

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. Keselematan Kita*, p. 14
53. MINDEF Records
54. *Our security. Keselamatan Kita*, pp. 15-16