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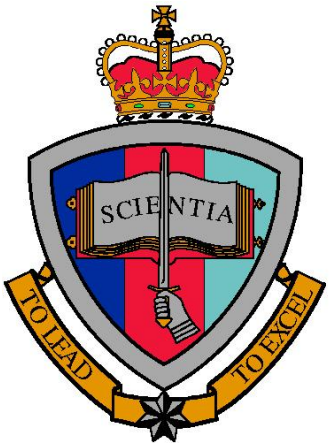

ARISTOCRACY OF ARMED TALENT

THE MOTIVATION, COMMITMENT, AND ASCENSION OF MILITARY ELITES IN SINGAPORE (1965-2014)

SAMUEL LING WEI CHAN

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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This thesis examined why generals and admirals in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) were motivated to join the military as regulars, why they remained on active service, and how they ascended to the pinnacle of the office corps. Theories and empirical studies drawn from psychology, sociology, and the management sciences served as sensitizing concepts which guided data collection. Twenty-eight retired military elites drawn from vocations across the tri-service SAF shared their 'lived experiences' during semi-structured interviews. There were primary and secondary motivations to join the SAF. The former included prestigious scholarships, that the SAF was the best career option available, military medicine was an atypical path for doctors, cutting-edge technology and technical competency, and genuine interests in the armed forces. The latter categories comprised salary, flying, the sea, 'escaping' conscription in the army, and familial roles in the choice of a military career. Although an officer could join the SAF nothing obliged him to serve until retirement. For the military elites their commitment to service was bi-dimensional. Transactional commitment was rooted in egoism and manifested in varying shades of obligations to stay in uniform, remuneration, and career progression. Yet these generals and admirals all converged toward an altruistic transformational commitment to their comrades-in-arms, the profession-of-arms, and the sacred mission apportioned to the SAF. Finally, officer ascension reflected both processes and structure. Officers received postings and promotion predicated on their performance and potential (not seniority) which are closely scrutinized to avoid cronyism. While there are no cookie-cutter pathways, the ascension structure favoured those who held command and is also subjected to organizational requirements and political considerations. Wearing a star or more not only reflected technical competency but was an amalgamation of military professionalism, critical responsibility, impeccable character, diplomatic acumen, and political trustworthiness. The empirical evidence presented is specific to the 28 interview participants and conclusions could be generalized at best to the 137 SAF generals and admirals between 1965 and 2014. Despite such limitations this study is undoubtedly the most detailed examination of Singapore's military elites to date and this is its original contribution to knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examined why generals and admirals in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) were motivated to join the military as regulars, why they remained on active service, and how they ascended to the pinnacle of the office corps. Theories and empirical studies drawn from psychology, sociology, and the management sciences served as sensitizing concepts which guided data collection. Twenty-eight retired military elites drawn from vocations across the tri-service SAF shared their 'lived experiences' during semi-structured interviews. There were primary and secondary motivations to join the SAF. The former included prestigious scholarships, that the SAF was the best career option available, military medicine was an atypical path for doctors, cutting-edge technology and technical competency, and genuine interests in the armed forces. The latter categories comprised salary, flying, the sea, 'escaping' conscription in the army, and familial roles in the choice of a military career. Although an officer could join the SAF nothing obliged him to serve until retirement. For the military elites their commitment to service was bi-dimensional. Transactional commitment was rooted in egoism and manifested in varying shades of obligations to stay in uniform, remuneration, and career progression. Yet these generals and admirals all converged toward an altruistic transformational commitment to their comrades-in-arms, the profession-of-arms, and the sacred mission apportioned to the SAF. Finally, officer ascension reflected both processes and structure. Officers received postings and promotion predicated on their performance and potential (not seniority) which are closely scrutinized to avoid cronyism. While there are no cookie-cutter pathways, the ascension structure favoured those who held command and is also subjected to organizational requirements and political considerations. Wearing a star or more not only reflected technical competency but was an amalgamation of military professionalism, critical responsibility, impeccable character, diplomatic acumen, and political trustworthiness. The empirical evidence presented is specific to the 28 interview participants and conclusions could be generalized at best to the 137 SAF generals and admirals between 1965 and 2014. Despite such limitations this study is undoubtedly the most detailed examination of Singapore's military elites to date and this is its original contribution to knowledge.

(97,964 words of text excluding annexes and bibliography)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*"

– Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

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Canberra, ACT

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ABBREVIATIONS

1 FLOT	First Flotilla
3 FLOT	Third Flotilla
3G	Third-Generation
ABSD	Applied Behavioural Science Department
ACC	Air Combat Command
ACCORD	Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence
ACGS	Assistant Chief of General Staff
ACP	Assistant Commissioner of Police
ADA	Air Defence Artillery
ADB	Air Defence Brigade [presently Air Defence Group (ADG)]
ADG	Air Defence Group [formerly Air Defence Brigade]
ADOC	Air Defence Operations Command [formerly Air Defence Systems Division (ADSD) and before that Singapore Air Defence Artillery (SADA)]
AELO	Air Engineering and Logistics Organization led by Head Air Engineering and Logistics (HAEL) [formerly Air Logistics Organization and before that Air Logistics Department, both led by Head Air Logistics (HAL)]
AFOG	Air Force Operations Group [presently Air Operations Control Group (AOCG)]
AFR	Annual Feedback Report
AFSB	Air Force Systems Brigade [presently Air Surveillance and Control Group (ASCG)]
ALS	Air Logistics Squadron [presently Air Engineering and Logistics Squadron (AELS)]
AO	Administrative Officer [a member of the Administrative Service (AS)]
AOAS	Army Officers Advanced School [formerly School of Advanced Training for Officers (SATO)]
AOCG	Air Operations Control Group [formerly Air Force Operations Group (AFOG)]
AOMC	Army Officers Management Centre
APGC	Air Power Generation Command
ARMCEG	Army Combat Engineer Group
AS	Administrative Service [the bureaucratic elite with the Public Service Division (PSD)]
ASCG	Air Surveillance and Control Group [formerly Air Force Systems Brigade (AFSB)]

ATA	Academic Training Award
AWO	Air Warfare Officer (an appointment in the air force)
BG	Brigadier-General
BMT	Basic Military Training
BTC	Battalion Tactics Course
C2D	Commitment to Defence
C3	Command, Control, and Coordination
C4I	Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence
CAB	Changi Air Base
CAF	Chief of Air Force
CBRE	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Explosives
CDF	Chief of Defence Force [as the defence chief is known since 1990]
CDO	Commando
CEO	Chief Engineer Officer
CEP	Current Estimated Potential
CGO	Chief Guards Officer
CGS	Chief of General Staff [as the defence chief was known from 1978-90]
CI	Chief Instructor (an appointment in a training school/institute)
CIO	Chief Infantry Officer
CMC	Chief of Medical Corps
CMEO	Chief Maintenance and Engineering Officer
CMPB	Central Manpower Base
CMR	Civil-Military Relations
CNB	Changi Naval Base
CNV	Chief of Navy
CO	Commanding Officer
COA	Chief of Army [formerly Deputy Chief of General Staff (Army)]
COL	Colonel
COMD	Commander
COMDT	Commandant
CNN	Cable News Network
COS-AS	Chief of Staff – Air Staff
COS-GS	Chief of Staff – General Staff
COS-JS	Chief of Staff – Joint Staff
COS-NS	Chief of Staff – Naval Staff
COSCOM	Coastal Command
CPT	Captain

CSC	Command and Staff Course/College
CSH	Combat Support Hospital
CSO	Chief Signals Officer
CSSCOM	Combat Service Support Command
CSO	Chief Supply Officer
CTC	Company Tactics Course
CTF	Combined Task Force
CTO	Chief Transport Officer
DCGS	Deputy Chief of General Staff
DEFCO	Defence Council
DGS	Director General Staff [as the defence chief was known from 1966-78]
DIR	Director
DIV	Division
DIV ARTY	Division Artillery
DJID	Director Joint Intelligence Directorate
DJO	Director Joint Operations
DJOPD	Director Joint Operations and Planning Directorate
DMG	Defence Management Group
DMI	Director Military Intelligence
DMO	Defence Materials Organization
DMRI	Defence Medical Research Institute
DMS	Defence Merit Scholarship
DPO	Defence Policy Office
DS	Deputy Secretary
DSO	Defence Science Organization
DSTA	Defence Science and Technology Agency
FMC	Federation Military College (Malaysia)
FSTD	Future Systems and Technology Directorate headed by the Future Systems and Technology Architect (FSTA) [formerly Future Systems Directorate (FSD) headed by the Future Systems Architect (FSA)]
FTS	Flying Training School
GBAD	Ground Based Air Defence [formerly Air Defence Artillery (ADA)]
GDS	Guards
GKSCSC	Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College [formerly Singapore Command and Staff College (SCSC)]
GSMB	General Support Maintenance Base
Hd	Head

HDB	Housing and Development Board
HJL	Head Joint Logistics
HNL	Head Naval Logistics
HNO	Head Naval Operations
HNPL	Head Naval Plans
HNW	Hotel New World
HQ	Headquarters
HUDC	Housing and Urban Development Company
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
JCISD	Joint Communications and Information Systems Department led by Head Joint Communications and Information Systems (HJCIS) [formerly Joint Communications and Electronics Department (JCED)]
JFC	Junior Flying Club [presently the Singapore Youth Flying Club (SYFC)]
JLD	Joint Logistics Department led by Head Joint Logistic (HJL)
JMPD	Joint Manpower Department led by Head Joint Manpower (HJM)
JOD	Joint Operations Department led by Director Joint Operations (DJO)
JOPD	Joint Operations and Planning Directorate led by Director Joint Operations and Planning Directorate (DJOPD)
JPTD	Joint Plans and Transformation Department led by Head Joint Plans and Transformation (HJPT) [formerly Joint Plans Department (JPD) headed by Head Joint Plans (HJP)]
JS	Joint Staff
LG	Lieutenant-General
LSA	Local Study Award
LST	Landing Ship Tank (type of naval vessel)
LTA	Lieutenant
LTC	Lieutenant-Colonel
MAF	Malaysian Armed Forces
MAJ	Major
MDES	Military Domain Expert Scheme
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MG	Major-General
MIO	Military Intelligence Organization led by Director Military Intelligence (DMI) [formerly Joint Intelligence Directorate (JID) led by Director Joint Intelligence Directorate (DJID)]
MID	Midshipman
MIDs	Midshipmen

MINDEF	Ministry of Defence
MO	Medical Officer
MOH	Ministry of Health
MPs	Members of Parliament
MSD	Military Security Department
MSTF	Maritime Security Task Force
MTA	Military Training Award
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCC	National Cadet Corps
NDP	National Day Parade
NDU	Naval Diving Unit
NALCOM	Naval Logistics Command led by Commander NALCOM
NLD	Naval Logistics Department led by Head Naval Logistics (HNL)
NLO	Naval Logistics Organization
NOD	Naval Operations Department led by Head Naval Operations (HNO)
NPLD	Naval Plans Department led by Head Naval Plans (HNPL)
NSAD	National Service Affairs Department
NSF	National Service Fulltime [i.e. fulltime conscripts]
NSMen	Operationally-Ready National Servicemen [formerly reservists]
NUH	National University Hospital
NUS	National University of Singapore
OC	Officer Commanding
OCC	Officer Cadet Course
OCS	Officer Cadet School
OCT	Officer Cadet Trainee
OMS	Overseas Merit Scholarship
OP	Observation Post
OPC	Officers' Personnel Centre
ORBAT	Order of Battle
ORD	Operationally-Ready Date [i.e. completion of military service, formerly known as Run-Out Date (ROD)]
OSA	Official Secrets Act
OTA	Overseas Training Award
PA	Promotion Authority.
PC	Refers to: 1) Participation Command; 2) Platoon Commander; or 3) Promotion Council
PDF	People's Defence Force

PLAB	Paya Labar Air Base
PM	Prime Minister
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PMR	Performance Management Report
PPL	Private Pilot Licence
PRB	Promotion Recommendation Board
PS	Permanent Secretary
PS (D)	Permanent Secretary (Defence)
PS (DD)	Permanent Secretary (Defence Development)
PSC	Public Service Commission [which 'oversees the recruitment, promotion and terms of service of civil servants']
PSD	Public Service Division [the 'central people agency of the Singapore Public Service']
PSO	Principal Staff Officer
QFI	Qualified Flying Instructor
RADM1	Rear-Admiral (one-star) [formerly Commodore (CDRE)]
RADM2	Rear-Admiral (two-star)
RECORD	Recognising the Contribution of Reservists to Total Defence
REME	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (a corps of the British Amy)
RET	Retired
RI	Raffles Institution
ROD	Run-Out Date [i.e. completion of military service, presently known as Operationally-Ready Date (ORD)]
RSAF	Republic of Singapore Air Force [formerly Singapore Air Defence Command (SADC)]
RSN	Republic of Singapore Navy
RSS	Republic of Singapore Ship
SA	Singapore Artillery
SAB	Singapore Armoured Brigade
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SAFMC	Singapore Armed Forces Medical Corps
SAFOS	Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Scholarship
SAFRA	Singapore Armed Forces Reservist Association
SAFTI	Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute
SAFTI MI	SAFTI Military Institute
SAR	Singapore Armoured Regiment
SAS	Refers to either: 1) SAF Academic Scholarship [formed from the

	amalgamation of the Academic Training Award (ATA) and Military Training Award (MTA)] or; 2) Singapore Advanced Schools
SATO	School of Advanced Training for Officers [presently Army Officers Advanced School (SATO)]
SBAB	Sembawang Air Base
SCDF	Singapore Civil Defence Force
SCE	Singapore Combat Engineers
SCSC	Singapore Command and Staff College [presently Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College (GKSCSC)]
SIA	Singapore International Airlines
SIB	Singapore Infantry Brigade
SID	Security and Intelligence Division (external intelligence agency)
SIG	Signals
SIR	Singapore Infantry Regiment
SIT	Singapore Improvement Trust
SMS	SAF Merit Scholarship [formerly Overseas Training Award (Academic)]
SOH	Sword of Honour
SOF	Special Operations Force
SPF	Singapore Police Force
SQN	Squadron
SSSO	Senior Specialist Staff Officer
SVC	Singapore Volunteer Corps
TAB	Tengah Air Base
TNB	Tuas Naval Base
TPT	Transport
TRADOC	Army Training and Doctrine Command
TSWC	Tri-Service Warfighter Course [formerly Tri-Service Course (TSC) and before that the Joint Junior Staff Course (JJSC)]
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UC	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Command
UN	United Nations
VADM	Vice-Admiral
WOSPEC	Warrant Officer and Specialists
WSO	Weapon Systems Officer

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"We in Singapore are fortunate that we do not subscribe to the aristocracy of pedigree, class or caste, but to the aristocracy of talent. Hence the high social mobility which is one of the outstanding characteristics of our Republic."[1]

— C. V. Devan Nair (1923-2006)
President of the Republic of Singapore (1981-5)

1.1 Introduction and Research Questions

This thesis is a case study of Singapore's military elites between 1965 and 2014. The aim is to understand aspects of their 'lived' realities and social contexts as they scaled the ranks to serve at the apex of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and within the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) (Annex A).[2] Twenty-eight retired generals and admirals graciously shared their respective experiences and retrospective reflections which proved invaluable in addressing three research questions. The first query is their reason(s) for a military career and asked "*why were they motivated to sign-on as regular officers?*"[3] The second is their continuation of active duty after fulfilling initial service obligations, or "*why were they committed to stay-on in the SAF?*" The final question examined their ascension. Essentially, "*how did they ascend the rank hierarchy in terms of processes and force structure?*" The underlying logic *connecting* the questions is that one must *join* the military and *stay* on active duty before being *selected* on some criteria as a member of Singapore's Aristocracy of Armed Talent.[4]

The study is important because it focused on men who had the sacred duty to prepare a technologically-advanced war-machine to deter aggression in peace and manage the calibrated application of violence in war. A detailed examination of military elites in Singapore has never been undertaken and this is the study's original contribution to knowledge. This chapter contains three sections which unfurl

[1] "The scholars' debt," *The Straits Times*, 2 July 1982, p. 1; and "What price our high-achievers?" *The Straits Times*, 2 July 1982, p. 16.
[2] General ranks in the Singapore Army and Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) include the one-star Brigadier-General (BG), two-star Major-General (MG), and three-star Lieutenant-General (LG). The corresponding ranks in the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) are Rear-Admiral (one-star) (RADM1), Rear-Admiral (two-star) (RADM2), and Vice-Admiral (VADM). The four-star General (GEN) and Admiral (ADM) is legislated but not (yet) in use.
[3] The phrase 'sign-on' is a colloquial expression used to indicate an individual has opted for regular service in the SAF. This intention is realized upon signing an agreement stipulating the terms and conditions of employment.
[4] The phrase 'Aristocracy of Talent' has been used to depict a societal 'aristocracy' based on merit instead of birth. See for example Lewis K. Killian, "Generals, the Talented Tenth, and Affirmative Action," *Society* (September/October 1999), p. 33; and Stephen J. McNamee and Robert K. Miller Jr., *The Meritocracy Myth* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004), p. 101.

foundational aspects pertinent in addressing the research questions. The first defines and frames the group (the military elite) and identifies its members (the military elites) within Singapore's context. The second section presents the methodological toolbox with philosophical and practical reasons for selecting the qualitative approach over others amidst contested views of merit and academic rigour. A discussion of research ethics rounds-off this segment. The final section charts the scope and structure of the thesis.

1.2 The Elite

A definition of the word 'elite' usually contains two parts. The first refers to a segment of society or an organization considered superior to the rest.[5] This superiority is normally a quality or ability that makes them "the best or most skilful people in a group."[6] The second part consists of perceived benefits so that "an elite group has a high status because it contains the best of its kind."[7] The result of combining ability and status is that the elite are usually "a small group of people who have a lot of power or advantages."[8]

The issue with 'elite' as a noun or adjective is the inimical connotations associated with the verb 'elitism' which has turned 'elite' into a dirty word in Singapore and abroad.[9] The dictionary proffers various definitions of elitism according to the angle of emphasis. It can mean "the belief that a small group of people who have a lot of advantages should keep the most power and influence."[10] It could also refer to "the belief that a society of system should be run by an elite" or "the superior attitude or behaviour associated with an elite."[11] The root of the issue is one where the superiority complex and sense of entitlement arising out of elitism has intertwined itself with the word 'elite'. An 'elite' does not necessary display 'elitism' but is today frequently guilty by association.[12] Singaporean academic Kenneth Tan expanded on the notion that:

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[5] Judy Pearsall (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Tenth Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 463.
[6] *MacMillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, International Student Edition (Oxford, UK: Macmillan Education, 2002), p. 450.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] See for example Tan Weizhen, "Get to know Koh first: PM," *TODAY*, 29 January 2013, pp. 1-2; and "Should 'elite' cease to be a dirty word?" *The Guardian*, 18 March 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/mar/18/highereducation.uk (accessed 28 May 2014). Another word in the cross hairs seems to be 'meritocracy' which is increasingly seen as benefitting only a selected few. See Siau Ming En, "Avoid making meritocracy a dirty word, says Heng," *TODAY*, 29 January 2014, www.todayonline.com/singapore/avoid-making-meritocracy-dirty-word-says-heng (accessed 28 May 2014).
[10] *MacMillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, p. 450.
[11] Pearsall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p. 463.
[12] "Should 'elite' cease to be a dirty word?"

> "Elitism sets in when the elite class develops an exaggerated 'in-group' sense of superiority, a dismissive attitude toward the abilities of those who are excluded from this in-group, a heroic sense of responsibility for the well-being of what the in-group 'laments' as the 'foolish' and 'dangerous' masses, and a repertoire of self-congratulatory public gestures to maintain what is sometimes merely a delusion of superiority."[13]

In practical terms elitism raises its ugly head when "the best, the cream of society, [look] after themselves and their kind, ensuring their own progress and successes, if necessary at the expense of the rest of society."[14] In Singapore, elitism is personified in a segment of "upper-middle or upper-class public servants with impeccable academic grades but out of touch with the very people they are supposed to serve."[15] It must, however, be stressed that elites and elitism are not necessarily synonymous.

