques and applications to field craft would definitely create interest. A few senior NCOs spoke in a regimental style. The key speaker was Staff Sergeant Harry Lim who had been a weapons and drill instructor at FMC, Sungei Besi, Selangor. He expected excitement with war-experienced Israeli advisors and had been looking forward to building up an extraordinary fighting spirit and learning military skills. Up to now, he felt that the course had been disappointing. The Police group was represented by DSP A Lawrence, aged 45 years. He stated that the level of training was too low for them to participate in and felt that it was not appropriate, taking into consideration their seniority, as they were DSPs and aged from 41 to 45 years. They felt awkward carrying out the basic field craft drills. They would prefer a familiarisation course. The Israelis advisors, not being fluent in English was never an issue of discomfort and it was not highlighted as a problem by the trainees. The panel on stage was silent, listening intently. After hearing our comments and feedback for almost an hour, the panel discussed quietly. LTC Vij then stood up and told us to go for a half-hour tea-break. We assembled punctually after the break and LTC Vij announced that we would be given a course break of two weeks with immediate effect. We were happy with the opportunity for a break and left the room.

At the request of our government, the Israelis had arrived in November 1965 to study how they could assist the SAF in its build-up. Their immediate task were to ascertain the competency and standard of skills of Singapore's military personnel. They began the assessment and selection of the potential trainees before launching the Instructors' Preparatory Course. 2LT Clarence Tan who had just returned from the Malaysian Special Services Unit, was asked to perform various physical tests that would be used as a basic standard for the selection. The selection process included tactical tests. Officers like CPT James Chia and LTA Kesavan Soon were tested on this with a sand model. They impressed the Israelis with their excellent performance and responses. The Israelis might have felt differently when non-operational SVC officers and NCOs were tested. Officers from 2 SIR and NCOs could not be tested as the unit was still on operations in Sabah, Malaysia. They discovered that most of the senior officers at MID were out of touch with the ground and lacked an understanding of current events. One top senior officer misinformed them when he said that the SAF military personnel were poorly trained and were only slightly above the level of boy scouts. They had had a brief discussion with one SVC senior non-operational major who portrayed the volunteer military personnel as weekend soldiers who joined SVC as a hobby. The team at this point knew that they had to be content with personnel of various levels of military competency and backgrounds for the course. They took the opportunity to formulate the syllabus with the genuine intention of bringing everyone up to the same level in the Instructors' Preparatory Course.

IX. WHAT IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

We were informed of the new changes when we reported to Jurong Primary School in the morning after a two-week break. The course managers and the Israelis had come up with a revised programme for mature and trained personnel. We would no longer have to stay in but to report for training at 0800 hrs when breakfast would be served. On Mondays and Tuesdays, there would be technical and classroom training, with the latter part of each day spent on 5BX or games. From Wednesdays to Fridays, there would be night training. Half-day training sessions would be held on Saturdays. Buddy-pairings of a Police trainee officer with an SIR officer would be initiated to assist the police officers keep abreast with the developments of the course. Under the new syllabus, new weapons and demolition, including live and training grenades, would be introduced. These would be the new US AR-15 Rifle and the Israeli rocket launcher. The Israeli bangalore torpedo for breaching and improvised jerry can petrol bombs for vehicle ambush would be used for tactical exercises. All training would be done at Pasir Laba and at the rifle ranges in the new SAFTI complex. Lessons on Fighting in Built Up Areas (FIBUA) would be taught and would include night movement using overlays (map) on tracing paper. Fire and movement and tactical exercises from section to platoon levels would be executed at the Pasir Laba training areas. These would be followed by live firing exercises. Some SIR trainee officers would be nominated to assist in the field training and would be assigned to write instruction formats on the lessons they assisted in. The new training period would last for about six and a half weeks. This new training syllabus appealed to us and we were very keen to learn.

For the next 11 training days, the programme concentrated on the technical handling of the AR-15 and night movement using overlay on tracing paper for navigation. The instructions on handling the AR-15 rifle captured the full attention of the trainees. In fact, the Israeli advisors were amazed with the trainees' quick assimilation of the weapon and their proficiency in handling the rifle.

