

**EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL  
ON SAF SAFETY**



**COMMENTS ON THE  
COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY'S  
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ON  
THE DEATH OF  
CFC DAVE LEE HAN XUAN**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1. On 2 May 2018, a Committee of Inquiry (COI) was convened by the Armed Forces Council to investigate the circumstances leading to the death of Corporal First Class (CFC) Lee Han Xuan, Dave. The External Review Panel on SAF Safety (ERPSS) was invited to participate in the COI by, firstly, having one of its members serve on the committee and, secondly, examining and commenting on the COI's findings.

2. ERPSS has since received a brief on the COI's preliminary findings. As requested by the Ministry of Defence, we have provided, in this statement, our comments on the findings. We understand that the investigations are still ongoing and will comment further after the COI has completed its work.

## **COI'S PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

### **Summary of the Incident**

3. On 18 Apr 2018, CFC Lee was observed to be disoriented after completing an 8km fast march. He was attended to by on-site responders, whose actions included removing CFC Lee's equipment and clothing, applying ice packs at vital points, pouring water on him and giving him water to drink.

4. CFC Lee was subsequently evacuated from the incident site to Bedok Camp Medical Centre (BMC). At this point, CFC Lee was semi-conscious and his core body temperature measured 42.7°C. Two bags of fast intravenous drip were administered and he was placed in the medical centre's body cooling unit. When his core body temperature did not fall, CFC Lee was evacuated from BMC to Changi General Hospital (CGH).

5. CFC Lee was attended to at CGH's Accident and Emergency Department and, thereafter, hospitalised in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). While in the ICU, his condition continued to deteriorate and he passed away on 30 Apr 2018.

### **Cause of Death**

6. The COI established that CFC Lee's death was the result of heat stroke leading to multiple organ injury.

7. The COI was unable to ascertain the direct causes which led to CFC Lee suffering from heat stroke. Accumulated fatigue and insufficient rest were, however, identified as possible contributory factors. There was also a possibility that CFC LEE may not have been in optimal health.

8. The COI felt that the likely reasons for CFC Lee finally succumbing to heat stroke were the inadequate on-site casualty management he received and the delay in evacuating him to Bedok Camp Medical Centre. These shortfalls occurred because the persons attending to CFC Lee mistook his signs and symptoms, and thought he was suffering from physical exhaustion rather than heat stroke.

9. The COI found no evidence indicating that CFC Lee's death was caused by foul play.

#### **ERPSS' Comments**

- ERPSS agrees with the COI that accumulated fatigue and insufficient rest were possible contributory factors leading to CFC Lee suffering from heat stroke.
- ERPSS agrees with the COI's preliminary assessment that inadequate medical aid at the incident site and delayed evacuation to the medical centre were likely reasons for CFC Lee succumbing to his injuries.
- ERPSS agrees with the COI that there was no evidence indicating that CFC Lee's death was caused by foul play.

#### **Training and Safety Management**

10. The COI established that the 8km fast march was conducted in accordance with the approved lesson plan, and that conducting and safety structures were in place.

11. There were, however, two breaches of SAF regulations the day before the fast march, which the COI felt could have contributed to the accumulated fatigue and insufficient rest amongst the soldiers in CFC Lee's platoon.

12. Breach #1: Unauthorised Deviations from Lesson Plan.

a. There were two strenuous physical training activities conducted on 17 Apr 2018, namely, Combat Circuit 4 and Cardiovascular 6. The two activities were endorsed by the Centre of Excellence for Soldier Performance and Combat Circuit 4 was conducted according to the approved lesson plan. The conduct of Cardio 6, however, deviated from the lesson plan.

b. The lesson plan for Cardio 6 required soldiers to be grouped according to their IPPT running times. Each group was then required to run six laps of 400m, at a pace determined by its members' running ability. Contrary to the lesson plan, the entire platoon was made to run together, at the same pace. As a result, CFC Lee had to run about 10 seconds per lap faster than he was supposed to, for three laps. He was then allowed to run at his own, slower pace, for the remaining three laps.

c. The rest timing provided between each lap was also less than stipulated in the lesson plan. Soldiers were given one minute to rest between laps, which was 45 seconds less than stipulated.

d. It was established by the COI that approval for the deviations was not sought, which was a breach of the Army's Training Safety Regulations.