Within the study of elites, classical theorists such as Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels focused on the rule of political elites (the 'organized minority') over the masses (the 'disorganized majority') and examined themes of superiority, force, manipulation, wealth, class, familial ties, achievements, revolutions, and political parties.[16] These themes influenced subsequent theorists where some made nuanced classifications according to social functions – political, organizational, intellectual, artistic, moral, religious, economic, education, cultural, military, and legal – and examined cooperation and integration among the elites, the role of individual performances and meritocracy, and the democratic means of elite selection and recruitment.[17] The backgrounds and education of elites attracted particular interest.[18]

Wide-ranging definitions of the term 'elite' proliferated in tandem with the expansion of research on the topic. Considerations were given to those with most influence based on power, wealth, respect, and knowledge.[19] Others viewed elites as the

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[13] Kenneth Paul Tan, "Meritocracy and Elitism in a Global City: Ideological Shifts in Singapore," *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January 2008), p. 10.
[14] Speech by Minister of Defence, Dr Yeo Ning Hong, at the MINDEF Workplan Seminar on 26 March 1994 (MINDEF, Gombak Drive). Reported in "An SAF that strives for excellence," *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1994, p. 4.
[15] Han Fook Kwang, Zuraidah Ibrahim, Chua Mui Hoong, Lydia Lim, Ignatius Low, Rachel Lin, and Robin Chan, *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011), p. 102.
[16] Michael Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites* (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), pp. 8-21.
[17] John Scott, *Power* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001), p. 39; and Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, pp. 22-40.
[18] Krishna Kumar, "Reproduction or Change? Education and Elites in India," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 20, No. 30 (27 July 1985), pp. 1280-4; Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Robert L. Cutts, *An Empire of Schools: Japan's universities and the Molding of a National Power Elite* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1997); Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, pp. 61-88; Mitchell L. Stevens, *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Gareth Williams and Ourania Filippakou, "Higher education and UK elite formation in the twentieth century," *Higher Education*, Vol. 59, Iss. 1 (January 2010), pp. 1-20.
[19] Harold D. Lasswell, Daniel Lerner, and C. Easton Rothwell, "The Elite Concept," in Peter Bachrach (ed.), *Political Elites in a Democracy* (New York, NY: Atherton Press, 1971), p. 14; and Harold D. Lasswell, *On*

minority who exerted disproportionate influence and made "major decisions" within political and social affairs.[20] In functional terms elites included "political leaders; administrators of the state; those in charge of the economy; leaders of the people; and military chiefs."[21] Others counted leaders of the media, academia, and labour unions as elites.[22] Indiscriminate use of the word resulted in conceptual overstretch as John Scott noted:

> "At the height of its popularity almost any powerful, advantaged, qualified, privileged, or superior group or category might be described as an elite. The term became one of the most general – and, therefore, one of the most meaningless – terms used in descriptive studies. It was applied to such diverse groups as politicians, bishops, intelligent people, aristocrats, lawyers, and successful criminals."[23]

Scott proposed the term 'elite' be applied only to those who hold and exercise a degree of 'power', the authority to issue orders, to direct, and expect compliance from others.[24] Concepts consistent with this proposal included Suzanne Keller's 'strategic elites' whose "decisions and actions have many consequences for many members of society."[25] An even narrower and succinct concept is C. Wright Mills' 'power elites' namely the 'economic, political, and military' triumvirate who are the "real centers of power" affecting the whole of society.[26]

1.2.1 The Military Elite

The military elite as a group is counted among society's elite independent of broad or narrow definitions, the exception being classical theorists who focused exclusively on the ruling class or political elites. In some cases, the military elite and political elites are one in the same as post-coup juntas or as catalysts to democratic transitions.[27] In most cases, however, the military elite is subservient to the political

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Political Sociology, edited and with an Introduction by Dwaine Marvick (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 115.

[20] Geraint Parry, *Political Elites* (Colchester, UK: European Consortium for Political Research, 2005), pp. 13, 28.

[21] Nada K. Kakabadse, Andrew Kakabadse, and Alexander Kouzmin, "From Local Elites to a Globally Convergent Class: A Historical Analytical Perspective," in Andrew Kakabadse and Nada Kakabadse (eds.), *Global Elites: The Opaque Nature of Transnational Policy Determination* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 2.

[22] Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, p. 3.

[23] John Scott, "Modes of power and the re-conceptualization of elites," in Mike Savage and Karel Williams, *Remembering Elites* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 27; and Scott, *Power*, pp. 31-2.

[24] Scott, *Power*, p. 31; and Scott, "Modes of power and the re-conceptualization of elites," p. 28.

[25] Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, p. 31.

[26] Scott, *Power*, p. 38; Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, p. 41; Scott, "Modes of power and the re-conceptualization of elites," p. 35; and Kakabadse et al., "From Local Elites to a Globally Convergent Class," p. 6.

[27] For example Eva Etzioni-Halevy, "Civil-Military Relations and Democracy: The Case of the Military-Political Elites' Connection in Israel," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 401-17; Nil S. Satana, "Transformation of the Turkish Military and the Path to Democracy," *Armed Forces & Society*,

echelon in both democratic and non-democratic forms of government.[28] In terms of power, the most "tangible results of their work" is also the metric by which they are judged, namely military victories.[29] In times of peace – and since not all military elites experienced combat – they have power through authority vested in their appointments. As Peter Bachrach explained:

> "Elites wield power, but in most cases their resources of power reside in their occupation of a position of authority. Moreover, the exercise of authority by elites is often more far-reaching and effective than when they merely choose to exercise power … Authority is exercised when obedience to a command results from either a belief in the legitimacy of the commander's position and his right to issue the order, or a feeling of loyalty and confidence in the sound judgment of the commander, or from both."[30]

While one included the military elite among the various social elites, identifying members of the former is often subjective. Some referred to 'elite' units and it was observed that:

> "… the whole question of what constitutes a military elite is not as clear as many people may believe. Due to a lack of understanding, the term is often misused by the press and public, and also by military personnel. Many different groups, including submariners, search and rescue technicians, paratroopers, fighter pilots, specific combat arms units, and even military police have been labelled as elites, just to name a few."[31]

The term 'elite' is also used in reference to senior military officers. The late eminent military sociologist Morris Janowitz in his 1971 classic *The Professional Soldier* defined the military elite – whom he also calls an 'elite cadre' – as officers at the apex of the rank hierarchy "responsible for the management of the armed forces."[32] Within this esteemed group lay the strategic core, "the elite nucleus – who give the military establishment its direction."[33] While conceptually sound, the composition of military elites differed across countries and researchers. Janowitz considered general-rank

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Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring 2008), pp. 357-88; Mark Beeson, "Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia and the Philippines: Will the Thai Coup Prove Contagious?" *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring 2008), pp. 474-90; Terence Lee, "The Armed Forces and Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Explaining the Role of the Military in 1986 Philippines and 1998 Indonesia," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (May 2009), pp. 640-69; Aditya Bhave and Christopher Kingston, "Military coups and the consequences of durable de facto power: the case of Pakistan," *Economics of Governance*, Vol. 11, Iss. 1 (February 2010), pp. 51-76; Jonathan M. Powell and Clayton L. Thyne, "Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (March 2011), pp. 249-59; and Zoltan Barany, "The Role of the Military," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October 2011), pp. 24-35.

[28] Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, pp. 32-3.

[29] Ibid., p. 32.

[30] Peter Bachrach, "Introduction," in Peter Bachrach (ed.), *Political Elites in a Democracy* (New York, NY: Atherton Press, 1971), pp. 2-3.

[31] Bernd Horn, "The Dark Side to Elites: Elitism as a catalyst for disobedience," *Canadian Army Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter 2005), p. 67; and Bernd Horn, "Love 'Em or Hate 'Em: Learning to live with Elites," *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter 2007-2008), p. 34.

[32] Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1971), pp. 11, 58.

[33] Ibid.

(one- to four-star) officers as America's military elite.[34] Scott used the same group of officers in his study of power in the United States (US).[35] Eva Etzioni-Halevy qualified "colonels and above" as military elites in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF).[36] Oren Barak and Eyal Tsur on the other hand limited their definition to officers in the ranks of Major-General (MG) and Lieutenant-General (LG).[37] Others used appointments as the delimiter. Li Cheng and Scott Harold grouped officers from Colonel (COL) to General (GEN) in the Central Committee and Central Military Commission as China's military elite.[38] Nicholas Jans et al. did not classify their officers of interest as military elites but restricted their study to two- to four-star Australian officers who served in the capacity of a "military strategist rather than that of senior operational commander."[39] It is clear that there is no prescribed grouping of a country's military elites and it remains a matter of the researcher's judgement and the study's context.[40]

1.2.2 Singapore's Military Elite

In this thesis Singapore's military elite consists of flag-officers who are authorized to wear one or more stars.[41] These ranks reflect their individual abilities to lead at the highest and most important echelons of the defence establishment. The elite nucleus resides within the military elite and includes the Chief of Defence Force (CDF) responsible for the entire SAF, and three service chiefs – Chief of Army (COA), Chief of Navy (CNV), and Chief of Air Force (CAF) – who lead the Singapore Army, Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN), and Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF). Statutory laws do not regulate the number of flag-officers but the defence establishment actively controls promotions at this level to avoid 'brass-creep'.[42]

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[34] Ibid., p. 147. General-grade officers in the US Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force include Brigadier-General (one-star), Major-General (two-star), Lieutenant-General (three-star), and General (four-star). The corresponding ranks in the navy are Rear-Admiral (Lower Half), Rear-Admiral, Vice-Admiral, and Admiral. The five-star General of the Armies or Fleet Admiral was last authorized during WWII and the Korean War.
[35] Scott, *Power*, p. 37.
[36] Etzioni-Halevy, "Civil-Military Relations and Democracy," p. 403. General-grade officers in the Israeli Defence Force include Brigadier-General (one-star equivalent), Major-General (two-star equivalent), Lieutenant-General (three-star equivalent). The corresponding ranks in the navy are Rear-Admiral (Lower Half), Rear-Admiral, and Vice-Admiral.
[37] Oren Barak and Eyal Tsur, "The Military Careers and Second Careers of Israel's Military Elite," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Summer 2012), p. 473.
[38] Li Cheng and Scott W. Harold, "China's New Military Elite," *China Security*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Autumn 2007), p. 62.
[39] Nicholas Jans with Stephen Mugford, Jamie Cullens and Judy Frazer-Jans, *The Chiefs: A Study of Strategic Leadership* (Canberra, ACT: Centre for Defence Leadership and Ethics, Australian Defence College, 2013), p. 7.
[40] Scott, *Power*, p. 38.
[41] 'Flag-officer' is not a term reserved only for admirals. In the SAF it is used in reference to "senior commanders holding the rank of one-star general (or its equivalent) and above." See "Navy Day – 'Charting the Future'," *Pioneer* (June 1994), p. 16.
[42] Interviews No. 25 and No. 15.

Within Singapore's context the fear of being tagged an 'elite' came from semantic limitations to mean 'elitism', at best, or perceptions of a deeper and more sinister malaise, at worst. Yet it was the late Dr Goh Keng Swee (hereafter 'Dr Goh'), the chief architect and Singapore's first defence minister (1965-7, 1970-9), who specifically applied the term 'military elite' to the SAF.[43] In 1972, he revealed the "deliberate creation of military elites in the Republic … the most skilled, most competent and most successful … the ultimate guardians of the independence of sovereign states."[44] Goh was cognizant of elitism and cautioned that Singapore's elites, including its senior military officers, "do not enjoy special privileges other than bigger incomes and better working conditions which their superior performance entitles them to."[45]

The identification of Singapore's military elites has been a challenge. In *Defending the Lion City* Tim Huxley referred to a non-existent Brigadier-General (BG) "Tan Seck Khim."[46] Huxley, assuming a spelling error, actually referred to Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Tan Teck Khim who served as the first Director General Staff (DGS) in the former Ministry of Interior and Defence (MID) from 1966 to 1968.[47] Ross Worthington, in *Governance in Singapore*, confused the ranks of various individuals making BG of two non-general officers while 'demoting' another.[48] Finally, former Singapore President S. R. Nathan in his memoirs with Timothy Auger mentioned a "M. S. Gill from Tangkak in Johore, who later became a brigadier-general in the Singapore Armed Forces."[49] The stated individual is believed to be the late Mancharan Singh Gill who rose to the then-second highest uniformed appointment as Deputy Chief of General Staff (DCGS) in 1982 before retiring as a Colonel (COL) in 1986.[50]

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[43] Melanie Chew and Bernard Tan Tiong Gie, *Creating the Technology Edge: DSO National Laboratories, Singapore 1972-2002* (Singapore: DSO National Laboratories, 2002), p. 26.
[44] Speech by Dr Goh Keng Swee, Minister of Defence, at the Promotion Ceremony at MINDEF HQ on 2 May 1972. Reproduced in "Creating a Military Elite," *Pioneer* (June 1972), pp. 13-4.
[45] Ibid., p. 13.
[46] Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City* (St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), p. 74.
[47] The MID was established in 1965 and separated into the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on 11 August 1970. The legacy of MID is presently reflected in number plates on MINDEF vehicles which begin with the prefix 'MID'. Tan Teck Khim joined the Singapore Police Force in 1945 and after the MID served as Permanent Secretary (Special Duties) at the Ministry of Health (1968-71) and Commissioner of Police (1971-9). See "An Assistant Commissioner of Police at age of 38," *The Straits Times*, 5 September 1963, p. 18; "Police chief to get envoy's post," *The Straits Times*, 7 July 1971, p. 8; Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000* (Singapore: Times Media and The Straits Times Press, 2000), p. 36; and Ramachandran Menon (ed.), *One of A Kind: Remembering SAFTI's First Batch* (Singapore: SAFTI Military Institute, 2007), p. 31.
[48] Worthington cited BGs Foo Kok Swee, Ho Meng Kit, and Lim Chuan Poh. Foo was a lieutenant-colonel (LTC) who retired in the mid-1970s. Ho Meng Kit was a colonel (COL) who left the SAF in the early 1990s. Former CDF Lim Chuan Poh made BG in 1997, MG in 1999, and LG in 2001. See Ross Worthington, *Governance in Singapore* (London, UK and New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 209, 215-7, 222.
[49] S. R. Nathan with Timothy Auger, *An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2011), p. 153.
[50] Gill made COL in 1972. "No. 1 soldier Col. Vij promoted to Brigadier," *The Straits Times*, 3 May 1972, p. 1; and "Deputy SAF chief retires," *The Straits Times*, 20 October 1986, p. 9. Another possible 'M. S. Gill' is LTC (RET) Mejar Singh Gill who is usually referred to as 'Mejar' and not by the initials 'M. S.'

Such confusions were unavoidable because information on Singapore's military elite is not readily available and accessible. This unlike Israel – to which Singapore is often compared – where "[o]ccasionally derided for their failings, but more often worshipped for their achievements, Israel's generals become household names and popular heroes in a way that is unimaginable in most liberal democracies."[51] This is especially so in times of conflict where Israeli society has passed harsh and uncompromising judgement of their military leaders. Singapore's military elites are not as famous and some have even queried why the defence establishment required so 'many' flag-officers.[52] Only a few have seen any direct action which rendered any question of 'combat motivation' moot.[53] Similarly, commitment is generally viewed in terms of staying-on or leaving active service and not the consideration of 'commitment to the point of death'.[54] In fact it was once reported that war-gaming exercises will be "the closest to a major military deployment as they (SAF officers) will ever get."[55]

Independent of war and peace, Janowitz opined that "the career experiences of generals and admirals are matters of public record, and this information is an essential part of the civilian control of the military profession."[56] This obviously does not apply to the city state which prides itself as an information hub but where biographies of its military leaders are rare and the few in existence are often abridged either by design or a combination of ignorance and apathy.[57] It is hardly surprising if Singaporeans cannot recognize their military elites. This status quo has remained because peace and prosperity have removed matters of national defence from society-at-large and fostered benign civil-military relations (CMR), a subject discussed in later sections.

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[51] "The IDF's new chief of staff: Israel's feuding generals," *The Economist*, 15 February 2011.
[52] Li Xueying, "Save money by having fewer generals? No way," *The Straits Times*, 11 March 2007, p. 8; and "Every Soldier Counts: PM," *TODAY*, 12 March 2007, p. 3.
[53] Officers with 'direct action' experience include the late BG (RET) Thomas Campbell in World War Two; BG (RET) Patrick Sim and LG (RET) Winston Choo during *Konfrontasi* (1963-6); and BG Lam Shiu Tong as part of the Special Operations Force incursion to free hostages on SQ 117 (26 March 1991). Research on combat motivation emphasized the strong bonds between soldiers in small-group and stress they "fight for their mates rather than for their country" but other plausible reasons include political indoctrination, punishment, morale, training, officer leadership, rotation system, discipline and values. See for example Marina Nuciari, "Models and Explanations for Military Organization: An Updated Consideration," in Giuseppe Caforio (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military* (New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003), p. 64; Hew Strachan, "Training, Morale and Modern War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2006), pp. 211-27; and Leonard Wong, "Combat Motivation in Today's Soldiers," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (July 2006), p. 660.
[54] Bernard Morris Bass, *Transformational Leadership: Industrial, Military and Educational Impact* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), p. 20.
[55] Chua Hian Hou, "SAF Warriors train on virtual front," *CT* (The Straits Times), 9 August 2000, p. 12.
[56] Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 125. The most famous war heroes are MG Lim Bo Seng (1909-44) of Force 136 and LTA Adnan bin Saidi (1915-42) of the 1st battalion, Malay Regiment who made the ultimate sacrifice in World War II. See Kevin Blackburn, "Colonial forces as postcolonial memories: The commemoration and memory of the Malay Regiment in modern Malaysia and Singapore," in Karl Hack and Tobias Retting (eds.), *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), pp. 320-3.
[57] Despite an internet presence since the late 1990s it was only on 22 October 2012 that a revamped MINDEF website contained the biographies of the CDF and service chiefs. The biographies of other flag officers are also sketchy and piecewise information is released only on ad-hoc basis. See Rachael Lim, "MINDEF's revamped website user-friendly on multiple platforms," *CyberPioneer*, 29 Oct 2012.

Nevertheless, constructing a database of Singapore's military elites is possible albeit time consuming. Tedious repetitions of sifting through open-source literature and data triangulation resulted in a list of 137 SAF officers – all men and overwhelmingly ethnically Chinese – who wore at least one star between 1965 and 2014 (Annex B).[58] The list of 75 army generals (55.1% of total), 24 admirals (17.6%), and 38 air force generals (27.2%) excluded seconded foreign officers and any honorary promotions.[59]

1.3 Research Design

The section is devoted to the research design – the Philosophy and Approach, Method, Analysis, and Ethics (PAMAE) – on which this study rests. Its importance goes beyond ticking-off the proverbial 'methodology' portion of any research project. It instead forms "the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and ultimately, to its conclusions."[60] Without this map there is the danger of simply "picking 'off-the-shelf indicators' and applying 'well-defined concepts' to new situations [which] also means passing on disguised ideologies if care and awareness are not exercised."[61] This is critical as there is no one correct 'method' in the social sciences. The current state of 'methodological affairs' is analysed and sometimes decried in the number of books on the topic, made a fulltime preoccupation for some, and is *sine qua non* for many research projects. What matters most are the principles governing the research design taken to address the research questions asked as Gary Thomas reasoned:

> "… science is not about a method, but about intuition or thinking – it's about supplying answers to questions with good evidence and good reasoning, which

[58] Sources included: 1) the official newspaper *The Straits Times*; 2) official MINDEF/SAF publications such as *Pioneer* (official magazine of MINDEF/SAF), *Pointer* (Journal of the SAF), *Army News*, *Navy News*, and *Air Force News*; 3) commemorative SAF publications such as anniversary books; 4) other government approved publications like the *Public Service Commission* (PSC) *Annual Reports*, *Connections* (newsletter of Temasek Club, the SAF officer's club), *E.Ngage* (newsletter of the future systems directorate), *SAFTILink* (newsletter of SAFTI MI), *MEDLink* (newsletter of the SAF Medical Corps); 5) interview transcripts from the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore; and 6) individual web-pages and blogs on the internet.

[59] Seconded foreign officers included Air Commodores Geoffrey Millington and Jonathan Langer who aided the early development of the Singapore air force. One local war hero is Lim Bo Seng (1909-1944) who hailed from Fujian in China and arrived in Singapore at age 16. He was schooled at Raffles Institution before receiving his tertiary education at the University of Hong Kong. His bravery and ultimate sacrifice against Japanese aggression in WWII earned him a posthumous promotion to Major-General from the Chinese Nationalist Kuomingtang. See "Major General Lim Bo Seng – A Legend to remember," *Pioneer* (October 1989), pp. 8-9; and Ho Shu Huang, "Rethinking the Who, What and When: Why not Singaporean military heroes?" in Norman Vasu, Yolanda Chin, and Kam-yee Law (eds.), *Nations, National Narratives and Communities in the Asia-Pacific*, Comparative Development and Policy in Asia, Vol. 14 (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), p. 16.