Unlike the first two weeks, the trainees were full of enthusiasm and showed their readiness to use the rifle for live firing exercises. The lessons ended with a highly satisfying shoot at the 100m range in the SAFII complex. None of us had ever used a rocket launcher before and the Israeli maroon coloured rocket launcher provided us with another interesting week. The four days' training ended with live firing at the Bajau Hill 205, Pasir Laba and the trainees with suntan on their faces seemed happy with their performances. The night movement using tracing paper overlay for navigation provided some fun with humorous incidents. The planned route was from Joo Lim estate to Sungei Poyan and the trainees were required to go through vegetable plots, water lily ponds and deserted farms. LTA Roy Desker, later LTC and CO 3 SIR, was our group leader. The night was pitch-dark and movement in a single line formation was really slow. From time to time, LTA Desker and his navigators would raise the overlay against the sky to check our location. Whenever LTA Desker encountered unexpected developments, he would turn around and would whisper a message to the person behind him. This would be repeated all the way to the last man in the formation and acknowledgement or the response would be passed back to the front. Any action LTA Desker took would be imitated automatically by the rest. During one incident, he came to a wet laterite track and he mistook it for a stream. He uttered "Stream, jump!" Everyone who came to this point jumped except for the last man who declared, "It's a track." Someone in the middle gave a loud cry, "Blind!" and this message was transmitted to the front and rear. In another incident, LTA Desker led us into the entry point of a deserted fenced enclosure. He tracked along the side of the fence and as he moved to the exit point, the last man of the formation had just reached the entrance and knocked into him. The person behind him spoke loudly, "Hell, we are going around the chicken coop." Immediately, the atmosphere lightened and everyone started to laugh. One of the Israeli advisors who was following behind, was getting agitated with the slow pace. He tried to overtake the single line formation and was not aware that LTA Desker was negotiating a narrow path between two ponds which were thickly covered with water lily plants. The ponds appeared like solid ground. He hastily moved forward to the left side of us and dropped into the pond with a loud splash. LTA Desker turned round and asked, "What happened?" The answer from the rear came instantly, "He hit the pond." LTA Desker reacted with a laugh, "Hee Hee" which was repeated all the way to the last man. There were few more unexpected incidents and the movement became slower as the men walked with caution. At a debrief near Hill 286, the instructor who had fallen into the pond was soaking wet. He joked that he felt much cooler and that the slow march was very enjoyable.

X. LIVE FIRING EXERCISES

To enhance the learning experience at the coming live firing exercises, the 60mm light mortar and the 7.62 General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) were added to the syllabus. 2WO Richard Ong, 1 SIR Platoon Sergeant of 81mm Mortar and 2LT Surjit Singh, SVC Artillery gunner had both mastered this weapon and were assigned to fire the 60mm light mortar for all live firing exercises. LTA Joe Heng and 2LT George Ho displayed proficiency in handling the GPMG and were assigned to fire the GPMG from the support base for platoon live firing exercises. The section training was focused on immediate reaction to enemy fire and the repetitive sequence of fire and movement. The Israeli advisors were very thorough with these lessons. They started the lessons from an appreciation of the tactical situation to dry runs and followed up with live firing. The lessons would begin with scenarios on various situations such as the section on independent patrol or as part of a platoon on offensive operations. We discussed methods and actions to be taken. Upon accepting our recommendations, the Israelis made us walk the ground to check our plans. The execution of living firing would commence after a few 'dry runs' during which safety was the primary consideration. The same format of execution was repeated for night live firing exercises. For night live firing, improvised oil lamps, nicknamed Joudi lamps, were used as safety markers along the routes and the direction of assault.