13. Breach #2: Unauthorised Administration of Informal Punishment.

a. On the same day, at about 2140hrs, CFC Lee's platoon was subjected to unauthorised collective punishment to discipline them for a lack of teamwork and the use of mobile phones after Lights Out, despite repeated warnings. The informal punishment, which lasted for about 30 minutes, mainly took the form of physical exercises.

b. The personnel who meted out this punishment did so in breach of the SAF's directive on informal punishments. Their actions also resulted in CFC Lee's platoon receiving 6 hours and 15 minutes of rest that night, which contravened the Training Safety Regulations' requirement that soldiers must have a minimum of 7 hours uninterrupted rest the night before any strenuous activities.

### **ERPSS' Comments**

- ERPSS emphasises that it is essential for personnel to comply with safety rules promulgated in the approved operating manuals. Breaches such as those found by the COI should not be condoned.
- ERPSS notes the COI's assessment that a proper safety management plan was put in place for the conduct of the fast march. In addition to having strong safety management structures and processes, ERPSS would like to highlight the value of strengthening the safety culture on the ground. If each commander and soldier takes greater personal ownership and responsibility for safety, it would bring about desirable behaviours such as a) strongly respecting and complying with safety rules and guidelines; b) being willing to speak out when there are safety concerns; c) taking greater care of themselves and each other; and d) open-reporting so as to share lessons and prevent future accidents. Such behaviours would substantially strengthen the Army's efforts to ensure safe training.

## **COI'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

14. The COI proposed several recommendations to strengthen systems and processes, and minimise the likelihood of a similar incident recurring. The main recommendations included:

- a. Strengthening the decision-making process on urgent evacuation by SAF medics and commanders.
- b. Reinforcing the education on heat injury recognition, prevention and management.
- c. Highlighting to commanders the need to adhere to regulations and guidelines.
- d. Stressing the importance of managing soldiers who are having difficulty coping with training.

### **ERPSS' Comments**

ERPSS agrees with the COI's recommendations and would like to emphasise the following:

- Commanders' Knowledge of Heat Injuries. Commanders should be equipped with the requisite knowledge so they can proactively flag out potential heat injury casualties.
- Commanders' Decision Making Process. In the context of casualty management and evacuation, sound decision making should include attributes such as the ability to assess situations correctly, a willingness to consult others and an awareness of cognitive biases.
- Medics' Professional Authority and Communication Skills. It is important for medics to be able to exercise their professional authority when dealing with medical issues. This would include being able to communicate effectively and affirmatively with commanders who are much more senior than them.
- Managing Soldiers who are Facing Difficulties. While it is the soldier's individual responsibility to sound off to their commanders if they are feeling unwell or unable to cope, it is also important for commanders to watch out for such soldiers and proactively pull them out of training before they get injured.

## **CONCLUSION**

15. ERPSS agrees with the COI's preliminary findings and recommendations. We note that the Army is in the process of instituting the COI's recommendations, as well as taking a range of additional actions to strengthen heat injury management and reinforce its training safety systems. ERPSS supports these actions and considers them important steps towards making the SAF a safer place for our soldiers.

Submitted by:

Chairman and Members,  
External Review Panel on SAF Safety



### **Second External Review Panel on SAF Safety (ERPSS)**

1. The members of the second External Review Panel on SAF Safety are:

Mr Heng Chiang Gnee [Chairman]  
Director, MMA Offshore Ltd  
Chairman, Workplace Safety and Health Council (Apr 2016 - Mar 2018)

Mr Chan Yew Kwong  
Director (Special Duties), Occupational Safety and Health Division, Ministry of Manpower

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