[60] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2009), p. 26.

[61] Robert C. Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences: An Introduction* (London, UK and New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), p. 243.

> can be done in a variety of ways, with the principal feature of importance being the thought and analysis that goes into providing those answers."[62]

The research design centred on PAMAE is presented in four subsections. The first concerns the philosophy of knowledge and the approach – quantitative, qualitative, or mixed – best suited for the specific research questions asked.[63] The second examines the method predicated on the selected approach and specifies procedures and participants utilized in data collection. The third addresses data analysis and its sufficiency. The final subsection outlines the ethical considerations that govern this undertaking.

1.3.1 Philosophy and Approach

Thoughtful practitioners reason that findings conveyed via "written text is always incomplete, partial and situated, and there can be no god's-eye view. All writing reflects a particular standpoint: that of the author."[64] This standpoint is influenced (or 'tainted', as some might say) by the author's philosophy of what constitutes knowledge and personal 'lived' experiences. The former refers to an individual's philosophical – ontological (nature of reality) and epistemological ('how do we know what we know') – position vis-à-vis the research questions asked. Knowledge is commonly understood as both 'conscience' which is "concentrated in an individual's mental space" and 'science' "which is distributed among a community of collaborators."[65] Of course, what counts as knowledge depends on the ontological (and epistemological) postures adopted:

> "A realist ontology rests on the assumption that the variables of interest exist outside individuals and are, therefore, concrete, objective, and measurable … An 'interpretivist' ontology rests on the contrasting assumption that human beings do not passively react to an external reality but, rather, impose their internal

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[62] Gary Thomas, *How to do your Case Study: A guide for students and researchers* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2012), p. 9.
[63] The term 'paradigm' is purposefully avoided because the social sciences have not reached a paradigmatic state with "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners" nor is there "the basic assumption of a field (where) acceptance of it is mandatory for practitioners." Quoted in Michael Roskin, "From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: Shifting Generational Paradigms and Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Autumn 1974), pp. 564-5. Similarly, Alan Bryman noted: "It is probably the case that it is quite inappropriate to designate them as paradigms because neither of them can be viewed as indicative of the normal science of a discipline … Quantitative and qualitative research are probably closer to being 'pre-paradigms'." See Alan Bryman, "The end of the paradigm wars?" in Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, and Julia Brannen (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (London, UK: SAGE, 2008), p. 14.
[64] Darrel N. Caulley, "Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief," *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2004), p. 187; and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "'What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been …': Twenty-Five Years of Qualitative and New Paradigm Research," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2010), p. 4.
[65] Steve Fuller, "The project of social epistemology and the elusive problem of knowledge in contemporary society," in Gerard Delanty and Piet Strydom (eds.), *Philosophies of Social Science: The Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK: Open University Press, 2003), pp. 428-9.

> perceptions and ideals on the external world and, in so doing, actively create their realities."[66]

If one adopts the 'realist' – also termed 'positivist', 'functionalist', or 'objectivist' – assumption and its associated epistemological view, this is a declaration that issues related to humans and society are understood by explaining 'cause and effect' and addressed in ways consistent with the natural and physical sciences.[67] 'True' knowledge is observed by measuring and testing dependent variables using scientific (hypothetico-deductive) designs and quantitative methods such as random 'experiments' and statistics (e.g. regression, time series analysis) in an attempt to generalize replicable findings, and therefore predictability, through theory development.[68] The 'realist' philosopher's world is orderly and uncovering this "fixed reality" through "systematic and explicit" rational inquiry gives 'true' (or 'compelling') knowledge.[69] This knowledge is not impacted by the researcher or the subject(s) of observation because the former is "detached" from the latter and "avoid(s) affecting the research process."[70]

Despite the attractive assumptions and intentions of the positivist approach, practical challenges and the lack of generalizeable results and theories became conspicuous in its application to the social sciences. The late Giovanni Sartori elucidated that "the experimental method has limited applicability in the social sciences, and the statistical one requires many cases."[71] Furthermore, cases that fall outside scientific explanations are often dismissed as 'errors' or 'outliers' but interpretivists viewed "the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding."[72] Critics cited the glaring absence of 'covering laws' or 'grand narratives' in the social sciences "that hold for all times – past, future and present – for the systems under study" but which exist in the natural sciences as evidence of the

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[66] Roy Suddaby, "From the Editors: What Grounded Theory is Not," *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2006), p. 636.
[67] Martin N. Marshall, "Sampling for qualitative research," *Family Practice*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (1996), p. 522; John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1998), p. 17; and Mary Katherine O'Connor, F. Ellen Netting and M. Lori Thomas, "Grounded Theory: Managing the Challenge for Those Facing Institutional Review Board Oversight," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 2008), p. 37.
[68] Robert E. Stake, "The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry," *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (February 1978), pp. 5-6; Garry Potter, *The Philosophy of Social Science: New Perspectives* (Harlow, Essex, UK: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000), p. 59; Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Third Edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), pp. 11, 26; Norman K. Denzin, *Qualitative Inquiry Under Fire: Toward a New Paradigm Dialogue* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press Inc., 2009), p. 16; and Lincoln, "'What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been …'," p. 5.
[69] Joseph E. McGrath and Bettina A. Johnson, "Methodology makes meaning: How both qualitative and quantitative paradigms shape evidence and its interpretation," in Paul M. Camic, Jean E. Rhodes, and Lucy Yardley (eds.), *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding perspectives in Methodology and Design* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), p. 34.
[70] Ibid., p. 35.
[71] Giovanni Sartori, "Comparing and miscomparing," in David Collier and John Gerring, *Concepts and Method in Social Science: The tradition of Giovanni Sartori* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), p. 152.
[72] Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1995), p. 39.

interpretivist nature of non-static, non-rational human behaviour in differing contexts.[73] Others argued that "flesh and blood people … are often "a-rational" … that is, they do not appeal to pure reason or statistical logic but rather are derived from pure lived experience" and the scientific method "was a rather distant, detached way to study the intimate, human realities of life."[74] The 'paradigm wars' – as debates over "the merits and assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research" became known – erupted and have continued since the 1980s as it became apparent positivist methods were not appropriate for all inquiries in the social sciences.[75] At times it proved impossible as "the stringent requirements of scientific inquiry could not be met" and anti-positivist researchers were simply not willing to fall for Scientism, the "fetishisation and inappropriate slavish imitation of the methods of natural science."[76]

Taking an interpretivist – commonly called 'constructivist', 'anti-positivist', or 'anti-naturalist' – assumption presents a different epistemological scene.[77] It is a declaration that human experiences are more than exercises in explaining 'cause and effect'. The scientific method has its merits in examining non-interpreting (meaning-free) and predictable objects in the natural sciences but falls short when it comes to human beings who self-interpret, judge, perceive, and give meaning to "beliefs, feelings, attitudes, aspirations or fears."[78] Hypothesis testing and the generation of generalizable theories and models remained peripheral at best. The main focus and consideration is to understand the meaning of contextual behaviour as lived and understood by the actors of interest and interpreted by the researcher.[79] Knowledge is thus constructed by *both* the researcher and the researched. The phenomena under examination must be understood within "a wide sweep of contexts: temporal and

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[73] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 345-8; Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 15; and Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th Edition (London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009), p. 12.
[74] Lincoln, "'What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been …'," p. 6; and Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, p. 23.
[75] See for example N. L. Gage, "The Paradigm Wars and Their Aftermath: A 'Historical' Sketch of Research on Teaching since 1989," *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 18, No. 7 (October 1989), pp. 4-10; Bryman, "The end of the paradigm wars?" pp. 13-25; Mark A. Alise and Charles Teddlie, "A Continuation of the Paradigm Wars? Prevalence Rates of Methodological Approaches Across the Social/Behavioral Sciences," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 2010), pp. 103-26.
[76] Potter, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, pp. 18, 78; and Lincoln, "'What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been …'," p. 4. The requirements of scientific inquiry include: validity (accuracy and precision of measurements, i.e. the 'truth'), reliability (research instrument is neutral in its effect and is consistent giving the same results on different occasions, i.e. can be repeated), generalizability (explain similar phenomena at a general or universal level rather than being unique, i.e. the boundary of applicability), and objectivity (absence of bias in the research as a result of impartial and neutral in researcher's influence on its outcome, process of data collection and analysis that is fair and even-handed, i.e. value free). See Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide: For small-scale social research projects*, Fourth Edition (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2010), p. 298; and McGrath and Johnson, "Methodology makes meaning," p. 42.
[77] Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 27; and O'Connor et al., "Grounded Theory," p. 37.
[78] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 337, 340, 345-8; and Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 40.
[79] Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, p. 214; Potter, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 106; Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, pp. 21, 243; and O'Connor et al., "Grounded Theory," pp. 30-1.

spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, and personal."[80] Frequently, *but not always*, this meant the employment of qualitative traditions of inquiry to uncover rich and detailed data which reflected society's "ambiguity and contradictions" and proffered multiple and alternate explanations.[81] The most common included the historian's biography (originating from the humanities and social sciences), the psychologist's phenomenology (psychology and philosophy), the sociologist's grounded theory (sociology), the anthropologist's ethnography (anthropology and sociology), and the social or political scientist's case study (human and social sciences, business, management, and leadership studies) all of which are frequently "not generalizable, not replicable, and filled with judgements."[82]

Despite the increasing traction of interpretivist assumptions much of social inquiry still takes place within the 'dominant' "natural-scientific mode with descriptive modes offered as qualitative alternatives or complements."[83] Positivists continued to hold the social sciences to the same standards of inquiry as the natural sciences to meet the requirements of a 'good' science.[84] For some this meant utilizing only quantitative methods. Some qualitative practitioners even attempted to 'strengthen' their methods and adopted the standards of quantitative (scientific) methods.[85] This line of thought was famously encapsulated in King, Koehane, and Verba's *Designing Social Inquiry*.[86] This classic text drew critical responses but remains a core reading on 'methods' courses.[87] In fact universities, research institutes, funding bodies, and even countries deeply-rooted in the quantitative tradition have marginalized practitioners of qualitative research.[88] It was also observed with direct relevance to this thesis that "the

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[80] Stake, "The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry," pp. 5-6; Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, p. 39, 43; Potter, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 75; Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 135-9; and Robert E. Stake, *Qualitative Research: Studying how things work* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2010), p. 31.
[81] Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, p. 304.
[82] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, pp. 5, 15; and Lincoln, "'What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been ...'," p. 4.
[83] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, p. 240; and McGrath and Johnson, "Methodology makes meaning," p. 33.
[84] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 345-8.
[85] For example Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their original proposition of the grounded theory approach, and Robert Yin on his approach to undertaking case studies. See Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967); and Yin, *Case Study Research*.
[86] Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[87] James Mahoney, "After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research," *World Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2010), p. 122.
[88] See for example Adrienne D. Dixson, Thandeka K. Chapman, Djanna A. Hill, "Research as an Aesthetic Process: Extending the Portraiture Methodology," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2005), p. 17; Janice M. Morse, "A student's nightmare: The hung committee," *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 18, No. 7 (July 2008), pp. 875-6; Stake, *Qualitative Research*, pp. 29-30; Sari Knopp Biklen, "The Quality of Evidence in Qualitative Research," *International Encyclopedia of Education* (2010), pp. 489-90; and Sungeun Yang, "Surviving as a qualitative researcher in a quantitative world: a personal reflection," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2013), pp. 81-5. For a list of responses to *Designing Social Inquiry*, see Mahoney, "After KKV," pp. 120-47.

larger picture of research into the military is argued to have been oriented toward the engineering rather than enlightenment model of sociology."[89]

Social inquiry using an interpretivist-based qualitative approach is imperfect with several shortcomings. It is subjective because of personal interpretations; generalizations and predictions (if at all) are limited; the contributions made "to disciplined science are slow and tendentious"; findings are relatable at best and esoteric at worst; results do little to advance social practice because of changing societal context(s); the associated costs are high in terms of research ethics and money; the effort in collecting data and its subsequent analysis is intensive and time consuming so that "many studies continue purely because they are labours of love."[90] Qualitative research also continues to evolve and perennial disagreements arise over issues "such as the relative importance and appropriate place of particular techniques."[91] It does not help that at times the pendulum has swung too far leading to "the excesses of an antimethodological, 'anything goes', romantic postmodernism that is associated with the more radical branches of the qualitative inquiry movement."[92]

While the 'interpretivist' posture is most appropriate for this study its shortcomings are minimised through the validity of data and analysis in four ways.[93] First, the procedures for obtaining data are reasonable and reliably replicable albeit limited by subjectivity. The meanings of 'lived experiences' are, after all, internally-constructed and non-observable. As such the interviewees influence the study because only they "can deliver the most valuable slice of this knowledge."[94] The researcher also influences the study by gathering and interpreting data which is invariably shaped by past experiences – and in turn impacts what information is recorded, the interpretations made, and how findings are represented – resulting in the double-subjectivity (by both the interview participants and the researcher) of interpretations.[95] The researcher is thus obliged to exercise 'reflexivity' – to be conscious of and explicitly

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[89] Paul Higate and Ailsa Cameron, "Reflexivity and Researching the Military," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (January 2006), p. 221.
[90] Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, pp. 45-6; and Stake, *Qualitative Research*, p. 29.
[91] Mahoney, "After KKV," p. 122. Denzin and Lincoln posit that qualitative research has evolved through eight different moments: Traditional (1900-50); Modernist or Golden Age (1950-70); Blurred Genres (1970-86); Crisis of Representation (1986-90); Postmodern, a period of experimental and new ethnographies (1990-5); post-experimental inquiry (1995-2000), the methodologically contested present (2000-4); and the fractured future (2005-present). See Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), p. 3.
[92] Denzin, *Qualitative Inquiry Under Fire*, p. 19; and Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, pp. 304-6.
[93] Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, pp. 298-302; and Yin, *Case Study Research*, pp. 40-1.
[94] Lincoln, "'What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been ...'," p. 7.
[95] Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, pp. 99-100; Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 243, 246; Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, pp. 4, 9; Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, p. 56; John W. Creswell, William E. Hanson, Vicki L. Clark Plano and Alejandro Morales, "Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation," *The Counseling Psychologist*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (March 2007), p. 238; Joanne Waterhouse, "From narratives to portraits: methodology and methods to portray leadership," *The Curriculum Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (September 2007), p. 275; and Biklen, "The Quality of Evidence in Qualitative Research," p. 489.

acknowledge the biases (or 'selective judgement') – to enable readers to contextualise the study."[96] Second, the accuracy and precision of empirical evidence is obtained through multiple data sources, the use of triangulation, grounding data in context and interviews, and giving 'thick description' to 'voices' of the research participants. Third, data is analysed through continuous pattern matching to uncover categories emerging from the themes of motivation, commitment, and ascension. Finally, the conclusions from data and analysis are valid with respect to the 28 interviewees and perhaps with extension to the particular case of Singapore but with limited transferability to other defence forces.[97]

With the author's background in statistics the 'easier' route would have been to take the quantitative approach but doing so would force humans into what the positivists idealized them to be – non-interpreting and predictable – and not what they are.[98] How would the study have progressed assuming that the quantitative approach was most appropriate? In all likelihood, 'measurements' of motivation and commitment would be captured via a survey comprising two to three dozen statements. Each carefully worded statement is matched to the popular five- (or seven-) point 'Likert scale' for respondents to indicate whether they 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'are undecided', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree' with the corresponding statement.[99] The strength of this scale is that it combined "attitudes towards different aspects of an issue and … provide[d] an indicator that is reflective of an overall attitude."[100] However, three shortcomings are evident. First, the sample size required for effective results ranged from "at least 68" to "a minimum of 120 people and preferably more than 200."[101] Second, the way statements are phrased is critical as a participant's dogmatism, curiosity, and perception of the research intent will slant responses in a

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[96] Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, p. 41; Nicola J. Petty, Oliver P. Thomson, and Graham Stew, "Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 1: Introducing the philosophy of qualitative research," *Manual Therapy*, Vol. 17, Iss. 4 (August 2012), p. 270.
[97] This is also a deliberate attempt to avoid the twin 'Fallacies of Research. 'Ecological fallacy' occurs when one makes inferences about individuals based on evidence gathered from 'groups, societies, or nations'. 'Individualistic fallacy', on the other hand, occurs when inferences are about 'groups, societies, or nations' are drawn from evidence gathered about individuals. See Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, Seventh Edition (New York, NY: Worth Publishers, 2008), p. 48.
[98] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 139, 141.
[99] For other scales used see chapter six on "Measuring attitudes and meaning" in David Clark-Carter, *Quantitative Psychological Research: The Complete Student's Companion*, 3rd Edition (Hove, East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press, 2010), pp. 86-98. The Likert Scale (or a variant) was utilized as part of a quantitative approach in studies such as Richard T. Mowday, Richard M. Steers, and Lyman W. Porter, "The Measurement of Organizational Commitment," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 14, Iss. 2 (April 1979), pp. 224-47; Alise Weibull, "European Officers' Job Satisfaction and Job Commitment," *Current Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 57 (1994), pp. 57-70; Laurel R. Goulet and Parbudyal Singh, "Career Commitment: A Reexamination and an Extension," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 61, Iss. 1, (August 2002), pp. 73-91; and Nuciari, "Models and Explanations for Military Organization," pp. 61-86.
[100] Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners* (London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2005), pp. 144-51.
[101] Clark-Carter, *Quantitative Psychological Research*, pp. 91, 93.

particular way.[102] Finally and most importantly for this study, "two people with the same score on the Likert scale may have different patterns of responding. Accordingly, we cannot treat a given score as having a unique meaning about a person's attitude."[103] Furthermore, questionnaires on motivation and commitment are frequently future-oriented and captured an individual's *present intent*. Whether current "beliefs and opinions" are congruent with future actions often remained unknown unless a longitudinal study is conducted. Even then the period between survey and follow-up is limited (often up to five years).[104]

1.3.2 Method

This subsection details the qualitative method employed in this study and the concomitant issues of collecting empirical data collection in terms of participants and procedures. To begin with, there are five main qualitative 'traditions' each with a varying focus.[105] The specific research questions asked are not concerned with only one life (biography), one cultural group (ethnography), developing theory from evidence gathered in the field (grounded theory), or a particular phenomenon (phenomenology). Consequently, the most appropriate is the case study which seeks 'in-depth analyses' and "may be created out of any phenomenon so long as it has identifiable boundaries and comprises the primary object of an inference."[106] Gary Thomas stressed that "the case study is not a method – it is a wrapper for different methods. It's the focus that is special to the case study – a focus on the singular. The key is to draw rich, interconnected information from this singular focus and derive unique insights from the analysis that follows."[107] Inquiry is made "in depth and from many angles" of the 'why' and 'how' and generalization is applicable only to the case studied.[108] Robert Stake added:

> "We do not study a case primarily to understand cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case … The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself … We seek an accurate but limited understanding. Seldom are we primarily trying to

[102] R. T. White and L. D. Mackay, "A note on a possible alternative to Likert Scales," *Research in Science Education*, Vol. 3, Iss. 1 (1973), pp. 75-6.
[103] Clark-Carter, *Quantitative Psychological Research*, p. 93.
[104] Mowday et al., "The Measurement of Organizational Commitment," p. 226.
[105] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, pp. 65, 67, 112-3, 148-9, 251.
[106] John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 19.
[107] Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, pp 43-4; and Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, p. 2.
[108] Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, pp. 3-4, 9, 23.

> generalize to other cases. Still, some comparison with other cases is inevitable. We and our readers often modify our previous generalizations somewhat as a result of acquaintance with a new case."[109]

Of the four possible designs listed in Table 1.1 by Robert Yin this thesis follows the 'embedded single case design'. It is a single case of the military establishment in Singapore from 1965 to 2014. Yet it is also embedded because there are 28 'units of analysis' comprising the unique 'lived' experiences of 28 individual officers. Thomas termed this a 'nested' case study where the breakdown is within the principal unit of analysis and not concerned with making comparisons across different cases. He elaborated that: "A nested study is distinct from a multiple study in that it gains its integrity, wholeness, from a wider case. This process is used for contrasting subunits as part of the wider case."[110] In this thesis the officers are the subunits within the 'wider case' of MINDEF and the SAF.