The following week, we started the demolition and grenade lessons. The materials were imported. We practised with live grenades during the training sessions. But for live firing exercises, we used training grenades as a safety precaution. For the demolition lessons, we were taught to use improvised jerry can petrol bombs for vehicle ambush lessons. For platoon offensive operations, the concentration was on quick and deliberate attack. Like the section training, the lessons began with an appreciation of a given situation in the Pasir Laba live firing area at Snake Ridge, above the Four-Track Junction, facing Bajau Hill 205. The Israel advisor directing the quick attack lesson told us that such operations would normally be done against an enemy outpost or an enemy in hasty defence with a minimum of prepared defences. The platoon would usually be on a patrol or a point platoon of a company in advance. In this lesson, the quick attack was on an enemy outpost. After two hours of discussion, we checked the ground for dry runs before executing the live firing. This would be our first experience to use a 'bangalore torpedo' to breach a defended enemy locality. The assault would be done through the gap marked by guides on both sides shouting "Gap! Gap!" Support from both high and flat trajectory weapons was employed during the attack. The execution of the day live firing was carried out strictly according to instructions and this could be attributed to the thoroughness of our Israeli advisors. The night attack was a repeat of the day format. Joudi lamps were used to mark the route from the assembly area to the objective. As an added safety precaution, at the extreme left and right of the assault force, lights were set up to indicate to the flank groups where the main assault force was. The night quick attack was conducted with ten safety officers. As the platoon deliberate attack would have an almost similar pattern of execution, it was decided to only have a tactical lesson. We were told that this form of attack

would be done as part of a company deliberate attack on a fortified defended enemy location. Battalion support weapons would be employed to neutralise the enemy. These exercises were the first live firing experiences anyone in our group had experienced.

XI. VEHICLE AMBUSH

The last week of the course concentrated on vehicle ambush training. According to the Israeli advisors, vehicle ambush was typically executed behind enemy lines against vehicles moving in a convoy carrying troops or logistical goods. A typical ambush force would be company strength. Two platoon-sized ambush parties would be located 100m to 200m apart and the third platoon would act as a reserve force. The overall ambush force would include left and right cut-off sections. In our case, the day vehicle ambush lesson was to be conducted as the platoon on the right flank of the company. The live firing was to be executed in Pasir Laba, at the point along the road facing Bajau Hill 205. The exercise began with an analysis of the situation, using a sand table and then a ground study to appreciate the actual problems. After understanding what needed to be considered for the mission, rehearsals at the designated location were done. The group commander was ASP Wilfred Skinner, with CPT Edward Chan as his second-in-command. The demolition team was led by SGT Tan Cheng Bong who had SVC 2LT Shari and 2 SIR 2LT Robert Wee to assist him. The appointment holders were nominated with the view to give every trainee an opportunity to experience working with all ranks. The ambush began with Four-Track Junction as the assembly area where live ammunition was distributed and the live petrol tank bomb called a 'fougas', was set up. This task was supervised by CPT John Morrice. DSP T.E. Ricketts was appointed the Supervising Safety Officer. Everyone was involved in this exercise, including the full turnout of the Israelis. No one was left out of battle (LOB). The day vehicle ambush live firing exercise was orchestrated with precision. The execution was done according to plan. It began with the thunderous explosion and the fireball of the petrol bomb, followed by deafening rifle fire with tracers. The support weapons added to the uproar. The assault force charged aggressively and kept firing to the limit line of exploitation. After almost 30 minutes of destructive action, there was a sudden silence, followed by the re-organisation phase. At the quick debriefing, one of the Israeli advisors, his face glowing with pride, praised the performance. Then he pointed to the sky to remind us of the finale performance which was to be held the following night.

The next morning, MAJ Jacob of the Paratrooper School, briefed us on the key points of a night vehicle ambush. Night vehicle ambush operations would be carried out deep in enemy territory. To reach the ambush location, the assigned force would be required to go through a few secured tactical locations. During the day, a clandestine recce team would have gone out to confirm the route to be taken to the various positions for the ambush. CPT James Teo was appointed commander of the mission. DSP Richard Tay was his deputy. The recce team of four was led by 2LT Alan Lie. His team comprised Inspector Chin, Sergeant Yacob