Table 1.1: Summary of possible case study designs.[111]

Unit of Analysis	Single Case Design	Multiple Case Design
Holistic (single-unit of analysis)	1 context, 1 case	Many contexts, each containing 1 case
Embedded (multiple units of analysis)	1 context, 1 case, many embedded units of analysis	Many contexts, each containing 1 case with many embedded units of analysis

If a case study is not a method then what constitutes 'method'? Method deals with procedures and participants and "methodological eclecticism" in the social sciences has provided the researcher with various choices.[112] In this study, procedure covered the use of theory as sensitising concepts to aid data collection, data analysis, and associated ethical considerations. Data included both open (academic literature and news) and closed (interviews and archival material) sources.

<u>Sensitising Concepts</u>

There is no universally acceptable definition of 'theory' due to the various meanings attached to it.[113] For hardcore methodologists 'theory' is an umbrella term

[109] Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, pp. 4, 8, 134.
[110] Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, pp. 152-3.
[111] Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 47.
[112] Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, pp. 7-8.
[113] Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, pp. 33-4; and Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, pp. 112, 213.

which encompassed ad-hoc classificatory systems, taxonomies, conceptual frameworks, and theoretical systems.[114] In a loose sense, 'theory' is the bridge (if any) between scientific law(s) and empirical observations.[115] Theories in this study are utilized as *sensitising concepts* which "suggest directions along which to look" much like 'sign posts' when approaching 'empirical instances' of the case studied.[116] They are not utilized as *definitive concepts* which provide an abstract framework to test hypotheses or impose rigid preconceived notions of what to see.[117] The theories utilized as sensitising concepts to construct the interview questionnaire for data collection and restrict inquiry to 'relevant dimensions' are covered in the next chapter.[118]

Data Collection

Data collection is necessary to link sensitising concepts with reality and the empirical evidence obtained for analysis "animates" and addresses the study's research questions.[119] The 'standard' repertoire of data collection methods in qualitative studies included documents (primary and secondary), archival records, interviews, observations, audio visual recordings, and physical artefacts.[120] For this study, it would be more conceptually robust and desirable but less feasible (not to mention almost impossible) to conduct individual longitudinal studies over the course of the officers' respective careers through observation and interviews at various junctures. The practical constraints are obviously the spatial-temporal limitations and the foreknowledge of who will reach flag-rank. Experimentation is a non-option. As such, Janowitz's approach of collecting data from published memoirs, in-depth biographies, and interviews is most appropriate.[121] Even then, data collection is never straightforward when it comes to the military. The broad challenges included preconceptions of the military (for all non-career individuals), gender (for females

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[114] Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, pp. 34-7.
[115] Potter, *The Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 60.
[116] Glenn A. Bowen, "Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 2006), p. 3; Martyn Hammersley, "Sensitizing Concepts," in Victor Jupp, *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2006), pp. 279-80; Jan Jonker and Bartjan Pennink, *The Essence of Research Methodology: A Concise Guide for Master and PhD Students in Management Science* (Heidelberg and Berlin, Germany: Springer-Verlag, 2010), p. 54; and Martin Bulmer, "Concepts in the Analysis of Qualitative Data," in Martin Bulmer (ed.), *Sociological Research Methods: An Introduction*, 2nd Edition (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), pp. 242-3.
[117] Bulmer, "Concepts in the Analysis of Qualitative Data," p. 243.
[118] Jessica Hoffmann Davis, "Balancing the whole: Portraiture as methodology," in Paul M. Camic, Jean E. Rhodes, and Lucy Yardley (eds.), *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding perspectives in Methodology and Design* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), p. 207; Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 107; and Jonker and Pennink, *The Essence of Research Methodology*, p. 55.
[119] Biklen, "The Quality of Evidence in Qualitative Research," p. 489.
[120] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, pp. 62-3; and Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs," p. 247.
[121] Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, pp. 125, 165.

entering a male dominated sub-culture), and the esoteric knowledge, experiences, and terminology (for all civilians without prior military service and to an extent also to conscripts).[122] The 30 months as a fulltime national serviceman (NSF, i.e. conscript) and active duty as an operationally-ready national serviceman (NSman, i.e. reservist) since 2004 proved beneficial for the author because it afforded an understanding of Singapore's military establishment beyond that of a 'pure-civilian' outsider. Yet there was also a healthy distance so that respect for the interviewees as flag-officers is preserved but not overawed by their rank or reputation.

Three specific obstacles, however, presented themselves during data collection. The first was difficulty in constructing a data set of Singapore's military elite. Researchers with non-officially sanctioned agendas have often found themselves viewed with suspicion, stonewalled in their attempts, or simply ignored.[123] Those who received data are usually tagged with the mandatory acquiescence to seek 'official clearance' prior to any publication of findings.[124] Certain topics attracted even greater scrutiny. Take Alon Peled's experiences in his Harvard doctoral thesis-turned-book where he related:

> "Before travelling to Singapore, I called a journalist who had worked there many years to ask for his advice on how to facilitate my research. The journalist, who knew nothing about the topic of my work, attempted to allay my fears. 'The reports in the West on the so-called Singaporean secrecy are grossly exaggerated,' he told me. 'You can research anything you wish to research in Singapore with the exception of two topics: the military and ethnic relations'."[125]

The career biographies of Singapore's military elites were partially reconstructed through the triangulation of various open-sources. This included local newspapers anchored by the "state-directed local broadsheet" *The Straits Times*.[126] Data was also mined from official military publications such as *Pioneer* (official

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[122] Higate and Cameron, "Reflexivity and Researching the Military," pp. 219-33; and Delphine Deschaux-Beaume, "Investigating the military field: Qualitative research strategy and interviewing in the defence networks," *Current Sociology*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (2012), pp. 101-17.

[123] This has occurred with such frequent that a book has been published on this 'phenomenon'. See Loh Kah Seng and Liew Kai Shiun (eds.), *The Makers & Keepers of Singapore History* (Singapore: Ethose Books and Singapore Heritage Society, 2010). With specifics to the SAF, Australian academic Michael Barr's request for a list of recipients of SAF scholarship was ignored by the Singapore Ministry of Defence. See Michael D. Barr, "The Charade Of Meritocracy," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (October 2006), Vol. 169, No. 8 (October 2006), pp. 18-22. The author's request for a list of SMS recipients was ignored as were requests to access archival copies of *Navy News* and *Air Force News* not available at either SAFTI Library or the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library.

[124] See for example Lynette Janice Chua, *How Does Law Matter to Social Movements? A Case Study of Gay Activism in Singapore* (Berkeley, CA: Ph.D thesis at the University of California, Berkeley, 2011), pp. 75-6.

[125] Alon Peled, *A Question of Loyalty: Military Manpower Policy in Multiethnic States* (Ithaca, NY and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. xiv. See also Alon Peled, *Soldiers apart: A study of ethnic military manpower policies in Singapore, Israel and South Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Ph.D at Harvard University, 1994).

[126] Kenneth Paul Tan, "Who's Afraid of Catherine Lim? The State in Patriarchal Singapore," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (March 2009), p. 43.

publication of the SAF), *Pointer* (journal of the SAF), respective service newsletters, commemorative books and conference reports accessible at various libraries across Singapore.[127] Data triangulation was, however, limited by the availability of certain printed open-source material. Two of three email requests for access were ignored. Archival records in the form of oral history recordings were available at the National Archives of Singapore. These sources aided the preparation of biographical data with verifications made during the interviews. The most beneficial albeit non-accessible internal primary sources – what some termed the 'grey literature' – are held at the MINDEF Heritage Centre and in the respective officer's 'P-file' (service record and report).[128]

The second challenge was securing interviews with an appropriate segment of the military elite. This segment was not a *random sample* where all members had "an equal chance of selection" which is more useful for quantitative-type studies seeking to test hypotheses and generalization.[129] Nor was it a *convenience sample* based on the most accessible individuals because there was no guarantee any of the officers approached would grant an interview. The most 'productive' segment is a *purposeful sample* "based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself."[130] Purposeful in this study, and in practical terms, was to obtain a *maximum variation sample* across service, vocation, year of enlistment, highest education level attained, and scholarship status. In some cases the latter three variables were based on the author's estimates. Unknown variables (possibly with explanatory powers) prior to sampling included the socio-economic background, parental occupations, and family sizes of the respective interview participants.

The *maximum variation sample* was bounded by several practical considerations. A list of 125 flag-officers from 1965 to 2012 was identified for possible interviews between July 2012 and February 2013. The list was trimmed on the assumption that retired officers and those not in the public limelight will have the greatest liberty in providing candid personal accounts. For this reason, the 30 officers on active service and the five holding political office were excluded from sampling consideration. The list was further shortened with the exclusion of two deceased officers and 10 who did not reside in Singapore.[131] Forty-six of the remaining 78 were

[127] These included libraries at SAFTI Military Institute (SAFTI MI), Nanyang Technological University, and the Lee Kong Chian reference library.
[128] Deschaux-Beaume, "Investigating the military field," p. 103.
[129] Marshall, "Sampling for qualitative research," pp. 522-3.
[130] Ibid., p. 523.
[131] The officers were the late BG (RET) Thomas James Duncan Campbell (d. 20 October 1989) and the late BG (NS) (Dr) Wong Yue Sie (d. 28 May 2010). The names of the officers residing overseas are withheld to maintain privacy.

approached resulting in 28 (62.2%) once-off semi-structured interviews. The author previously met four of the 28 interviewees on occasions prior to the interviews. Of the other 18 invitations, four responded with well wishes but declined to participate, 12 did not respond, and two responded favourably but interviews did not take place.[132]

The 'snowballing' technique where an interviewee is asked to recommend other officer as possible participants was not practiced to avoid the possibility of data coming from only a specific circle of officers. It was not a deliberate attempt to uncover friction or animosity between individuals, even factions, but the actual interviews provided sufficient indication this was present at varying junctures across the SAF. It must also be highlighted that the 28 interview participants were by-and-large 'controversy-free'. The overwhelming majority exhibited a humble demeanour and some explicitly stated their participation was simply to aid the study. One might distil this and the absence of self-aggrandizement in the chapters ahead. What the participants sought was perhaps to simply preserve snippets of their experiences for future generations. At the same token it is not surprising that some of the less fondly remembered individuals ignored interview requests but so did those who were simply 'too busy'.

The final challenge was the veracity of interviews. Since the research questions presented can only be answered by the officers themselves, the most direct approach is simply to ask but limitations were present. For starters, the quality of evidence is a reflection of mutual trust between the researcher and study participants on the basis of professional and ethical conduct. For this reason data might be further tainted (beyond the interviewees' and interviewer's interpretations) for reasons ranging from mistrust of the interviewer, to concerns of being identified, to having forgotten details, and even a self-serving agenda.[133] To assuage and ameliorate such concerns the 'voices' obtained from interviews are kept anonymous and only assigned an interview number. Rank and names are cited only from open sources. A "relationship of trust" between the researcher and participants is also established in the initial stages of face-to-face interviews.[134] Some of the more recent 'retired' officers expressed concern over the all-encompassing Official Secrets Act (OSA) but interviewees seemed more forthcoming the longer they have retired from active service. The litmus test is whether a reader is convinced that what is said in the following chapters is believable.[135] Even then the veracity of responses and thus the validity and contestability of data is "[o]f course, we

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[132] An interview with BG (RET) (Dr) Lim Meng Kin was arranged for 30 November 2012, the same morning he was hospitalised for pneumonia. He subsequently passed away on 31 January 2013 from the cancer-related illness aged 62. An interview with the second flag-officer did not take place as his schedule did not permit an interview before the author left Singapore.
[133] Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 42.
[134] Davis, "Balancing the whole," p. 200.
[135] John W. Creswell and Dana L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Summer 2000), p. 124.

don't know for sure."[136] What would an interviewee say if asked the same questions by his immediate family members or his closest comrades-in-arms? This is not unique to the use of interviews for data collection. The same questions, however, could be asked of non-observable participant-centric quantitative measurements such as the Likert scale. Finally, "[o]nce rapport is established, another challenge is to keep a critical distance" so that the analysis can be made as objectively as possible and not be swayed by impressions formed during the interview.[137]

1.3.3 Analysis

The purpose of analysis is to interpret and structure collected data into evidence (or 'information') relevant to the study's research questions.[138] For the qualitative traditions of inquiry this involved uncovering patterns of "contextualized emergent understanding rather than the creation of testable theoretical structures."[139] There is, however, no standard 'off the shelf' package of guidelines or standard procedures for analysis. Any undertaking must be rationalized and adapted to each unique study.[140] As Robert Stake explained:

> "The search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions, which we call 'correspondence' … We can look for patterns immediately while we are reviewing documents, observing, or interviewing – or we can code the records, aggregate frequencies, and find the patterns that way. Or both. Sometimes, we will find significant meaning in a single instance, but usually the important meanings will come from reappearance over and over. Both categorical aggregation and direct interpretation depend greatly on the search for patterns. Often, the patterns will be known in advance, drawn from the research questions, serving as a template for analysis. Sometimes, the patterns will emerge unexpectedly from the analysis."[141]

Analysis in a case study requires "detailed setting and description of the case" with four possible approaches for analysis and interpretation.[142] 'Categorical aggregation' filters data for a grouping of similar cases with "issue-relevant meanings." 'Direct interpretation' only considers one instance but "draw(s) meaning from it without looking for multiple instances." Third, one can 'establish patterns' "between

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[136] Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, p. 210.
[137] Robert Mikecz, "Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (2012), p. 482.
[138] Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, p. 161; Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 1999), p. 150; and Biklen, "The Quality of Evidence in Qualitative Research," p. 489.
[139] O'Connor et al., "Grounded Theory," p. 30.
[140] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, pp. 16-7, 142; and Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 25.
[141] Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, p. 78.
[142] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, pp. 153-4.

two or more categories". Finally, there are 'naturalistic generalizations' where a reader "can learn from the case for either themselves or for applying it to a population of cases." The first three approaches are all appropriate in categorizing emergent themes from the 28 embedded cases and address the specific questions on motivation, commitment, and ascension.[143]

One common way to search for inter-case similarity and inter-categorical patterns is through 'constant comparison'. Data is collected, analysed, and consistently compared with other units to uncover emergent thematic patterns, "properties and dimensions."[144] This is an iterative process – some termed a 'data analysis spiral' – where "one enters with data of text and exits with an account or a narrative. In between, the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles around and around."[145] Constant comparison has three inherent advantages. First, repetition is crucial "to see if the constructs, categories, explanations, and interpretations [made] sense."[146] Second, it ensured "that all data produced will be analyzed rather than potentially disregarded on thematic grounds" to create "a balanced composition, a unified whole."[147] Finally, repeated iterations enhanced sensitivity to nuances in the data and their meaning which resulted in data saturation where no new categories or themes emerge.[148] Such 'categorical aggregation' is also utilized in other qualitative methods such as 'open coding' in grounded theory or 'classifying' in phenomenology.[149] A binding narrative is constructed after the inter-case categories and inter-categories patterns have emerged and data saturation is achieved. It is never a matter of laying the narrative first and then searching for 'voices' to fill in the gaps for reasons of credibility. It must also be highlighted that the 'voices' presented are but a selected proportion of "an overwhelming collection of data" and at best illustrated but not prove beyond doubt the points being made.[150]

There are three issues related with the analysis of 'voices' that must be highlighted, namely 'thick description', interview transcription, and data saturation. 'Thick description' is used to validate 'voices' in terms of "how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them ... validity refers not to the data but to the inferences drawn from them."[151] The problem with 'thick description' is its proliferated use across the spectrum of qualitative

[143] Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs," p. 248.
[144] Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs," p. 248; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, p. 144; and Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, p. 56.
[145] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, p. 142.
[146] Michael Quinn Patton quoted in Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," p. 125.
[147] Davis, "Balancing the whole," p. 214; and O'Connor et al., "Grounded Theory," p. 41.
[148] O'Connor et al., "Grounded Theory," p. 31.
[149] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, p. 155.
[150] Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, p. 295.
[151] Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," pp. 124-5.

traditions since the term first appeared in metaphysics and anthropology.[152] Confusion arose from the definitional standpoint and whether 'thick description' was successfully achieved. Some commenced with the premise that 'thin description' is simply factual reporting "independent of intentions or the circumstances that surround an action."[153] 'Thick description' in contrast gained credibility by providing the reader with a contextual situation of behaviour and even "involve[d] ascribing present and future intentionality to the behavior."[154] The 'voices' contained in the following chapters were subjected to certain standards for inclusion.[155] First, they are "deep, dense, detailed accounts" which described and interpreted intended actions made within a "clear description of the context" so as to "insert history into experience." Next, they conveyed thoughts, feelings, expressions, actions, and meanings.[156] 'Thick description' has achieved verisimilitude when "credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation."[157]

A concurrent issue which arose in the quest for credibility lay in the transcription of interview data which are 'verbatim facsimiles' to form 'thick description'. The verbatim quotations presented contained not only what was said (for analysis) but also how (expression and non-verbal communication of feelings) and why (contextual) they were said.[158] The difficulty, which was also encountered during this thesis, is that:

> "Verbal interactions follow a logic that is different from that for written prose, and therefore tend to look remarkably disjointed, inarticulate, and even incoherent when committed to the printed page. Inherent differences between the spoken tongue and the written word mean that transcripts of verbal conversations do not measure up well to the standards we hold for well-crafted prose (or even formal speeches), with the result that participants often come across as incoherent and inarticulate … The disjuncture between what coheres in natural talk and what demonstrates communicative competence in written prose comes as a shock to many respondents when they are asked or are offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews."[159]

This was the case with participants who requested a copy of notes taken during their respective interviews and subsequently revised the text into 'well-crafted prose'. The revisions were then quoted where required to illustrate points being made. For the

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[152] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in Clifford Geertz (ed.), The *Interpretation of Cultures: Selective Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 3-30.
[153] Joseph G. Ponterotto, "Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept 'Thick Description'," *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (September 2006), p. 542.
[154] Ibid., p. 539.
[155] Ibid., p. 543.
[156] Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), p. 83.
[157] Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," pp. 128-9.
[158] James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, "Inside Interviewing – Transcription Quality," *SAGE Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), p. 11.
[159] Ibid.

other interviews, the recommendation followed was for researchers to 'tidy' the texts by editing for readability without altering the message and meaning.[160] This was carried out only *after* the completion of data analysis and thematic categories have emerged. For this reason the subsequent chapters contain a mix of both verbatim and only when necessary "coauthored conversation-in-context" quotations for readability.[161]

Finally, 'data saturation' is conceptually sound but posed practical challenges.[162] There are no predetermined sample sizes and suggested perimeters are frequently estimations which lacked justification.[163] One suggested 20 to 30.[164] Another 30 to 50.[165] A survey of 14 leading qualitative researchers arrived at a "moot point" of 19 but each respondent provided unique insights dependent on circumstances and situation.[166] The number of interviews is thus 'uniquely adequate' dependent on the research question(s) and the contextual responses provided by the interviewees.[167] Data 'saturation' is achieved when additional data and analysis becomes repetitive, superfluous, and even counter-productive because it does not lead to new discoveries or meaning and therefore no new categories, themes, perceptions, or explanations emerged.[168] Saturation in this study was reached at interview 23 but this became apparent only in retrospect after 28 interviews as no new thematic categories emerged.

1.3.4 Ethics

The ethical considerations were cleared by the Human Research Ethics Advisory at the University of New South Wales and highlighted to each prospective participant (Annex C). The author's biographical sketch was also attached as part of the introductory email sent to 46 potential interviewees (Annex D). The military elite's participation in this study was completely voluntary and in doing so surrendered a measure of privacy albeit anonymously by sharing their experiences in a document that

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Mark Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Art. 8 (September 2010), pp. 3, 5, 16; and Jonker and Pennink, *The Essence of Research Methodology*, p. 54.
[163] Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews," pp. 3-4.
[164] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, p. 64.
[165] Janice M. Morse, "Designing funded qualitative research," in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p. 225.
[166] Sarah Elsie and Rosalind Edwards, "How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research," *National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper*, No. 019 (01 June 2012), p. 4.
[167] Marshall, "Sampling for qualitative research," p. 523; Biklen, "The Quality of Evidence in Qualitative Research," p. 490; and Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews," p. 3.
[168] O'Connor et al., "Grounded Theory," p. 31; Jonker and Pennink, *The Essence of Research Methodology*, p. 54; and Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews," pp. 2-3.

will eventually be made openly available.[169] Interviews were hand-recorded in a verbatim manner and quoted unless alterations were required to protect their identities where possible. Anonymity is assumed to decrease the likelihood of self-aggrandizement and increase candour. The reader can decide whether this is true in subsequent chapters. The only data attributable to individuals are those available in the open domain such as published documents, news releases, or where specific permission is granted. As former active duty flag-officers the interviewees were firmly cognizant of information sensitivity. Even then, some participants had to be assuaged and concerns ameliorated that the interviews contributed to evidence-based academic research and not a tirade of 'Singapore-bashing'.

Finally, there was the need to look beyond the interviews as mere sampling variables and consider the setting which could impact the interviewees and skew data. For example, Martin Marshall asked "would this individual express a different opinion if they were interviewed next week or next month? Would they feel differently if they were interviewed at home or at work? Should I study them when they are under stress or relaxed?"[170] To elicit the maximum level of candour the interviewees were allowed to determine day, time, and location of the interviews.[171] The interview questionnaire was also made available upon request.

1.4 Scope and Structure of the Study

The underlying aim of this thesis is to understand why 28 military elites were motivated to sign-on as regular officers, why they were committed to stay on active duty, and how they ascended the hierarchy into the Aristocracy of Armed Talent. The scope is centred on 28 individual experiences and augmented with open-source interviews of other flag-officers and statistics gathered on all SAF officers authorized to wear one or more stars between 1965 and 2014. Only information of contextual and specific relevance to the research questions were of concern. This meant that the character profiles of flag-officers – personality traits, behaviour patterns, and leadership styles – and their impact on organizational outcomes were not addressed.[172] 'Professionalism' in terms of tactical prowess as junior officers, abilities to manoeuvre

[169] Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, pp. 69, 71-3, 77.
[170] Marshall, "Sampling for qualitative research," p. 524.
[171] The interviews lasted between 30 and 330 minutes with an average of 90. 21 took place at their place of employment, three at their private residences, and four at a public location (e.g. café/pub).
[172] Martin M. Chemers, *An Integrative Theory of Leadership* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), pp. 19-24. Leadership styles could include transformational (charismatic, inspirational, intellectual simulating, and attends to subordinates on an individual basis to achieve more than originally intended), pseudo-transformational (displays transformational characteristics but leader is "impulsively aggressive, narcissistic, and impetuous … self-concerned, self-aggrandizing, exploitative, and power oriented"), or transactional (exchange-agreement and reward-punishment focused) leaders. See Bass, *Transformational Leadership*, pp. 4-9, 14-5, 24-5, 33, 41-2.

forces as senior officers, or strategize as flag-officers was similarly avoided. The SAF's capabilities to achieve a 'swift and decisive victory' in the event of war also remained speculative at best.

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two reviews literature relevant to the research questions and covers theories which serve as sensitising concepts to frame the interview questionnaire. Chapter three offers the contextual narrative into the profession-of-arms in Singapore, the early military leaders, and the foundations of the professional officer corps. The first research question on the motivation to join the SAF as regular officers is addressed in chapter four. Chapter five continues with the second question on why the officers were committed to stay-on in the SAF. Chapters six and seven examine how an officer ascends the hierarchy for entry into the Aristocracy of Armed Talent. The former deals with processes which governed rank ascension namely performance, potential, promotion, and postings. The latter deals with the force structure and pathways which enabled an officer to ascend and eventually hold an appointment deemed worthy of a first star as BG or Rear-Admiral (one-star) (RADM1). Chapter eight concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE, THEORY, AND SENSITISING CONCEPTS

"Here, the existing literature becomes relevant for grounding your argumentation, for showing that your findings are in concordance with the existing research, that your findings go beyond or contradict existing research."[1]

— Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter surveys literature pertinent to Singapore's military establishment and covers theories which form the 'intellectual playing field'.[2] On occasion one might come across advocates of a 'literature-review free' qualitative approach but by and large the literature review aims to identify the current state of research, how this study adds to the body of knowledge, and uncovers sensitizing concepts "drawn from half-formed, tentative analytic frames, which typically reflect current theoretical ideas."[3] This chapter commences with an overview of SAF-specific literature. This is followed by studies in military sociology – the literature within which this thesis is situated – congruent with the research questions asked but conducted mainly in the United States and Europe. The later subsections cover theories of motivation, commitment, and ascension drawn from psychology, sociology, and the management sciences which are subsequently utilized as sensitising concepts – for reasons which will be explained – to guide this study.

2.2 SAF-specific Literature

The vast majority of literature on the SAF is focused on defence acquisition, CMR, ethnic composition, and large-scale studies of conscripts during Basic Military Training (BMT) or small team dynamics. Under the acquisition umbrella, pundits have traditionally focused on Singapore's defence spending, arms procurement, indigenous military-industrial complex development, and improvement in its war-fighting capabilities. Since the 1970s numerous publications have consistently ranked the SAF – especially the RSAF – as the most modern, well-trained, well-equipped, and best-

[1] Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 53.
[2] Stake, *Qualitative Research*, p. 106.
[3] Charles C. Ragin, *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1994), p. 87; Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 48; and Vera Bitsch, "Qualitative Research: A Grounded Theory Example and Evaluation Criteria," *Journal of Agribusiness*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 2005), p. 77. See also Yin, *Case Study Research*, pp. 130-1, 176; Thomas, *How to do your Case Study*, pp. 30, 194-5; and Jonker and Pennink, *The Essence of Research Methodology*, p. 53.

organized defence force in Southeast Asia (Annex E). This is made possible through the deliberate policy to maintain the technological and qualitative edge over potential adversaries. Acquisitions and mid-life upgrading programs are carried out independent of the economic climate while civilian and military leaders have always ensured value for money and remained conscious of not sparking an arms race. The only blemish has been Singapore's military-industrial complex which found itself in journalistic crosshairs on occasion for supplying munitions to Myanmar's military junta.[4]

The second widely covered topic is CMR in Singapore where authors usually focused on the deliberate practice of channelling military scholar-officers and retired senior officers into the civil service and politics.[5] Their conclusions invariably questioned the professionalism of the SAF Officer Corps but also recognized the symbiotic relationship between the military and the government. One even depicted the transition of former career officers into the Cabinet as a "silent semi-putsch by the Brigadier-Generals" (Annex F).[6] These publications also indicated that civilian control of the military apparatus remained a non-issue although this 'Civil-Military Problematique' seemed a perennial concern for other countries.[7] Stephen McCarthy viewed the SAF as having been "dominated by the civilian sector since its inception … [and forms] an integral part of the administrative structure." He further reasoned that "the military elite has, therefore, not developed an independent identity or political agenda, a distinct corporate culture separate from those of the administrative and political elites, and the line that traditionally separates the military from the civil bureaucracy and the political leadership has all but disappeared."[8] Ross Worthington similarly described Singapore as:

> "… highly militarised, but the military was created by a civilian government during peace time and has no connection with the establishment of the state, nor an historical existence; the military is a creature of the civilian

[4] Bertil Lintner, "Passing in the Dark: Singapore is accused of supplying military regime with arms," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 142, No. 44 (3 November 1988), p. 17; William Barnes, "Singapore weapons factory for junta," *South China Morning Post*, 22 July 1998; Eric Ellis, "Singapore, a friend indeed to Burma," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 2007; and Grant Peck, "Arms easy to buy for Myanmar junta," *The Associated Press*, 12 October 2007.
[5] Tim Huxley, "The Political Role of The Singapore Armed Forces' Officer Corps: Towards A Military-Administrative State," *Strategic and Defence Studies Centre Working Paper*, No. 279 (December 1993); Richard A. Deck, "Singapore: Comprehensive Security – Total Defence," in Ken Booth and Russell Trood (eds.), *Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific Region* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999), pp. 247-69; Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, pp. 232-40; Stephen McCarthy, *The Political Theory of Tyranny in Singapore and Burma: Aristotle and the rhetoric of benevolent despotism* (Abindon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 115; Sean P. Walsh, "The Roar of the Lion City: Ethnicity, Gender, and Culture in the Singapore Armed Forces," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (January 2007), pp. 265-85; Michael Raska, "'Soldier-Scholars' and Pragmatic Professionalism: The Case of Civil-Military Relations in Singapore," *South-South Collaborative Programme Occasional Paper Series*, No. 12 (2012).
[6] Deck, "Singapore," p. 254.
[7] Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1996), pp. 149-78; and Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, "The Gap: Soldiers, civilians and their Mutual Misunderstanding," *The National Interest* (Fall 2000), pp. 29-37.
[8] McCarthy, *The Political Theory of Tyranny in Singapore and Burma*, p. 115.

> administration with its power structure carefully designed to minimise its political autonomy and optimise its defence function. The military is represented in the legislature, the executive and the various public bureaucracies, but there is no evidence of military government as it would normally be understood."[9]

The SAF also did not face issues prevalent in other militaries such as gender restrictions in combat roles, sexual orientation, lengthy and multiple (combat) deployments overseas, operational casualties and the concomitant effect(s) on families, military bases and their relations with host communities.[10] It must be noted that Singapore does not fit neatly into certain CMR concepts. For example, Singaporean CMR currently falls between Samuel Huntington's models of *objective* and *subjective* control.[11] There is objective control because a separate domain exists between the military and the political with the former completely subservient to the latter in terms of political decisions. Yet subjective control is also present by virtue of conscription and geographical restrictions have intertwined the military with society and domestic politics.[12] As Malaysian academic Muthiah Alagappa observed, Singaporean CMR has "features of democratic civilian control, but over time ethnic considerations dominated the composition of the military as well as the basis for civilian control, moving CMR firmly in the direction of subjective civilian control."[13]

With reference to military elites, Singaporean CMR does not fit neatly into Morris Janowitz's 'Four Models of Political-Military Elites'.[14] It does not conform to the *aristocratic* model because the civilian and military elites are socially but rarely functionally integrated. The only exceptions are the small numbers of officers on temporary secondment to non-defence ministries or who hold 'hybrid' posts which can be filled by either civilian or military officials. The SAF is a part of the government but not *the* government. There is also no aristocratic class to speak of in the traditional sense of privilege by birth although the widening income inequality is a growing concern. The *democratic* model is limited. There is civilian political supremacy but the requirement for "extremely viable parliamentary institutions and broad social consensus" is tenuous at times.[15] There is also minimal correlation with the *totalitarian*

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[9] Worthington, *Governance in Singapore*, p. 247.
[10] Christopher Dandeker, "On the need to be different: Military Uniqueness and Civil-Military Relations in Modern Society," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 146, Iss. 3 (June 2001), pp. 4-9.
[11] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964).
[12] Politicians in early post-independence Singapore 'volunteered' for military training and today almost all male politicians have served either as national servicemen or regulars in the SAF.
[13] Muthiah Alagappa, "Asian Civil-Military Relations: Key Developments, Explanations, and Trajectories," in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 436.
[14] Morris Janowitz, "Military Elites and the Study of War," *Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 1957), pp. 9-18.
[15] Ibid., p. 11.

model. Although male political leaders have rendered uniformed service this is a mere reflection of conscription and not because a military junta holds power. There are also no 'political commissars' in the SAF unlike those found in genuine authoritarian regimes. Finally, the only resemblance with the *garrison-state* model is the ascent of a few military elites to political office but "prolonged international tension" is absent and groups in the military do not "indirectly wield unprecedented amounts of political and administrative power."[16] Singaporean CMR is perhaps best viewed through Rebecca Schiff's 'Concordance Theory' which considered the historical and cultural antecedents – themes covered in chapter three – which shaped the triangular government-military-citizenry relationship and explained the absence of military intervention in domestic affairs.[17]

Singaporean authors do not seem fussed over the CMR issue.[18] Tan Tai Yong viewed the relationship as a 'civil-military fusion' where the military does not function independently, nor does it covet political influence. The SAF is viewed as an integrated component of the civilian structure and played "an essentially complementary role in the social and economic functions of the state. The upshot is a military establishment that does not possess its own independent political or ideological ambitions but instead identifies fully with the values, interests, and national goals set by the civilian government."[19] Military personnel would be weary to bite the hand that feeds them very "competitive salaries."[20] Chan Heng Chee reckoned that should grievances surface "dissatisfied young officers do not stage coups. They merely resign to join the lucrative private sector with their highly marketable skills."[21] The same trend continues today.

The third topic which has received a fair amount of coverage is the underrepresentation of Malay-Muslims in the upper and sensitive echelons of the military which reflected deliberate policies of the past. This view has become *sine qua non* in studies on Singapore's practice of meritocracy, the minority Malay-Muslim

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Rebecca L. Schiff, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Fall 1995), pp. 7-24; and Kwok Jia-Chuan, *Explaining Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, MA: MS thesis at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010).
[18] Chan Heng Chee, "Singapore," in Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch (eds.), *Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 136-; Tan Tai Yong, "Singapore: Civil-Military Fusion," in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 276-93; Neo Beng Tong, *Civilian Control of the Military in Singapore* (New York, NY: MA thesis at the State University of New York at Buffalo, 2006); and Tan Tai Yong, "The armed forces and politics in Singapore: The persistence of civil-military fusion," in Marcus Mietzner (ed.), *The Political Resurgence of the Military in Southeast Asia: Conflict and leadership* (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), pp. 148-66.
[19] Tan, "Singapore," p. 278.
[20] Zakarian Haji Ahmad, "The Military and Development in Malaysia and Brunei with a Short Survey on Singapore," in J. Soedjati Djiwandono and Yong Mun Cheong (eds.), *Soldiers and Stability in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), p. 246.
[21] Chan, "Singapore," p. 147.

community, and at times within the context of Singapore-Malaysia relations.[22] One author cited the two decade-long practice of "exclusion and discrimination" against Malays as a 'contradiction' of meritocracy and multiculturalism.[23] Another depicted the absence of Malay-Muslim recipients of prestigious military scholarships as a "charade of meritocracy."[24] Yet the contextual circumstances for the marginalisation of Malays-Muslims in the SAF's early days and their gradual advancement into the upper echelons of the officer corps have remained conspicuously absent from such one-sided views.[25]

The fourth area of research included large sample quantitative studies conducted by psychologists at MINDEF's Applied Behavioural Science Department (ABSD) and doctoral studies by regular SAF officers. Elizabeth Nair conducted 33 semi-structured interviews with post-NS male university students which indicated NS "served in some way to enhance the inter-racial integration of the population."[26] Chan Kim Yin examined the 'motivation to lead' among 2161 military recruits and pre-university students in Singapore, and undergraduates in the United States.[27] Star Soh's longitudinal study of 718 recruits examined how their perceptions, beliefs, and values evolved over eight weeks in BMT.[28] Lim Beng Chong examined team composition and the effects of processes and performances on 50 seven-man sections from the army.[29] Don Willis gauged the commitment of 621 regulars from 15 army battalions using a 48-question survey.[30] Job satisfaction and relationships with peers proved the strongest predictors of an individual's attachment and identification with the SAF. Job satisfaction in combination with promotion opportunities and 'organisational support' were the key reasons to remain in service. However, whether the respondents actually remained in service is unknown. Finally, Chiang Hock Woon's qualitative study of 21

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[22] Elizabeth Nair, "Nation-Building Through Conscript Service in Singapore," in Daniella Ashkenazy (ed.), *The Military in the Service of Society and Democracy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 103; Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*; Deck, "Singapore," p. 263; Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man* (Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), p. 203; Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, power and the culture of control* (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 142; Barr, "The Charade of Meritocracy," pp. 18-22; Walsh, "The Roar of the Lion City," pp. 265-85; and Lily Zubaidah Rahim, "Governing Muslims in Singapore's secular authoritarian state," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2012), p. 181.
[23] Rahim, "Governing Muslims in Singapore's secular authoritarian state," p. 181.
[24] Barr, "The Charade of Meritocracy," pp. 18-22.
[25] Adrian Lim, "Malays make strides in SAF," *MyPaper* (Singapore Press Holdings), 30 May 2014, http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/malays-make-strides-saf (accessed 31 May 2014); and "Malay-Muslim community against tokenism: Maliki," *The Straits Times*, p. B16.
[26] Nair, "Nation-Building Through Conscript Service in Singapore," pp. 101-10.
[27] The sample included 1594 SAF recruits, 274 students from three junior colleges ('high schools') in Singapore, and 293 undergraduates at the University of Illinois in the US. Kim-Yin Chan, *Toward a Theory of Individual Differences and Leadership: Understanding the Motivation to Lead* (Urbana, IL: Ph.D thesis at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1999).
[28] Star Soh, *Organizational Socialization of Newcomers: A Longitudinal Study of Organizational Enculturation Processes and Outcomes* (Columbus, OH: Ph.D thesis at Ohio State University, 2000).
[29] Beng Chong Lim, *Do the Leader and Member make the team? The Role of Personality and Cognitive Ability* (College Park, MD: Ph.D thesis at the University of Maryland, 2003).
[30] Don Willis, "The Structure & Antecedents of Organizational Commitment in the Singapore Army," presentation at the *45th International Military Testing Association Conference* (Pensacola, Florida: 3-6 November 2003).

recruits concluded that initial training experiences and how they coped affected their perceptions of, and commitment to, NS in terms of time and energy.[31]

Where literature on Singapore's post-independence defence establishment remained scant is an in-depth examination of its history since 1965 and the sociological aspects of regular, NS, and retired personnel.[32] This study's quest to understand the motivation, commitment, and ascension of Singapore's military elites partially addresses this gap. Previous studies only addressed these queries in a piecemeal manner. Leong Choon Cheong's *Youth in the Army* presented biographical sketches of 11 NSFs which included BG (RET) Lee Hsien Yang.[33] Leslie Terh's *Sons and Officers* recorded the lived experiences of Singaporean trainees such as LG (RET) Winston Choo at the Federation Military College (FMC) in Malaya between 1957 and 1965.[34] BG (RET) Tan Yong Soon's *Living the Singapore Dream* is a partial autobiography and included biographical sketches of his peers.[35] It remains the only book of this type by a flag-officer. A commemorative book to mark 40 years of NS included a four-page biography of BG (RET) Leong Yue Keong.[36] Several publications also addressed SAF officer ascension. A 1982 issue of *Pointer* detailed the SAF's manpower policies.[37] Derek Da Cunha painted a macro-sociological portrait of the SAF and included several paragraphs on the unique 'scholar-officer' phenomenon used to groom senior military leaders.[38] Tim Huxley's *Defending the Lion City* included a chapter which broadly addressed SAF manpower policies. Publications commemorating Dr Goh also mentioned certain manpower policies which he implemented.[39]

A 2011 monograph by the SAF Centre for Leadership Development titled *Called To Lead* has come closest to the research questions asked in this thesis.[40] A total of 11 officers – six army generals and five admirals – were interviewed with six quotes on

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[31] Chiang Hock Woon, *Young Singaporeans' Perspectives of Compulsory Military Conscription: How they manage the national service experience in relation to their education, development and careers* (Leicester, UK: Ph.D thesis at the University of Leicester, 2011).
[32] Irvin Lim Fang Jau, "Viewpoints: Pointers from the Past, Foresight into the Future," *Pointer*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2004); and Tan Peng Ann, "Viewpoints: Learning from the Past: An Old Soldier's Advice," *Pointer*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2004).
[33] Leong Choon Cheong, *Youth in the Army* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1978).
[34] Leslie Terh, *Sons and Officers: Life at Prestigious Military College* (Singapore: Sea Sky Books Enterprise, 2000).
[35] Tan Yong Soon, *Living the Singapore Dream* (Singapore: SNP International Publishing, 2007).
[36] *40/40: 40 stories & 40 years of National Service* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2007), pp. 100-4.
[37] *Manpower policies affecting the SAF officer*, The Pointer Special Issue (Singapore: The Pointer, March 1982).
[38] Derek Da Cunha, "Sociological Aspects of the Singapore Armed Forces," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring 1999), pp. 459-75.
[39] See for example Ooi Kee Beng, *In Lieu of Ideology: The Intellectual Biography of Goh Keng Swee* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010); Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, *Working for Dr Goh Keng Swee: Collection of Anecdotes* (Singapore: Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, November 2011); and Barry Desker and Kwa Chong Guan (eds.), *Goh Keng Swee: A public career remembered* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2012).
[40] Ng Zhi-Wen, Adrian Chan, Sukhmohinder Singh, and Lim Teck Yin, *Called To Lead: A Reader for Aspiring SAF Leaders* (Singapore: Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces, 2011).

motivation to sign-on and a further four on commitment to stay-on in the military.[41] The monograph represents the largest study of senior SAF officers to date but was designed as an insight into senior leadership to encourage circumspection among active-duty officers. This is not the monograph's shortcoming as it was never conceived as a study of the motivation, commitment, and ascension of military elites in Singapore.