and SGT Rahim. They left in the early morning to recce from Joo Lim Estate to Bajau Hill via Track 46, Red House Hill and Hill 286. CPT Teo planned and conducted an “O” group using a sand table later in the morning. Preparations began at noon. I was appointed leader of the demolition team which included 2LT Ronald Looi, SGT Chia and SGT Shafie. My task was to carry the manpacked 35kg jerry can of petrol on my back all the way to the ambush position. Inspector Chin would lead us to the ambush location to set up the petrol tank bomb. Though we were given two hours’ rest till 1700 hrs, we were too fully occupied with the preparations to take advantage of the rest period. By 1800 hrs, we mounted the old faithful Bedford 3-tonner to Joo Lim Estate at the foot of Peng Kang Hill. At 1900 hrs, the main force was led on the 6km route to the ambush site by the recce team. The pace was fast and we hastily went through the tactical observation posts at Red House Hill, secured by CPT Michael Seth and WO Ong Hui Peng; the foot of Hill 286 was secured by CPT Jagrup Singh and Staff Sergeant Harry Lim. During the approach, all rifles remained unloaded and I had no problems carrying the 35kg jerry can petrol on my back though MAJ Jacob showed concern. Despite poor visibility, we reached the ambush location at Bajau Hill by 2030 hrs and were ready for action at 2100 hrs. We had a 45-minute wait before the ambush was activated to drive home the fact that in such cases, the arrival of the enemy was not predictable nor even guaranteed. At the appropriate time, the enemy arrival was simulated by a few torch lights shining on to the road. Suddenly, there was a petrol tank explosion, followed immediately with mortar firing illumination rounds in the sky to light up the killing area. Tracers were flying everywhere. At ground level, trip flares illuminated the road. The whole area was lighted up and there was a crackling sound of rifle fire. After about 20 minutes of intense rifle and mortar fire, flares were fired from Verey pistols to indicate the completion of mission and activate the withdrawal of the ambush force to the nearest tactical RV which was the junction of Pasir Laba and Jurong Road. The forced march to this location was demanding and taxing. Though exhausted, there was a lot of satisfaction among the trainees who celebrated the achievement of the grand finale. LTC Vij and the Chief Advisor were present at the quick debrief. They complimented us on the successful completion of a tough and difficult exercise. We got onto the faithful Bedford 3-tonners for the journey back to Jurong Primary School where we were served with lavish midnight snacks.

XII. END OF COURSE

After the challenging night vehicle ambush exercise, we all left for a well-earned weekend. Before the course officially ended on 7th May, we were given one week’s break to settle personal administration. During the week, some returned to their respective units and offices to check on their routine office duties. The officers from the SIRs who were assigned to write lesson formats stayed back. I was tasked to produce lesson formats on Section Fire and Movement and the Platoon Quick Attack. When discussing with the Israeli advisors, I realised that the advisors originally followed English military doctrine and made adjustments according to their war experiences. They had few British training pamphlets and when I showed them mine, theirs were not as current as what I had.

Time was also spent preparing the enlistment of recruits for SAFTI in June 1966. We visited the construction site of SAFTI to familiarise ourselves with HQ and the two training company buildings. The Instructors' Preparatory Course ended with a closing ceremony with Dr Goh Keng Swee as the guest of honour. We were later interviewed individually by LTC Vij. I was told that though I had good a report, I could have done better. The good news was that I would be promoted to CPT on 1st June, 1966 and that I would command Platoon 6 of Bravo Company. My platoon would be reinforced by the newly promoted CPT Rajaratnam as my second-in-command, 2WO Richard Ong as the Platoon Sergeant and Staff Sergeant Lee Eng Tong, Staff Sergeant Shafie, Sergeant Rahim and Sergeant Yacob as Section Commanders. All the military personnel were promoted to one rank higher and posted to SAFTI to assume key appointments or as Instructors. As for the police, DSP Ricketts and ASP Skinner¹ were posted to SAFTI as B Company Commander and 5th Platoon 2I/C respectively, while Inspector Chin was to be a section instructor in A Company. The rest of the police officers were posted to MID to serve as senior staff officers. On 26th May, 1966, we assembled in the conference room for the closing ceremony. Those who attended included the Israeli advisors, Mr Bogaars, the Permanent Secretary from MID as well as other staff from MID and the Jurong Primary School staff led by LTC Vij. Dr Goh Keng Swee congratulated us on the successful completion of the course and complimented the Israeli advisors who assisted in the preparation of the course syllabus. He briefly discussed the problems expected during the build-up of the SAF and emphasised that we represented the first step in the development of a strong and capable SAF for the future. The course



LTA Goh Lye Choon receiving his course certificate from Minister for the Interior and Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee.

was of paramount importance to Dr Goh as he was the architect for the establishment of SAFTI. He was not deterred by the lack of manpower or logistic deficiency. After Singapore left Malaysia, time was critical to build and develop Singapore's defence. To make up for the shortage of regulars for the Instructors' Preparatory Course, he supplemented trainees with personnel from the Police, Volunteers and a group of NCOs from the Regulars and Volunteer Corp. As an interim measure, he directed Jurong Primary School to be used as the Training Centre. This was typical of his resourcefulness in the build-up of Singapore's defence. He proudly presented us with the Course Certificate signed by Mr Bogaars and LTC Vlĳ.