2.3 Military Sociology

While studies on military elites in Singapore are conspicuously absent this is not necessarily so for other countries where they have taken various forms. Biographies and autobiographies of retired military leaders in the English-speaking world are numerous (Annex H). Some focused on the unique political and military milieu of a particular period, conflict, and government. Others were centred on criticisms of military leaders in times of conflict. The literature also covered the prestigious military colleges and academies that served as the cradles for various officer corps. The transitions of retired military personnel to public service have also attracted interest.[42] Several publications stand out among the literary kaleidoscope and provided a frame for this thesis.

In *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel Huntington painted the motivational basis expected of the professional American military officer in the mid-twentieth century:

> "Does the officer have a professional motivation? Clearly he does not act primarily from economic incentives. In western society the vocation of officership is not well rewarded monetarily. Nor is his behavior within his profession governed by economic rewards and punishments. The officer is not a mercenary who transfers his services wherever they are best rewarded, nor is he the temporary citizen soldier inspired by intense momentary patriotism but with no steadying and permanent desire to perfect himself in the management of violence. The motivations of the officer are a technical love for his craft and the sense of social obligation to utilize his craft for the benefit of society. The combination of these drivers constitutes professional motivation. Society, on the other hand, can only assure this motivation if it offers its officers continuing and sufficient pay both while on active duty and when retired."[43]

Huntingtonian ideals reflected professionalism though a lifelong dedication to the profession-of-arms and the triumph of altruism (increase the welfare of others)

[41] The interviewees were LG Lim Chuan Poh, LG Ng Yat Chung, RADM2 Kwek Siew Jin, RADM2 Ronnie Tay, BG Hugh Lim, BG Ong Boon Hwee, BG Ravinder Singh, BG Winston Toh, RADM1 Sim Gim Guan, RADM1 Tan Kai Hoe, and RADM1 Tay Kian Seng.
[42] See for example Alex Schneider, *Transforming Retired Military Officers into School Principals in Israel* (Leicester, UK: Ph.D dissertation at University of Leicester, 2004); and Kathy Wardlaw, *Exploring Public Service Motivation Theory and Perceptions by Military Retirees: A Qualitative Study* (Prescott Valley, Arizona: Ph.D dissertation at Northcentral University, 2008).
[43] Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 15.

grounded in social obligation and benefit over egoism (increase personal welfare) based on economic and monetary considerations.

Morris Janowitz theorized that officer motivation for service varied according to models of political-military elites. His 1957 study attributed power and the preservation of social status as motivating factors within the *aristocratic* model.[44] The *democratic* model assumed officers were motivated by "professional ethics alone." Officers in the *totalitarian* model had no alternatives to military service. Finally, those in the *garrison-state* model were motivated by "national survival and glory." He continued with a thorough examination of American military elites within the democratic model in *The Professional Soldier* on which the research questions in this study are predicated. Janowitz argued that individuals with the potential to serve as commissioned officers faced 'extensive tension' in their decision to realize this potential. Certain social circles (usually in urbanized areas) considered the military "a berth of mediocrity" attracting only those keen to "avoid the competitive realities of civil society" whereas "the best minds are attracted to more positive endeavours."[45] Yet others held a countervailing view that military officers fulfilled "some special mission", namely the mastery of military craft necessary to fight and win the nation's wars.[46]

What motivated one to join the military amidst such conflicting images? Some officers cited a sense of 'calling'. Others looked at "conditions of employment" and the possibilities of a secure and promising career with adequate respect. Those in urban centres had strong motivations and rejected "the prosaic and limited horizons of the business world."[47] Those from rural areas allegedly placed glory before profit and leveraged on their "physical prowess, social protocol, and a general ideal of service to the community … The military career offered the strong-willed an opportunity to achieve these values; and in turn, such career motivation made it possible for the armed services to perpetuate the martial spirit."[48] Janowitz uncovered four main and at times overlapping patterns of motivation to join during his interviews with 277 army generals. These included "tradition, or more precisely family and social inheritance; sheer desire for education and social advancement, with or without a career commitment to the military; experience in a military setting; and 'boyhood' ambition."[49] Officers who based their motivation on a 'calling' were, however, "outnumbered by a greater concentration of individuals for whom the military is just

[44] Janowitz, "Military Elites and the Study of War," pp. 10-1.
[45] Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, pp. 104-5, 107.
[46] Ibid., p. 104.
[47] Ibid., p. 107.
[48] Ibid., p. 107.
[49] Ibid., p. 108.

another job."[50] With specific reference to commitment, Janowitz highlighted the numbers of "junior officers who resign after completing their required services" as a clear challenge to retention but did not provide specific reasons for those who chose to remain on active service.[51]

Janowitz also investigated the ascension of America's military elites. Their careers followed prescribed – or 'cookie-cutter' – routes "performed with high competence" but three- and four-star generals in the elite nucleus required "innovating perspectives, discretionary responsibility, and political skills … unconventional and adaptive careers … developed within the framework of existing institutions, since officers who express too openly their desire to innovate or to criticize are not likely to survive. All types of elites must be skilled in managing interpersonal relations, in making strategic decisions, and in political negotiations, rather than in the performance of technical tasks."[52] While these are expectations, realities are often more complicated. Other hidden and presumably less meritocratic factors which influenced an officer's ascension included being in "the appropriate academy class" and the good-fortune to be "at the right spot when new opportunities suddenly develop."[53]

These, however, cannot be the only factors as they resemble a roll of the dice. The need to create informal communication channels with influential officers surfaced as aspiring officers climbed the ranks. An established reputation helped attract superiors who could position them in subordinate command and staff billets.[54] This proved essential as officers were consistently observed and assessed and "it is impossible to separate the formal procedures from the elaborate informal screening that goes on simultaneously."[55] Furthermore, success came not only to those who technical competence but to those with the initiative to drive their careers by seeking appointments required for success. This meant "command duty, and to be involved in operations when assigned to staff duty."[56] While command is necessary it is insufficient on its own as military elites also "displayed an early and persistent propensity for staff work."[57]

Janowitz's realistic picture of the professional soldier stood in contrast with Huntington's ideal portrait. Neither is necessarily 'incorrect'. Charles Moskos captured

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[50] Ibid., p. 117.
[51] Ibid., p. 122.
[52] Ibid., pp. 11-2.
[53] Ibid., p. 126. The significance of attendance at specific academies in officer ascension has been noted at various times and in different countries. See for example David R. Segal, "Selective Promotion in Officer Cohorts," *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 8, Iss. 2 (March 1967), pp. 199-205; and Insoo Kim and Tyler Crabb, "Collective Identity and Promotion Prospects in the South Korean Army," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (April 2014), pp. 295-309.
[54] Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 145.
[55] Ibid., p. 145-6.
[56] Ibid., p. 147.
[57] Ibid., p. 166.

the departure from the Huntingtonian ideals in his Institution/Occupation (I/O) thesis where the motivation and commitment for military service lay between two opposite poles. The institutional pole is rooted in values and norms where individuals acted presumably for a greater good, followed a 'calling', and viewed their profession as "being different or apart from the broader society."[58] The occupational pole is predicated on rational calculations and prioritized self-interests over the military as an employer.[59] This is not merely semantics as Moskos and Frank Wood noted that 'occupationalism' threatened to replace:

> "… the intrinsic motivation of an institution with the extrinsic motivation of an occupation … the difference between intrinsic motivation, as in action due to personal values, and extrinsic motivation, as in behavior brought about by pay. The interaction of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards can be quite complex; not only may these rewards be nonadditive, but also inducing members to perform tasks with strong extrinsic rewards may create behavior that will not be performed in the future except for even greater extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards, moreover, can weaken intrinsic motivation."[60]

They also emphasized that the basis of motivation had long-term implications for those in the profession-of-arms:

> "… motivation of members in an institution rests more on values than on calculation, where as the opposite is true in an occupation. We are not so naïve as to believe that pecuniary considerations are absent or even minor in an institution, but we are aware of the findings in the research literature: what we call institutional identification fosters organizational commitment and performance exceeding those of an occupation. The armed services require certain behavior from their members that can never be coterminous with self-interest."[61]

To limit egotism as an individual's motivation to join or commitment to remain in the armed forces, it is clear that:

> "Leadership must affirm altruistic norms at the micro or small-unit level. Socialization by deed is much more powerful than socialization by word. The attribute of leadership that is common across all institutional militaries is based on continuous and personalized interaction with subordinates. Leaders are exemplars of the institution; immediate leaders are the institution to their subordinates. Thus, leaders' concern with the professional development of subordinates enhances the institution."[62]

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[58] Charles C. Moskos, "Institutional and Occupational Trends in Armed Forces," in Charles C. Moskos and Frank R. Wood (eds.), *The Military: More Than Just a Job?* (New York, NY: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1988), p. 16.
[59] Ibid., p. 17.
[60] Charles C. Moskos and Frank R. Wood, "Introduction," in Charles C. Moskos and Frank R. Wood (eds.), *The Military: More Than Just a Job?* (New York, NY: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1988), p. 5.
[61] Ibid., p. 280.
[62] Ibid., p. 287.

Moskos posited that neither I/O pole is dominant nor it was a simple matter of either 'I' or 'O'. Both can be present in the military community with implications on personnel attitudes, behaviour, socialization, the preservation of military values, and CMR.[63] David Segal noted that various empirical studies of the US military uncovered 'pragmatic professionals' who harboured "a mixture of institutional and occupational concerns."[64] With regards to officer ascension, Moskos reasoned: "An institutional military tends to evaluate its personnel in 'whole person' categories and rely heavily on qualitative and subjective evaluations. An occupational military tends toward judgments relating to specific performance standards and prefers numerical or quantitative evaluations."[65]

Studies beyond the seminal works by Huntington, Janowitz, and Moskos have reached similar conclusions. Eliot Cohen argued: "Patriotism, a desire for personal challenge, monetary or career incentives – all mould the young man or woman who joins today."[66] David Segal and Mady Wechsler Segal cited the "need the work" in addition to 'belongingness' afforded by camaraderie as motivation factors.[67] They concluded that "[t]he major finding of these studies is that the modal modern soldier seems to be motivated by considerations that are in part institutional or normative and in part occupational or rationalist."[68] Bernard Bass similarly identified three overlapping facets of commitment to military service independent of whether it is a life-long profession or merely a "stepping stone to a civilian career."[69] *Organizational* commitment is to the organization's goals, purposes, and norms. *Career* commitment is to one's own success. *Moral* commitment reflected an individual's moral code which he or she is willing to make sacrifices to uphold.[70] Other studies included the role of parents in the motivation equation and the military as a vehicle for social mobility through either the rank hierarchy in the long-term or via skills and education in the short-term.[71]

A motley array of reasons for joining and staying in military service was also evident in other militaries. According to Reuven Gal the notion of motivation in IDF

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[63] Moskos, "Institutional and Occupational Trends in Armed Forces," pp. 6, 15.
[64] David R. Segal, "Measuring The Institutional/Occupational Change Thesis," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring 1986), p. 358.
[65] Charles C. Moskos, "Institutional/Occupational Trends in Armed Forces: An Update," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring 1986), p. 381.
[66] Eliot A. Cohen, "Twilight of the Citizen-Soldier," *Parameters* (Summer 2001), pp. 23-4.
[67] David R. Segal and Mady Wechsler Segal, "Change in Military Organization," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1983), pp. 152, 154.
[68] Ibid., p. 162.
[69] Bass, *Transformational Leadership*, p. 2.
[70] Ibid., p. 21.
[71] William P. Kuvlesky and Jane Dameron, "Adolescents' Perceptions of Military Service as a Vehicle for Social Mobility: A Racial Comparison of Rural Youth," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 1 (1971), pp. 57-67; and Jennifer Lee Gibson, Brian K. Griepentrog, and Sean M. Marsh, "Parental influence on youth propensity to join the military," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 70, Iss. 3 (2007), pp. 525-41.

military service has *combat* and *induction* components with four categories in the latter.[72] *Survival* motivation was framed within the narrative of 'life and death' and mandated the conscription of all able-bodied individuals. Next, in *ideology* motivation there is "virtually no need for coercion or obligatory service because the source of motivation is based on values and ideology." *Normative* motivation drew legitimacy for military service through state legislation and conformity to societal expectations. Finally, there is *personal* motivation from individual's attempt at 'self-actualization' to meet personal goals or potential. Gal saw that "today, the motivation for a military career is so heavily based on salary and other benefits" in addition to the four induction motivation factors. The overlapping I/O phenomenon was also identified in studies of career soldiers in Taiwan. One study uncovered occupational motivation such as "[g]ood salary (67.4%), stable work (64.6%) and excellent welfare benefits (48.6%)" while another stressed institutional inclinations such as "work values, work satisfaction and work performance" which affected commitment to military service.[73]

Giuseppe Caforio and Marina Nuciari's study of European militaries revealed four motivational categories.[74] The first covered those who were indifferent toward either I/O position. The second were officers with pure occupational motives and joined 'by chance', for 'job security', to avoid 'unemployment', and 'pay'.[75] The third consisted of 'pragmatic professionals' who displayed various I/O characteristics such as 'the wish to be independent of the family', 'to go to sea, to fly, to parachute,' and to some degree also by salary, job conditions, and strong interests in work-life balance, job security, transferable work skills, and societal support for the military.[76] The final group was comprised of 'radical professionals' with firm institutional values and cited 'the wish to be a leader', 'interest in the military', 'serving one's country', and 'comradeship' as reasons for military service.[77]

These studies provided an eclectic array of empirical reasons for officer motivation to join, commitment to stay, and ascension in the armed forces. The next three sections examine some theoretical foundations which anchored this study and were utilized as sensitising concepts.

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[72] Reuven Gal, "The Motivation for Serving in the IDF: In the Mirror of Time," *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (December 1999).
[73] Kuo-Wei Lin, Chia-Mu Kuan and Chi-Hao Lu, "Analysis of intention to continue services among Recruited Voluntary Soldiers," *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2012), pp. 479-80.
[74] Giuseppe Caforio and Marina Nuciari, "The Officer Profession: Ideal-Type," *Current Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Winter 1994), pp. 36, 41-2.
[75] Ibid., p. 42.
[76] Ibid., pp. 37, 42.
[77] Ibid., p. 42.

2.4 Motivation

The concept of motivation is manifested in varying shades of needs, goals, concerns, purposes, values, agenda, and plans.[78] Broadly speaking, any examination of motivation "is the study of why people think and behave as they do."[79] It is "a complex intersubjective process from which affects, intentions, and goals unfold."[80] It is not surprising that research into motivation is so varied that "no one theory can explain all the data on motivation … it is naïve to believe that one comprehensive theory can explain all motivational states."[81] Another pundit reiterated:

> "A common criticism is that although more and more research is conducted on the topic, little seems to be added to the knowledge base. The problem seems to be not with the theories themselves, but with their implicit claim to be universally applicable."[82]

The evolution of motivation theories anchored in biological (physical needs), behavioural (drive, incentives, learned motives), and cognitive (purposeful pursuit of anticipated goals) approaches all have "limitations. None of them are above criticism … yet most provide some useful insights into employee motivation."[83] It is apparent that 'theories' cannot be simply transplanted but applied with care to specific contexts. Instead of recapping them all in a textbook-like fashion, the ideas of rational-choice, hierarchy of needs, and altruism-egotism are examined because they hold most relevance for military service motivation.

One could commence with 'rational choice' – where individuals set goals and act in a manner they believe will reach the said goals – to explain motivation.[84] This is congruent with utilitarian ethics where "every action is to be approved or disapproved depending on whether" an individual's *utility* (fulfilment, happiness) was promoted or preserved.[85] Although theoretically sound, questions arose over whether utility could be

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[78] Clelia Anna Mannino, Mark Snyder, and Allen M. Omoto, "Why Do People Get Involved? Motivations for Volunteerism and Other Forms of Social Action," in David Dunning (ed.), *Social Motivation* (New York, NY and Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 2011), pp. 127-8; John P. Meyer, Thomas E. Becker, and Christian Vandenberghe, "Employee Commitment and Motivation: A Conceptual Analysis and Integrative Model," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 89, No. 6 (2004), p.992.
[79] Sandra Graham and Bernard Weiner, "Theories and Principles of Motivation," in David C. Berliner and Robert C. Calfee (eds.), *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (New York, NY and London, UK: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 63.
[80] Joseph D. Lichtenberg, Frank M. Lachmann, and James L. Fosshage, *Psychoanalysis and Motivational Systems: A New Look*, Psychoanalytic Inquiry Book Series, Vol. 33 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p. xiii.
[81] Herbert L. Petri, *Motivation: Theory, Research, and Applications* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981), p. 22.
[82] Weibull, "European Officers' Job Satisfaction and Job Commitment," p. 60.
[83] Petri, *Motivation*, p. 21; Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham, "What Should We Do about Motivation Theory? Six Recommendations for the Twenty-First Century," *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 2004), pp. 388-403; and Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 191-8.
[84] Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, pp. 21, 80-5; Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 249-51.
[85] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 214, 216.

observed, measured, and compared.[86] Rational-choice theory fell short with 'rationality' defined in mathematical terms and ignored circumstances such as cultural-historical contexts which could render an act as 'irrational'.[87] Furthermore, rationality "implies no particular *kind* of goal, for goals are a product of emotion and human desire."[88] Max Weber addressed such shortcomings by subdividing motivation into four categories where two or more resulted in human action. *Technocratic thinking* is action taken to meet a particular goal. Next, *value-oriented thinking* occurred when the goal is not necessary rational but the means are. Third, *affective action* is emotion-based rather than rational means and goals. Finally, *traditional action* is motivation predicated on tradition or habit.[89] Weber considered it important to move beyond causes to consider individual beliefs and desires which provided intelligible reasons for action(s).[90] It is often difficult to differentiate between observable (and at times speculative) causes and unobservable reasons unless an individual's interpretation of actions and reasons are made explicit, which is the hallmark of 'interpretivist' epistemology.[91]

Abraham Maslow arranged causes and reasons into a 'Hierarchy of Needs'. Once lower-order needs are satisfied higher-order needs emerged "[a]nd when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and higher) needs emerge and so on."[92] Physiological (breathing, food, water, sex) and safety (employment, resources, health) needs formed the base of the hierarchy. The next tier was *belongingness* or having "a place in a group or family" which staved off "loneliness, ostracism, rejection, friendliness, and rootlessness."[93] Next, *esteem* addressed "the need of desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves, for respect or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others" and when fulfilled led to "feelings of confidence, worth, strength, and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world."[94] Finally, there is the Aristotelian concept of *self-actualization* where individuals reached their full potential "to ultimately be at peace with themselves."[95]

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[86] These include "complete preference rankings, complete knowledge of all outcomes, no cognitive deficits, perfect algorithmic reasoning." See Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, pp. 219-22, 226, 233.
[87] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, p. 250.
[88] Italics in original. See *Strategy*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication, 1-1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1997), p. 12.
[89] Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, p. 38.
[90] Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, p. 37.
[91] Ibid., p. 47.
[92] Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York, NK: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1970), p. 17.
[93] Ibid., p. 20.
[94] Ibid., p. 21.
[95] Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 22; and Russell G. Geen, *Human Motivation: A Social Psychological Approach* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc., 1995), pp. 6-7.

Reference to Maslow's hierarchy has become somewhat *de rigueur* in studies on motivation and leadership.[96] Over time various 'improvements' have been made to the hierarchy to ensure it remained current and relevant. For example, self-actualization is framed as taking responsibility "for creating and sustaining a personal biography that allowed us to avoid shame and feel pride."[97] This concept varied between individuals and included liberty from lower-order needs; attempts to escape from "a sick culture"; finding one's identity; freedom from dependency on others; personal growth; adjustment to social environment and find meaning; empowerment; and a "zest for living."[98] Self-actualization is never ending as "[t]he self-actualized individual is no longer motivated by deficiencies but is motivated to grow and become all that he or she is capable of becoming. Self-actualization constantly stimulated people to test their abilities and expand their horizons."[99] This could lead to *idealization* which is the "pursuit of an ideal or of cause that is more than oneself."[100] Military service can meet the various needs on Maslow's hierarchy through employment, belongingness found in camaraderie, esteem associated with rank in a 'noble' profession, an environment for suitable individuals to reach their potential, and idealization in defending one's country.

Motivation theory and military sociology guided this study in three ways. First, various sources stressed the importance of cultural-historical contexts. Second, motivation must be understood beyond causes and "studied within the realm of decision making."[101] Finally, a kaleidoscope of sensitising concepts pointed to reasons for joining the military ranging from Huntingtonian ideals, Janowitz's observation of urban and rural differences, the altruistic and egotistic reasons noted by Janowitz and encapsulated in Moskos' I/O thesis, the role of parents, and military service as a means of meeting evolving needs from the 'self' and beyond.