Immediately after this event, those who were posted to SAFTI, went to the Pasir Laba Officers' Mess and the NCOs' Mess to arrange for their accommodation. Our first task was to conduct the running and physical fitness tests for the 300 recruits in June, 1966.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The full co-operation and sincere understanding between the Israeli advisors and the mature trainees in the course were keys to its success. After initial misunderstandings over the backgrounds of the trainees, the Israeli advisors boldly revamped the syllabus to include realistic inputs from their experiences in battle. They did it with total commitment even though they may well have wanted to quit after the extraordinary meeting. They really opened up our perspectives and we participated enthusiastically in the course. The advisors made us realise that we were quite vulnerable and needed to be strong and independent to defend our country. They taught us that peace cannot be guaranteed and that we must always be prepared for war. Nobody would come to our aid when we are in trouble, nor could we be dependent on the United Nations (UN). By the time the UN forces arrived, we would have been overrun by the enemy. The advisors had respectable credentials and were exemplary in their loyalty and patriotism.

Coming from different backgrounds, services and ranks to work together, was definitely a unique experience for us. Slowly but surely, we developed a strong sense of belonging. We learned that under trying circumstances, we needed to be considerate and patient for a common cause. The advisors, in the arrangement of mixed appointments, regardless of ranks, in the various exercises, helped us to understand this point and to work together in times of need. We also learned from one another's different and varied experiences. The Police Officers who were senior in service and older, put aside their discomfort, to work closely with us, in the interest of nation-building. The SVC Officers and NCOs felt that being mobilised was justified because the course not only upgraded their skills but also enriched their understanding about nationalism. In addition, the NCOs were very happy as they had an opportunity to train with officers, working together on the same level for a common cause. They believed that the officers would have confidence in their abilities and

trust them. The regular officers were also pleased as they knew that there would always be Singaporeans who would come forward to defend Singapore. The positive attitudes reflected unity and progress to facilitate the SAF build-up. These remarkable trainees were directly or indirectly involved in the raising of many units, brigades and divisions. They also helped to establish and restructure the various training schools up to Command and Staff College. Most of them would have completed their services with early or offered retirements in the early 1980s. Unfortunately, the numbers of these early pioneers are decreasing.

I will always remember my experiences with much pleasure, contentment and nostalgia, glad that I have, in some way, together with my fellow trainees, contributed to the build-up of the SAF.

Endnotes

1. *ASP Skinner was re-routed to MID and eventually migrated to Canada.*



**SPEECH BY INCHE YUSOF BIN ISHAK,
PRESIDENT, REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE,
AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY
ON TUESDAY, 18TH JULY, 1967**

Today we make history, for today I, on behalf of the people of Singapore confer on 117 of our young men commissions in our Republic's Army. It is a great day for us and especially for you who have so successfully completed your training to become the first Singapore trained officers in our army. I understand also that a few days ago you celebrated the 1st Anniversary of your Armed Forces Training Institute (S.A.F.T.I.) with a full scale exercise which simulated real life conditions. From all accounts, you acquitted yourself honourably in this 'baptism of fire'. You are therefore now fully trained and equipped to shoulder the heavy tasks that will fall to you as officers of the Singapore Armed Forces. The people of Singapore will now be watching you and by you, they will judge the standards of our training and our Army.

As commissioned officers in the Singapore Armed Forces you have been entrusted with the great responsibility of building up and commanding our nation's Army. In your hands will be placed the National Servicemen who will be called up to service presently. You will be expected to inculcate in them the high standards of training and discipline you have received so that in the end, Singapore will have a first class Army equal to any in this part of the world. Your service will require your total loyalty and in this, you must never falter. You must always uphold the honour of our nation and our Army and to this end, a Code of Conduct has been promulgated for you and your men to follow at all times. You will be expected as officers to uphold this Code of Honour and to maintain the highest standard of behaviour which will be a personal example to your men and the citizens of Singapore.

I have been told that the training you received at the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute was a tough and rigorous one. During this time, you have had to make many personal sacrifices and encountered many hardships. This intensive training, as you must realise now, was a test in itself. It was necessary in order to determine your qualities of leadership and now you have proved that you possess these basic qualities. Your presence here this evening is a fitting end to the first stage of your career. Let me therefore be the first to congratulate you on your success.

Bear in mind, however, that by graduating successfully does not mean that you know all the answers. This is only the beginning of your military education and it is for you now, as officers, to further this knowledge.

I congratulate the parents on their sons' fine success. It must indeed be a proud day for them to see their sons being commissioned in the Singapore Armed Forces. The career that they have chosen is the highest calling a young man can answer to.

Here, he will give if required, the supreme sacrifice for this country and his fellowmen. In no other walk of life in Singapore is this so. The career your son has chosen will help in the building of our nation and wielding the people of different races in a cohesive and homogeneous group. Congratulations are also due to the instructors and officers of S.A.F.T.I. who have brought you to your present level.

Finally, as a symbol of this trust now placed upon you, you will be presented with a sword. It is to remind you of the duties required of you. You will keep this sword and live by the ideals for which it is given. So long as you carry this sword, live by its honour.

SPEECH BY MR. LEE KUAN YEW,
PRIME MINISTER, REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE,
AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY
ON TUESDAY, 18TH JULY, 1967

Today 114 officer cadets, the first graduates of SAFTI, have been commissioned into our armed forces. It takes place at a time when we have just received formal notice of the changes that will be necessary in the structure of the security and defence of our part of the world.

Today in London, the British Government has stated that by the middle-70s they will want to leave their bases in Singapore and Malaysia. So, we must build, together with such friends and allies as have an interest in the security and future of the Singapore-Malaysia area, sufficient forces for our security. And, the defence assistance we can expect in the long run from Britain may be in the nature of mobile forces, both aircraft and naval vessels.

There are five years to go before 1973, the earliest of the middle-70s, or ten years to go before 1977, the latest part of the middle-70s. The British Government says that the precise time will depend upon the circumstances. In this time, we have to build all the sinews we can so that we will not just be passengers in any defence alliance. The more self-reliant and effective we become, the more desirable and reliable a partner we make in any defence arrangement.

What we lack in numbers, we will make up for in quality: in the standards of discipline, training, dedication and leadership. There is no reason why we should not, by the middle-70s, achieve an equally secure arrangement against external aggression. For we can safely assume that we need to make provision against the possibility of only a middling, not a big, power attack.

Those of you who were in Singapore in 1942 when the Japanese Imperial Army swept into Singapore will know that there were vast differences between the capacity and quality of the different soldiers we saw. The Japanese Imperial Guards were accompanied by Koreans and Formosans. The British had Australians, Indians and Gurkhas on their side.

Everybody knew that one Japanese soldier was worth more than one of the others in tenacity and doggedness. Everybody also knew that some of the British contingents were made of sterner stuff and they were not related to the physical size of the soldiers of the various Commonwealth contingents.

War correspondents in Korea in the 50s and in Vietnam in the 60s know that armies vary in the discipline, grit and stamina of its soldiers and the quality of their officers. For example, the Vietcong have a healthier respect for some than for others of the soldiers on the American side. And, they do not flee with the same alacrity when pursued by some of the Asian contingents as when pursued by the South Koreans.

Recently, the Institute of Strategic Studies in London sent me a book about the defence and security of Southern Asia. In the appendix was set out the strength in numbers and the equipment of the various armed forces of Asia. Some have armies that run into millions of regulars and militia. Some have jets, tanks and naval ships. But, there was one component which was missing. And without this data, it was impossible to compare the capacity of these various armed forces. And the data was: What is the conversion rate between the various armed forces?

In other words, how many Koreans and Formosans in the last war equalled one Japanese soldier. Or, to bring the example more up to date, how many South Vietnamese soldiers equal one Vietminh soldier from the north, or vice-versa?