2.5 Commitment

Motivation and commitment are related concepts but the former is usually concerned with short-term behaviour while the latter is "generally reserved for important actions or decisions that have relatively long-term implications."[102]

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[96] See for example Chemers, *An Integrative Theory of Leadership*, p. 34; and Bass, *Transformational Leadership*, pp. 11, 164.
[97] Stephen R. Wilson, "Self-Actualization and Culture," in Donald Munro, John F. Schumaker, and Stuart C. Carr (eds.), *Motivation and Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), p. 89.
[98] Ibid., pp. 86-93.
[99] Petri, *Motivation*, p. 325.
[100] Bernard M. Bass, "Transformational Leadership: Looking at Other Possible Antecedents and Consequences," *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 1995), pp. 293-97.
[101] Locke and Latham, "What Should We Do about Motivation Theory?" p. 392.
[102] Meyer et al., "Employee Commitment and Motivation," p. 994.

Commitment refers to wide-ranging actions that could mean going beyond the 'call of duty' to having attitudes and values congruent with the goals of the organization.[103] In civilian occupations there are varying degrees of differences between commitment to a said profession and to the organization of employment.[104] This is, however, minimized in the armed forces and more so in Singapore where the SAF is the only organization in which one can render professional military service.

As with motivation research, there is no general theory of commitment as each theory proffered unique and contextualized insights. For example, one study viewed commitment as the altruistic reflection of a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization.[105] Yet another emphasized the egotistic dimension where commitment was calculated from the cost of leaving an organization and the perceived lack of alternative employment.[106] A third study posited that commitment occurred when an individual's employment needs are satisfied and personal values maintained in congruence with organizational values.[107]

One model which amalgamated these varying emphases into a cohesive framework is John Meyer and Natalie Allen's 'Three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment' which captured an individual's (employee's) relationship with an organization (employer).[108] The first component is the individual's genuine desire (*affective* commitment, i.e. want to) to maintain employment with the organization.[109] The second is based on costs associated (*continuance* commitment, i.e. need to) with not maintaining employment in the organization.[110] The final component

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[103] Mowday et al., "The Measurement of Organizational Commitment," pp. 225-6.
[104] Jean E. Wallace, "Professional and Organizational Commitment: Compatible or Incompatible?" *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 42, Iss. 3 (June 1993), pp. 333-49; John P. Meyer, Natalie J. Allen, and Catherine A. Smith, "Commitment to organizations and occupations: Extension and test of a three-component conceptualization," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 78, Iss. 4 (August 1993), pp. 538-51; and Jean E. Wallace, "Organizational and Professional Commitment in Professional and Nonprofessional Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (June 1995), pp. 228-55.
[105] Mowday et al., "The Measurement of Organizational Commitment," p. 226.
[106] Alexandra Panaccio and Christian Vandenberghe, "Perceived organizational support, organizational commitment and psychological well-being: A longitudinal study," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 75, Iss. 2 (October 2009) pp. 225-6.
[107] Uriel Leviatan, "Values and Organizational Commitment," *International Critical Thought*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2013), pp. 316-7.
[108] John P. Meyer and Natalie J. Allen, "A Three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment," *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1991), pp. 64-7.
[109] Ibid., pp. 69-71. Antecedent factors included: job status, quality of employment, rewards, organizational values, achievement, affiliation, autonomy, work ethic, locus of control, life interest in work, fulfilment of needs, utilization of abilities, decentralized decision making, and formalization of policy and procedure, work experience, pre-entry expectations, organizational dependability, organizational support, role clarity and freedom from conflict, supervisor consideration, accomplishment, autonomy, fairness of performance-based rewards, job challenge, job scope, opportunity for advancement, opportunity for self-expression, participation in decision making, personal importance to the organization.
[110] Ibid., pp. 71-2. Antecedent factors included: acquiring non-transferable skills, losing attractive benefits, giving up seniority-based privileges, or of having to uproot family and disrupt personal relationships, and possibly age and tenure in an organization. Other factors include attractiveness of alternatives.

is the obligation (*normative* commitment, i.e. have to) to maintain employment in an organization.[111] Meyer and Allen expected "varying degrees" of overlap between the three components.[112] Meyer et al. concluded in a follow-up study that the model was increasingly utilized and could be applicable in "countries and cultures" beyond North America.[113]

Aaron Cohen sought to improve Meyer and Allen's model with his four-component model of commitment which emphasized the *timing* of joining an organization and the *bases of commitment* anchored on relational (i.e. moral obligation and psychological attachment) and economic (i.e. rewards and benefits) rationale.[114] An individual's attitude of commitment *prior* to joining an organization (*commitment propensity*) rested on two pillars. The first is economic rationale (*instrumental commitment propensity*) from rewards and benefits expected from staying with the organization. The second is commitment based on moral obligation (*normative commitment propensity*).[115] An individual's actual commitment *after* joining an organization is also two-fold. Economic rationale (*instrumental commitment*) remained but moral obligation gave way to psychological identification with the organization's values and goals (*affective commitment*). Cohen dismissed Meyer and Allen's concept of an individual's moral obligation to remain with an organization (*normative commitment*) based on research gaps which supported "the relationship between early socialization tactics and normative commitment."[116] He further stressed that organizational commitment in the early part of employment was economically driven because time, experiences, and information are required to develop affective commitment."[117]

Beyond the immediate job at hand, various studies indicated that individuals with strong ties to colleagues resulted in greater social integration, organizational commitment, and decreased their need for alternative employment.[118] This is coherent with Yoon et al.'s *cohesion approach* where interpersonal attachment strengthened organizational commitment and loyalty through identification with organizational values and goals. Their *subgroup approach*, however, also highlighted interpersonal

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[111] Ibid., p. 72. Antecedent factors included: pressures exerted on an individual prior to entry into the organization, organizations initial outlay (e.g. education, bonuses).
[112] Ibid., p. 68.
[113] John P. Meyer, David J. Stanley, Lynne Herscovitch, and Laryssa Topolnytsky, "Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment to the Organization: A Meta-analysis of Antecedents, Correlates, and Consequences," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 61, Iss. 1 (August 2002), pp. 43-4.
[114] Aaron Cohen, "Commitment before and after: An evaluation and reconceptualization of organizational commitment," *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 17, Iss. 3 (2007), pp. 337, 343-4.
[115] Ibid., p. 342.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., p. 346.
[118] Quoted in Soo-Hoon Lee and Phillip H. Phan, "The effects of tie strength and tie diversity on job search, pay increases, and promotions in Singapore and Thailand," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, Vol. 23, No. 5 (2006), p. 821.

attachment as possible barriers to organizational commitment because an individual is attached to a small group and not beyond those confines.[119]

Whether an individual developed affective commitment depended on the realization of individual's expectations, the "psychological contract that reflects unarticulated hopes and feelings about what the organization and employees will give and get from the employment relationship."[120] This in turn impacted job performance in a profound manner as humans are generally energized by activities to which they are committed.[121] When expectations proved incongruent with experiences an individual sought to correct this cognitive dissonance the failure of which invariably resulted in the loss of commitment and eventual exit from the organization.[122]

Commitment theory and military sociology provided several sensitising concepts with which to frame an individual's commitment to a military career. Affirmative commitment is the desire to maintain employment for reasons of goals and values, benefits and rewards, the lack of a better alternative, and interpersonal and organizational attachments. Continuance commitment is predicated on the cost of not maintaining employment in an organization for economic reasons, career progression, and the time and effort already invested. Finally, there is normative commitment from the obligation to maintain employment with an organization. There is also the need to consider commitment before and after joining an organization. Empirical evidence further indicated commitment from staying true to 'a calling', dedication to the profession-of-arms, and unique experiences and opportunities that can only be fulfilled in the armed forces.

2.6 Ascension

There are four plausible angles to view officer ascension: cronyism and patronage, merit, visibility, and luck. Ascension through cronyism is evident when an individual is promoted through "preferential treatment without regard to their

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[119] Jeongkoo Yoon, Mouraine R. Baker and Jong-Wook Ko, "Interpersonal Attachment and Organizational Commitment: Subgroup Hypothesis Revisited," *Human Relations*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (1994), pp. 329-32, 345.
[120] Karen Beck and Carlene Wilson, "Development of affective organizational commitment: A cross-sequential examination of change with tenure," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 56, Iss. 1 (2000), pp. 114-36; and Karen Beck and Carlene Wilson, "Have we studied, should we study, and can we study the development of commitment? Methodological issues and the developmental study of work-related commitment," *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 11, Iss. 3 (Autumn 2001), pp. 257-78.
[121] Stephen R. Marks, "Multiple roles and role strain: Some notes on human energy, time, and commitment," *American Sociology Review*, Vol. 42 (1977), pp. 921-936; and Stephen R. Marks, "Culture, human energy, and self-actualization: A sociological offering to humanistic psychology," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 19 (1979), pp. 27-43.
[122] Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 1-31.

qualifications."[123] This can be rooted in 'particularism' (group affiliation) and/or 'paternalism' where "unreserved personal loyalty" is shown to influential individuals able to dispense preferential treatment.[124] This can take the form of *horizontal cronyism* among peers on an intra- or inter-organizational basis, or *vertical cronyism* on an intra-organizational basis where superiors exercised patronage toward subordinates in exchange for loyalty.[125] Cronyism and patronage are not anchored in abilities but on preferences which is the antithesis to merit-based ascension. Michael Barr drew generalizations from three civil servants-turn-politicians who allegedly epitomized "the highly personalised nature of power" in Singapore. He emphatically concluded that:

> "Patronage or sponsorship by a powerful person is a vitally important element in the rise of anyone in the Singapore political and administrative elite. 'Talent' and paper qualifications are sufficient in themselves to attract the notice of those with influence to disburse, but at some point one needs to plug into a patronage network. The earlier in life one is able to do this, the better."[126]

The second basis for ascension is merit and human resource practitioners have three associated systems at their disposal.[127] A Merit-Based System (MBS) relied on performance appraisals and rankings. This can be an *absolute* MBS where promotions are received only after explicit minimum acceptable standards are met by an individual's "past, current or projected future performance." The alternative to minimum standards is the *relative* MBS where individuals in the top percentile "are promoted regardless of their absolute performance level" to fill vacancies at the next level of seniority. Next, there is the Up-or-Out System where individuals have a set period to meet minimum performance expectations for promotion, failing which they must leave the organization.[128] Finally the Seniority-Based Systems favoured the most 'senior' individuals based on the length of experience in a particular job (or appointment) either within an organization or within a specific industry.[129] All three merit-based systems have possible applications in the military.

To some, performance-based merit is a "utopian" ideal because performance is not exactly objective and subjected to an individual's inspiration to "assert one's own

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[123] Thomas M. Begley, Naresh Khatri, and Eric W. K. Tsang, "Networks and cronyism: A social exchange analysis," *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, Vol. 27, Iss. 2 (2010), p. 282.
[124] Naresh Khatri and Eric W. K. Tsang, "Antecedents and Consequences of Cronyism in Organizations," *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 43, Iss. 4 (2003), pp. 291-3.
[125] Ibid., pp. 291, 294.
[126] Michael D. Barr, "Beyond Technocracy: The Culture of Elite Governance in Lee Hsien Loong's Singapore," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March 2006), p. 6.
[127] Steven E. Phelan and Zhiang Lin, "Promotion Systems and Organizational Performance: A Contingency Model," *Computational & Mathematical Organization Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (October 2001), p. 210.
[128] Ibid., p. 211.
[129] Ibid.

interests."[130] This led to the idea of 'visibility' as a possible ascension factor in the military. It was observed that:

> "As an officer moves up through the ranks, performance becomes more difficult to measure. Additionally, by the time an officer reaches the senior levels, the promotion process has (normally) prevented substandard performers from attaining higher rank, and thus, all performance evaluations at this level tend to be stellar. The distinguishing factor among officers at this career point is visibility. An officer achieves a reputation by serving successfully in a high-visibility job."[131]

The notion that visibility eventually replaced performance as the main driver of promotions at senior ranks seemed congruent with David Moore and Thomas Trout's Visibility Theory of Promotion which argued:

> "… that performance, while a necessary standard for acceptability into a rather large pool of officers from which the elite will emerge, is nonetheless a minor influence on promotion and becomes even less discriminating as an officer's career progresses; whereas visibility, which begins moderately, eventually becomes the dominant influence."[132]

Moore and Trout tested their theory against longitudinal data of American generals and admirals between 1940 and 1974 but acknowledged the effort did not "prove the validity of the visibility theory of promotion … [but] provide[d] compelling evidence that the promotion dynamics operating in peacetime are different from those in wartime, a situation that is at least fully consistent with the visibility theory."[133]

Luck is the final element that could play a part in promotions. Bernard Weiner's contribution to attribution theory listed four elements of importance in interpreting an achievement-related event (taking ascension as an achievement). First, *abilities* are evident in successes and inabilities through failures. Second, *effort* is perceived through time spent on the success achieved. Third, the *difficulty* of a task is gauged through established (e.g. success rates) and perceived norms. Finally, there is the notion of *luck* when there seems to be no relation between behaviour and outcome.[134] The first three elements can be linked to performance and visibility thus leaving the possibility of luck in partially explaining the ascension of military elites.

Ascension theory and military sociology highlighted several sensitising concepts. The former indicated an individual can ascend through cronyism and patronage, performance or seniority-based merit, visibility to those who determined

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[130] Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, pp. 30-1.
[131] David A. Schwind and Janice H. Laurence, "Raising the Flag: Promotion to Admiral in the United States Navy," *Military Psychology*, Vol. 18, Supplementary (2006), p. S85.
[132] David W. Moore and B. Thomas Trout, "Military Advancement: The Visibility Theory of Promotion," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (June 1978), pp. 452-3.
[133] Ibid., p. 467.
[134] Petri, *Motivation*, p. 307.

postings and promotions, and luck when behaviour and outcome seem mutually exclusive. The four plausible angles are all applicable to the military. Empirical evidence pointed to technical competency and 'cookie-cutter' appointments as necessary conditions for career progression. At the higher levels, however, innovation, discretion, political skills, and being in the right place when opportunities arise are essential to differentiate between the crème and the rest of the officer corps. While these concepts shed light on the general processes of ascension a holistic approach must also cover the ascension structure unique to any organization under examination.

2.7 Summary

This chapter covered literature pertinent to the aim of understanding the motivation to join, commitment to stay, and ascension of military elites in Singapore. These questions are conspicuously absent in existing Singapore-related literature. This is less so for other countries where studies in military sociology indicated eclectic reasons, both altruistic and egotistic, for joining the military and staying committed to the profession-of-arms. In terms of climbing the military hierarchy an officer's ascension is subjected to both official and unofficial processes and a structure unique to each military establishment. The sensitising concepts distilled from theories and studies in military sociology form the basis of the questionnaire (Annex G) utilized in semi-structured interviews to obtain empirical evidence from 28 retired SAF flag-officers and examined in detail later in this study.

CHAPTER 3
THE PROFESSION-OF-ARMS IN SINGAPORE

"The guns we provide the SAF are as effective as the soldiers who fire them. The soldiers are as effective as the officers who lead them. The officers are as effective as the society which nurtures them."[1]

— Dr Goh Keng Swee (1918-2010)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualizes Singapore's existence and the importance of manpower as seen through the lenses of defence and related societal norms. The first section provides an understanding of the psyche that drives the political leadership's valid obsession with national security and turned Singapore into a quasi-'Nation in Arms'.[2] Defence sits on a pedestal festooned with an unquestionable raison d'être, relatively lavish funding priority, and domestic and international visibility.[3] Yet, as Dr Goh cautioned, it is also imperative to understand defence beyond the impressive hardware and consider the various manpower challenges. Against this backdrop the second section covers the figures who led the SAF in its formative years, the majority of whom joined the military prior to the introduction of conscription.

3.2 Defence: The Sacrosanct Pillar

The indubitable nature of defence was shaped by the tumultuous events between the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 and the separation with Malaysia on 9 August 1965 where:

> "Singapore was overrun by the Japanese army … Some 20,000 to 30,000 men living in Singapore were massacred and most of the population lived under

[1] *SAFTI Leadership Journal* (Singapore: Centre for Leadership Development, SAFTI Military Institute, 2003), p. 81.

[2] One definition of Nation in Arms is the "codependency between the military and society. This codependency includes, but is not limited to, almost full national conscription of men and women of service age, harnessing the nation's economy to the countries war efforts, and even conscription of personal property (such as personal possessions, vehicles, and land) at times of war." See Gabriel Ben-Dor, Ami Pedahzur, Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Eran Zaidise, Arie Perliger and Shai Bermanis, "I versus We: Collective and Individual Factors of Reserve Service Motivation during War and Peace," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (July 2008), p. 587.

[3] Indeed, Singapore's high degree of military expenditure in relation to Gross Domestic Product and national budget placed this 'Nation-in-Arms' second only to Israel on the Bonn International Center for Conversion's 2012 Global Militarization Index. Singapore also led Southeast Asia with the highest defence budget in 2012. See *The Military Balance 2013* (London, UK: The International Institute For Strategic Studies, 2013), p. 251; and "Shopping spree," *The Economist*, 24 March 2012; and Susanne Heinke (ed.), *BICC Annual Report 2012* (Bonn, Germany: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2012), pp. 14-5. Global Militarization Index 2012 ranking: 1 Israel, 2 Singapore, 3 Syria, 4 Russia, 5 Jordan, 6 Cyprus, 7 South Korea, 8 Kuwait, 9 Greece, 10 Saudi Arabia.

> famine conditions. From 1948 to 1960 the Malayan Communist Party mounted widespread guerrilla insurgency in the Malayan Peninsula which was suppressed at great cost with much difficulty and with the full support of British arms. Between 1954 and 1963 the communist united front organizations literally ran riot in Singapore. Between 1963 and 1965, while in Malaysia, Singapore was the target of what was virtually an undeclared low-level war waged by the Sukarno regime of Indonesia."[4]

These experiences firmly entrenched Singapore's vulnerabilities into the collective psyche of its early leaders.[5] The immediate post-independence period also witnessed a myriad of domestic political and socio-economic challenges.[6] Although Singapore was poor and underdeveloped, it was clear that geography prevented "her from becoming a strategic vacuum. She remains at the gateway to the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, the ante-room to the Pacific."[7]

The logic behind the unflinching devotion to defence is predicated on three considerations. First, defence was not the most pressing concern during British colonial rule where Singapore – the 'Gibraltar of the East' – served as an important trading port, naval base, and satellite earth station.[8] Defence concerns remained peripheral during the short-lived merger with Malaysia but Singapore's security umbrella folded rather suddenly as irreconcilable political differences led to separation.[9] The impending phased withdrawal of military forces 'east of the Suez' reflected London's post-WWII strategic realignment but it was assumed that the United Kingdom (UK) would meet its

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[4] Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Struggle for Singapore* (Sydney, NSW, Australia: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1976), pp. 225-6. See also Claude Fenner and Frank Twiss, "Malaysia, Singapore and the British Military Withdrawal," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 115, No. 657 (1970), pp. 13-20. The Singapore Government "accepted Japan's atonement which took the form of a grant of $25m and the loan of another $25 million on liberal terms." Quoted in Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 16.

[5] For separation between Singapore and Malaysia see Albert Lau, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998); and Lee, *From Third World to First*.

[6] The challenges encompassed political (against the Communists and *Barisan Sosialis*), social (low education levels, sensitive issues of race, language, and religion), and economic (lack of resources, integration with global markets) dimensions. Lee Boon Hiok, "Leadership and Security in Singapore: The Prevailing Paradigm," in Mohammed Ayoob and Chai-Anan Samudavanija (eds.), *Leadership Perceptions and National Security: The Southeast Asian Experience* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 161-9; and Chin Kin Wah, "Singapore: Threat Perception and Defence Spending in a City-State," in Chin Kin Wah (ed.), *Defence Spending in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1987), p. 196.

[7] George G. Thomson, "Britain's plan to leave Asia," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 230 (1968), pp. 123-4.

[8] Dennis Cummings, "25 Years of British military satellite communications," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 138, No. 5 (October 1993), pp. 44-9.