Those of you who remember the years of confrontation can amuse yourself with this exercise in mental arithmetic: How many of the parachutists trained in Indonesia dropped down over Labis in 1964 equalled one Australian or one New Zealander? For it was they who eventually helped to round them up.

Upon your performance in the years ahead, people will assess if one Singaporean equals one Gurkha as foot soldiers. But, that is not good enough, for, unlike the British officered Gurkhas, we must forge our own officer cadre. As we go up the scale in sophisticated weaponry, the Singaporeans must match themselves against the best in the world. For only then will our survival rate be high and secure.

Remember, if knowledgeable people like military attachés in foreign embassies trained to observe and report on these matters, regard us as unequal in the discipline or perseverance and, under adverse conditions to be wanting in courage, or that we lack in intelligence to develop the skills which can come only after intense application to sophisticated weapons, then it will not be long before others pick up this contempt for our capacity to stand up for ourselves. This is one of the surest ways to invite an attack to subjugate us and turn us into economic serfs, or worker ants, for the welfare and well-being of others.

We in Singapore have established our reputation as a resourceful and ingenious community of merchants, manufacturers, workers and technicians. We have ample time up till the middle '70s for you and those who will follow you in SAFTI to establish a reputation of us as a hardy and well organised people. We must transform a rootless society of migrant stock into a closely knit community, determined to dig our toes in into our own corner of Asia.

You were not bred and drilled to be a parade army. Yours is a much sombre assignment. I wish you good fortune in your careers. May the trust which the people of Singapore have placed in you be jealously guarded. May our people's honour and freedom never be in jeopardy in your young but competent hands.



ABOUT THE EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

MAJ (RET) AJIT SINGH NAGPAL

Ajit had already joined the SAF before applying for the first SAFTI officer cadet programme. On commissioning, he was an instructor for the next two officer cadet cohorts, following which, he served as Company Commander in the 2nd Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment (2 SIR) and attended the School of Advanced Training for Officers. He converted to Armour and later re-specialised as a logistics officer leading to the command of the Ordnance Supply Base. On no-pay leave abroad, he earned a Masters in Management. On his return, he was assigned to the SAF Transport Battalion and G4 MINDEF. He chose to retire early to pursue a second career with a multi-national firm.



LTC (RET) SWEE BOON CHAI

Boon Chye had joined the Malaysian Territorial Army in 1964, Singapore then being part of Malaysia. On separation, he was mobilised and posted to HQ People's Defence Force (HQ PDF). His boss asked him to apply for the officer cadet programme that MINDEF had just launched. He performed well enough to earn prizes during the course as a marksman and top trainee in his company. During his 31 years of service, he was the organiser of choice for the SAF shooting competitions, which included neighbouring armed forces. He was variously Commanding Officer (CO) 2 SIR, Commander 23 Singapore Infantry Brigade, Commander 1 People's Defence Force (PDF) Training Centre, and before retirement, Commandant, National Cadet Corps.



CPT (RET) HWEE MAN LOK

Man Lok read for a BA degree on a government bursary in 1962. On completion of his studies, he was bonded to serve the government for three years. He opted to serve with the then Ministry of Interior and Defence. He left after serving the mandatory three-year bond in 1969. However, he continued to serve in the SAF when he was drafted as a reservist officer into national service. He was demobilised after completing the mandatory 14-year train cycle.



LTC (RET) CHAN SECK SUNG

Seck Sung was a youth leader in the People's Association before applying for the first officer training programme in SAFTI. He was sent to Fort Georgia in the United States for Green Beret training as a commissioned officer ahead of the whole first batch six weeks before the actual commissioning ceremony. On his return, he set up the Commandos and the Guards formation. He calls himself the most re-cycled battalion commander in the SAF, if not military history. He commanded in turn, 2 SIR, 8 SIR, 2 Guards (stood down) and the 1st Commando Battalion. His last job was Base Commander, MINDEF HQ. A large amount of material for *One Of A Kind* came from his private collection, and he continues to collect material for the group's records.



MAJ (RET) LAM YING KIT, VICTOR

Victor, reticent to a fault, stoical and tough, asked leave of nobody, including his father, an ASP in the Singapore Police Force, before joining the SAF. A keen sportsman, he had represented Singapore in the Under 23 category in rugby. He naturally gravitated towards physical training and became head of the School of Physical Training (PT) in SAFTI after attending the Advanced PT Course in Aldershot, UK. Apart from service in the SAF, he also served two separate terms as Warden of the Singapore Outward Bound School. Early in his career, he co-organised an overland expedition to the UK with other SAF personnel supported by MID. After his retirement, he continued to indulge in his passion for exploring exotic places including Tibet. He also became skilled in IT and social media. He maintains a Facebook record of developments among SAFTI's "First Batch".



MAJ (RET) LIONEL STANLEY THOMAS

Lionel was prepared for the stress of Pasir Laba training because he had been a sportsman in school and had completed the Outward Bound Course in Lemut, Perak. In fact, he is on record as saying that life in SAFTI was practically heavenly. He was in the first group of first batch officers sent to the Jungle Warfare School, Johor. He was appointed General Staff Officer of 3rd Brigade in 1974. After completing the Singapore Command and Staff College course in 1985, he was appointed CO, 5 SIR and later, G3, HQ PDF. He retired in August 1994 but volunteered to be a facilitator at the Singapore Discovery Centre for 12 years more during which he took on assignments to make presentations in SAF detention centres to rehabilitate soldiers under detention as part of the SAF Veterans League contributions to the military family.



MAJOR (RET) ABDUL SAMAD ATHAMBAVA

Abdul Samad s/o Athambava was already a Lance Corporal in the Signals Platoon of 2 SIR before joining the first officer cadet course. He had enlisted in the Singapore Military Forces against his father's wishes. As a signaller, he was deployed against Indonesian guerillas in east and Peninsular Malaysia. After commissioning, he was posted to the fledgling Armour formation and was trained abroad as a 'tankee'. Samad was a good source of material for this publication because he had compulsively filed his records. He retired as a major and went on a full Haj. He is currently with the Singapore Discovery Centre as a Veteran Guide and a Commitment to Defence (C2D) Ambassador conducting national education talks in schools.



MAJ (RET) RAM JANAM MISIR

Ram Janam had intended to be a lawyer, but was diverted by a friend into the SAF when MID started recruiting for officer candidates. After commission, he specialised in infantry support weapons before conversion to armour, in which formation he held both command and staff appointments in the first armour brigade. He retired in 1996 but continued to serve as a formation safety officer in the Guards and the Army Safety Inspectorate. He was awarded a Letter of Commendation for Bravery in 1968 at the first SAF Day Parade. He is now fully retired and spends most of his time in Mt. Abu, Rajastan.



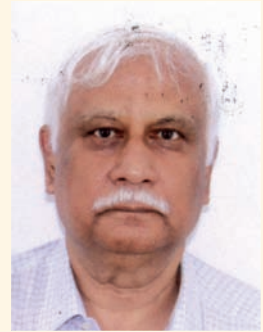
LTC (RET) ERROL NEUBRONNER

At age 18, Errol barely qualified for recruitment with the first cohort at SAFTI. With his effervescent personality, he was got on well with just about everybody. His earlier appointments were mostly staff and instruction. They included Chief Instructor, School of Advanced Training for Officers (SATO) and Senior Directing Staff of the Singapore Command and Staff College. He was also appointed CO 74 SIR and Commander, 22nd Singapore Infantry Brigade. As captain of the SAFSA Hockey Team, he brought home several national titles to the SAF. He retired from full-time service in 1996 and reserve service in 1998. Errol put together the graphics and other contents in the CD accompanying the first edition of *One Of A Kind* and his daughter Jill did the commentary. He now divides his time between taking care of his grandchildren and consolidating his family genealogy and is happy to be called a contented recluse.



COL (RET) RAMACHANDRAN MENON

Menon enlisted in the first intake for officer cadet training although he was already a qualified graduate teacher in the Ministry of Education. At 26, he was one of the oldest enlistees. After several staff and command assignments, his senior appointments in personnel management and army training and as Singapore's Defence Attache in Washington and as Director, Public Affairs and MINDEF Spokesman gave him a broad perspective of critical aspects of military life. Fortunately, from his point of view, it was all in peacetime. He retired in January 1995.



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