[9] Issues included special rights for Malays, equality, citizenship for non-Malays, governance (Malay political domination and monarchical system), choice of national language(s), and ideology (both domestic and external). See for example Denis Warner, "The second fall of Singapore," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 7, Iss. 8 (1965), pp. 298-300; Lee, *From Third World to First*, pp. 257-91; Lau Teik Soon, "Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Crisis of Adjustment, 1965-68," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 1969), pp. 157, 159; Chan Heng Chee, "Singapore's Foreign Policy, 1965-1968," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 1969), p. 179; Marvin L. Rogers, "Malaysia and Singapore: 1971 Developments," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (February 1972), p. 169; Jason Tan, "Improving Malay Educational Achievement in Singapore: Problems and Policies," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1997), p. 43; Narayanan Ganesan, "Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Some Recent Developments," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring 1998), p. 22; and Menon, *One of A Kind*, pp. 21-5.

political assurances.[10] The British defence minister declared "no naval pull-out from Singapore in the foreseeable future" in an October 1966 visit.[11] However, Downing Street's 1968 decision to accelerate the complete withdrawal of its forces by December 1971 instead of 1975 shocked and disappointed the Singapore Government. Plans for self-defence fell into disarray and state revenue would be drastically affected as British bases accounted for around one-fifth of Singapore's Gross Domestic Product.[12] An irate Dr Goh – whom Singapore's first Prime Minister (PM) Lee Kuan Yew depicted as his "alter ego" – called the episode "a disgraceful breach of an undertaking given to us."[13] In contrast to the British leaving too soon, the Malaysians overstayed their welcome and kept their ground forces in Singapore until 31 September 1967, more than two years after separation. The Malaysian Navy, however, continued using bases under agreements made during the formation of Federation and subsequently after separation.[14]

Second, the preceding events made it clear that Singaporeans were responsible for defending themselves if they were to chart their own destiny.[15] Convincing the

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[10] Chan, "Singapore's Foreign Policy, 1965-1968," pp. 177-91; and Derek McDougall, "The Wilson Government and the British Defence Commitment in Malaysia-Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (September 1973), pp. 229-40; and Leonard Rayner, "A Review of British Defence and Foreign Policies and their Effects on Singapore and the Rest of the Region," Southeast Asian Affairs (1976), pp. 348-53.

[11] Lim Suan Kooi, "Full steam ahead for the future," *The Straits Times*, 9 August 1972, p. 2.

[12] The British Far East Command stood down on 31 October 1971 and all remaining 'token' units were withdrawn between September 1975 and March 1976. "Lee: We have five to 10 years to build sinews ..." *The Straits Times*, 20 July 1967, p. 1; "Britain's pullout decision will stay'," *The Straits Times*, 17 January 1970, p. 5; R. Chandran, "Lee's tribute to British peace-keeping role in S-E Asia," *The Straits Times*, 17 October 1971, p. 1; Leslie Fong, "Britain's bombshell," *The Straits Times*, 24 November 1974, p. 10; Chin, "Singapore," p. 195; Malcolm H. Murfett, John H. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun, *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. ix, 280, 322-3.

[13] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Times & Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 510; Lee, *From Third World to First*, pp. 49, 61; and Thomson, "Britain's plan to leave Asia," p. 124. At the tribute foyer of the Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College, SAFTI Military Institute, Lee Kuan Yew was quoted on 4 June 2010 to have said: "Keng Swee was my alter ego, never daunted, never intimidated. We reinforced each other's resolve. It was a partnership that lasted from the London Forum days in 1949 until he resigned in 1984."

[14] The 1st Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment, of the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) occupied Camp Temasek (1963-77) at Ulu Pandan while 2 SIR was deployed to Sabah (August 1965 to February 1966) during *Konfrantasi*. However, 2 SIR was left without accommodation after redeployment from Sabah in 1966 and lived "under canvas" (i.e. in tents) at Farrer Park. Malaysian leaders stated "Malaysian troops could not leave the barracks until alternative accommodation could be found for them." Temporary barracks were constructed at Bukit Sembawang to house MAF troops who withdrew only in 1971. The problem was compounded by the fact the land belonged to Singapore but the British government handed the camp to the Malaysians. The Royal Malaysian Navy Training School (KD Sri Pekandok) continued operations at Khatib Camp until relocation to Lumut in Perak state of West Malaysia. Khatib Camp was transferred to the Singapore government on 2 February 1982. The Royal Malaysian Navy also housed its Recruits Training Centre (PULAREK Berek TLDM Woodlands), formerly known as KD Malaya, at Woodlands Barracks. See Mei-Lin Chew, "Crack Unit to move house," *The Straits Times*, 3 February 1975, p. 6; "Malaysian CDF at Woodlands Base," *Pioneer* (February 1992), p. 23; Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, p. 103; Lee, *From Third World to First*, pp. 32-3; and Menon, *One of A Kind*, pp. 29-30.

[15] Military control was transferred from the British to the Singapore government on 29 October 1971 with the latter fully responsible with the standing-down of Far East Command on 31 October 1971. See Murfett et al., *Between Two Oceans*, p. 280.

general population proved difficult as defence minister (1967-70) Lim Kim San explained in 1969 that:

> "one reason why some people in Singapore were insensitive to problems of defence was that for a 150 years the British had been the power responsible for security, largely with soldiers brought from outside Singapore. So generations of Singaporeans had been conditioned to believe that defence was not their personal concern. They had been taught to take it for granted."[16]

Those in power believed otherwise and saw a strong defence as the safeguard against revanchism, irredentism, or suzerainty. It also guaranteed Singapore's sovereignty across the political, economic, and territorial spectrum and provided the freedom to manoeuvre independent of any external interference or opposition.[17] A steady stream of conspicuous domestic and foreign events underpinned such concerns.[18]

The third and final reason for consistent defence investments is that without any exploitable natural resources Singapore needed to attract foreign investors. No one would put money in what was then a third-world state without some guarantee of stability. A strong SAF was seen as this guarantee. Indeed, it was not farfetched to see that "[i]f people believed that Singapore was weak and defenceless even wealthy Singaporeans would move part of their capital abroad."[19] The national narrative has consistently attributed Singapore's high standards of living to its sovereignty and a secure climate that would otherwise retard economic growth resulting in "a poorer people and instability."[20]

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[16] "At the floodgates of history … We stand prepared," *National Pioneer* (August 1969), pp. 5-6.
[17] Some incidences such as the 17 October 1968 execution of two Indonesia infiltrators responsible of bombing McDonald House killing three and wounding 30 during *Konfrontasi* (March 1965); the 7 May 1988 expulsion of E. Mason 'Hank' Hendrickson (First Secretary (political) at the US Embassy in Singapore) for meddling in domestic politics; the 5 May 1994 caning of Michael Fay for vandalism; the 17 March 1995 hanging of Flor Contemplacion (Filipina domestic helper) for the double murder of Delia Maga and Nicholas Huang. The American CIA allegedly tried to bride a special branch officer in Singapore. See Chan, "Singapore's Foreign Policy, 1965-1968," pp. 181-2; and Lau, "Malaysia-Singapore Relations," p. 172.
[18] Incidences of terrorist activities in post-independent Singapore included the Laju Ferry hijacking by two members of the Japanese Red Army and another two from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (1974); and the hijacking of Singapore Airlines Flight SQ117 en-route from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore by four members of the Pakistani People's Party (1991). Periods of tension in bilateral relationships included the official visit by Israeli President Chiam Herzog which led to protest riots in Malaysia (1986); the bilateral military exercise *Malindo Darsasa 3AB* between Malaysia and Indonesia which culminated in an airborne exercise 18km from the Singapore-Malaysian border (1991). Developments abroad such as the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, the Arab-Israeli conflicts, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and Russian actions in former Soviet republics pressed home the need for strong defence. See also Chew and Tan, *Creating the Technology Edge*, pp. 17, 44, 166; Chin, "Singapore," pp. 198-9; Lee, "Leadership and Security in Singapore," pp. 174-7; and Derek Da Cunha, "Major Asian Powers and the Development of the Singaporean and Malaysian Armed Forces," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (June 1991), pp. 59-63.
[19] Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 221.
[20] Li Xueying and Teo Wan Gek, "From improbable to reality," The Straits Times, 16 August 2010. These sentiments are also expressed in various government publications such as Martin Choo (ed.), *The Singapore Armed Forces* (Singapore: Public Affairs Department, Ministry of Defence, 1981), pp. 6-7; "SAF Day Message 1983," *Pioneer* (July 1983), p. 2; and *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century* (Singapore: Ministry of Defence, 2000), pp. 5-6.

Singapore has matched words with deeds through prudent investments in its defence capabilities. Australia, Israel, New Zealand, Taiwan, the UK and the US provided much needed military assistance in the early days. The unflinching dedication to harness and maintain the tech-edge has turned the SAF into the most advanced defence force in Southeast Asia. The price has been steep with a quarter of the annual budget consistently devoted to defence independent of economic conditions. The need for strong defence is continually and explicitly emphasized because "[w]ithout the SAF, the good life and the opportunities that young people enjoy would disappear like Cinderella's coach at midnight."[21] The trend of 'more guns' equals 'more butter' is set to continue unabated and defence can expect choice portions of the yearly budget.

3.2.1 National Service: Conscription by any other name

While money purchased impressive military hardware, the most pressing concern was the manpower required for the SAF war-machine to deter in peace and secure victory in war. Conscription was not a given at independence. The MID initially organized a brigade-sized force of part-time reservists centred on a small cadre of regular soldiers.[22] Debates on the future defence structure continued within the political elite and took greater urgency in light of the accelerated British withdrawal. Dr Goh envisioned a professional army of 12 battalions. Lee Kuan Yew favoured universal conscription for males and females but Goh objected to compulsory service for the latter.[23] Lee's one-time press secretary Alex Josey reasoned:

> "Lee did not want professional soldiers. 'This place must learn to live and work for a living. And if you are only a soldier, you do not contribute to the productivity of the place.' So men are called up, trained for two years, and then go back to earn a living and to become part of a reservoir of people 'who understand discipline, who know the mechanics of self-defence, and who can help in an emergency to defend their own country'. Lee also believed that an army based upon national service is an army that will never be able to stage a

[21] Nazry Bahrawi, "Battle for bright minds," *TODAY*, 7 August 2008, p. 8.
[22] Some 3,000 volunteered between October and December 1965. See also "Volunteers drive in Singapore," *The Straits Times*, 7 November 1965, p. 8; and "Spore to have volunteer fighting force," *The Straits Times*, 31 December 1965, p. 4.
[23] Lee, *From Third World to First*, p. 35; Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the "35 Years of National Service Commemoration Dinner," *MINDEF Website*, 7 September 2002, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2002/sep/07sep02_nr/07sep02_speech.html (no longer available); and Ooi, *In Lieu of Ideology*, p. 135. The question of extending NS to females surface intermittently although they have never been conscripted. See "Woman doctors' views on NS proposal," *The Straits Times*, 19 March 1976, p. 8; Philip Lee, "Women, this is your national service," *The Straits Times*, 10 April 1983, p. 1; "The Straits Times says Women's real NS role," *The Straits Times*, 12 December 1983, p. 18; "Why women should do NS," *The Straits Times*, 18 December 1983, p. 21; "NS for women? Not yet," *The Straits Times*, 5 August 1991, p. 20; Mathew Pereira, "Reporting for duty at the front line?" *The Straits Times*, 23 August 1992, p. 8; "45% of women say 'yes' to NS," *TODAY*, 6 March 2004, p. 3; "NS for Women? Yet Mother nay," *The Straits Times*, 16 March 2004, p. 4; Elgin Toh, "NS for women a hot topic among youths at Singapore Conversation," *The Straits Times*, 11 May 2013; and Jermyn Chow, "Let women choose to do NS, says female focus group," *The Straits Times*, 24 July 2013.

> successful coup d'état. His task was to create a citizens' army which involved everyone in a family sense, while at the same time elevating the status of the soldier."[24]

The lean economic years of early independence shelved Dr Goh's proposal because "[t]he two existing battalions were already costing us $20 million a year, a princely sum of money. 12 battalions would have bankrupted the treasury."[25] Conscription, or National Service (NS), was the "cheap way to provide a deterrent force" without draining state coffers.[26] Goh also viewed NS as a means of nation-building because "participation in defence and membership in the armed forces" could efficiently and effectively inculcate "loyalty and national consciousness" in a young nation.[27] He was well-aware that "[w]e are not a nation, we are a community, a society, a group of people living in the island of Singapore."[28] Singaporeans needed to believe in the construct that is Singapore and NS was the ideal "school of the nation."[29] This was especially significant post-independence when "Singaporeans had very little in common except financial aspirations and a sorrowful history of racial riots … citizens lacked a common loyalty, patriotism, history, or tradition."[30] NS facilitated interaction regardless "of economic, ethnic, religious, cultural and language differences" which eradicated prejudices from unfavourable stereotypes and also brought equality through communal living.[31]

NS eventually provided Singapore with a total mobilized defence force some seven times larger than peacetime numbers. This addressed the imbalances vis-à-vis Singapore's near-abroad as Dr Goh rationalized:

> "It is foolish to allow ourselves to be hypnotised by the disparity in the population ratios between Singapore and her neighbours. What counts is the fighting strength of the armed forces, not the size of populations. After five years of conscription, we can field an army of 150,000 by mobilising those on the reserve service. By using older persons and women for non-combatant

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[24] Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, pp. 219-20. See also Lam Peng Er and Kevin Yew Lee Tan, *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's Old Guard* (St Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1999), p. 59.
[25] Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the "35 Years of National Service Commemoration Dinner," *MINDEF Website*, 7 September 2002.
[26] BG (RET) Kirpa Ram Vij quoted in Tan Guan Heng, *100 Inspiring Rafflesians 1823-2003* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2008), p. 88. See also Ng Pak Shun, "'Why Not A Volunteer Army?' Reexamining the impact of military conscription on economic growth for Singapore," *The Singapore Economic Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2005), pp. 47-67.
[27] Ooi, *In Lieu of Ideology*, p. 134; and Ng Kai Ling, "SAF needs the best leaders: DPM Teo," *Straits Times*, 18 August 2010. Jon S. T. Quah, "Singapore: Towards a National Identity," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1977), p. 209; and "The SAF then," *The Straits Times*, 27 March 1988, p. 2.
[28] Speech by Dr Goh Keng Swee at a seminar on "Democracy and Communism" sponsored by the Ministry of Education for pre-university students at the Singapore Conference 24-29 April 1971. Reproduced in Goh Keng Swee, *The Economics of Modernization* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1995), p. 146.
[29] Anna Leander, "Drafting Community: Understanding the Fate of Conscription," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Summer 2004), p. 577.
[30] Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*, p. 94.
[31] Chan Heng Chee, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival 1965-1967* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 57; Elizabeth Nair, "Conscription and Nation-Building in Singapore: A Psychological Analysis," *Journal of Human Values*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1995), pp. 96, 98; and Lam and Tan, *Lee's Lieutenants*, p. 59.

> duties, we should eventually be able to field an army with a combat strength of 250,000 consisting of men between the ages of 18 and 35. The war-making potential of a small, vigorous, well-educated and highly motivated population should never be underestimated."[32]

While NS saved the treasury the costs were not eradicated with the burden simply redistributed among citizens. Conscription is simply "the legal and regulated form of forced labour for the state" in the uniformed services.[33] NS initially ameliorated unemployment but opportunity costs soon became apparent.[34] An individual's youth, lost employment potential, disruption in education, and a career nuisance if called up for reservist training are common concerns.[35] Furthermore, the then-MID candidly acknowledged in 1967 that "an enlarged standing army would be better from the point of view of combat efficiency."[36] Others were concerned over the impact on professionalism in an army which "has to look after a large number of conscripts."[37] Most recently BG (RET) then-COL Goh Kee Nguan opined: "A full-time career professional force is preferred for the Singapore Army as career soldiers have more time for training and deployment and has less deployment constraint when compared to a conscript force."[38] For almost fifty years the numbers game has always dictated otherwise.

The greatest hurdle was for society to buy into the idea of NS. Political leaders certainly had their work cut out due to socio-historical reasons. The colonial administration's 1954 attempt at conscription was strongly resisted and eventually failed. Chinese Middle School students vented their anger and ran amok at policy designed to "defend the same British order that had discriminated against them and in which they saw no future."[39] Only 400 men enlisted in 1954 before the NS Ordinance

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[32] "Building an army from scratch," *The Straits Times*, 9 September 2000, pp. 62-3.
[33] Casey B. Mulligan and Andrei Shleifer, "Conscription as Regulation," *American Law and Economics Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2005), p. 88. NS in Singapore commenced with the armed forces in 1967, and was extended to the police force in 1975, and fire brigade (now called the civil defence force) in 1981. See *Supporting Our NSMen: An Employers' Guide* (Singapore: MINDEF Public Affairs, undated), pp. 7, 10.
[34] Chan, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival*, p. 57; Amnon Barzilai, "A deep dark, secret love affair," *Haaretz*, 16 July 2004.
[35] Nair, "Nation-Building Through Conscript Service in Singapore," p. 106; Mulligan and Shleifer, "Conscription as Regulation," pp. 85-111; and Yew-Kwang Ng, "Why is the Military Draft Common? Conscription and Increasing Returns," *Annals of Economics and Finance*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2008), pp. 373-84.
[36] "National Service in Singapore," *The Straits Times*, 28 February 1967, p. 10.
[37] BG (RET) Lee Hsien Loong quoted in Chan Kim Yin, "Professionalism in a National Service Army: An Uneasy Combination?" *Pointer*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April-June 1989), p. 30.
[38] Goh Kee Nguan, "The Singapore Army Moving Decisively Beyond The Conventional," *USAWC Strategy Research Project* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 2004), p. 14. See also "National Service in Singapore," *The Straits Times*, 28 February 1967, p. 10.
[39] 20 of the 500 students who protested in front of Government House (Istana Negara) on 18 May were injured and 45 arrested in the ensuing clash with riot police. Six policemen were also injured. 1,000 students also locked themselves in Chung Chen High School (CCHS) but were evicted on 19 May by police. On 22 May another lock-in took place at CCHS with 2,500 student protesters but was settled peacefully. See Nor-Afidah Abd Rahman, "National Service Riots of 1954," *InfopediaTalk* (National Library Board Singapore), 28 July 2006, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1202_2006-07-28.html (accessed 28 May 2014).

Act was abrogated in 1955. This episode cautioned Singapore's leaders to the sensitivities of military service. Government communiqués emphasized Singapore's vulnerabilities and the need for Singaporeans to defend themselves and their personal interests. Dr Goh reasoned: "We wanted the people to regard our soldiers as their protectors – a reversal from the days when army and police uniforms aroused fear and resentment as symbols of colonial coercion. People must admire military valour."[40] Students, parents, and businesses had to be convinced. Politicians worked the ground to assuage concerned citizenry, hosted NS dinners for enlistees, and graced send-off ceremonies at enlistment centres. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce even minted special gold medallions for the first 5,000 recruits.

Those in power pre-empted the unpopular decision and mentally prepared the population for the impending NS announcement by setting examples for others to follow. Early leaders joined the part-time militia and at the first National Day Parade (NDP) on 9 August 1966:

> "… put up a brave show and were cheered enthusiastically by those behind the saluting dais and by the crowds lining the streets as they recognised their suntanned ministers and MPs in uniform, eager in their stride if lacking in martial bearing."[41]

Later on 29 November 1966 all civil servants were decreed to render Compulsory Active Service (CAS) which commenced on 1 January 1967.[42] The NS announcement followed swiftly on 21 February 1967. Nine thousand eligible males were called-up for NS on 28 March 1967 but only 838 enlisted for a two-year tour in the SAF on 17 August 1967 as NSFs.[43] The other 90% rendered part-time service in the People's Defence Force (PDF), the Special Constabulary, and the Vigilante Corps.[44] The CAS initiative was subsequently extended in 1968 to increase the SAF's full-time intake and targeted those with the greatest opportunity costs. This meant all civil servants (1967) followed by university graduates (1968) and subsequently by those with 12 (A-level) and ten (O-level) years of schooling.[45] The patchwork of initiatives designed to meet desperate

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[40] "Building an army from scratch," *The Straits Times*, 9 September 2000, p. 3.
[41] Lee, *From Third World to First*, p. 34.
[42] "First 'new look' civil servants on parade," *The Straits Times*, 18 June 1967, p. 7; and Lim Beng Tee, "Rewards for the 'military' civil servant," *The Straits Times,* 21 June 1967, p. 9.
[43] The 3rd and 4th battalions, Singapore Infantry Regiment (3 and 4 SIR) received 419 conscripts each. On 16 August 1969 they became the first operationally ready 'reservists'. Mickey Chiang, *Fighting Fit: The Singapore Armed Forces* (Singapore: TimesEditions, 1990), p. 40; and "Not Just In Reserve," *Army News*, Issue No. 113 (October-November 2004), p. 6.
[44] Ong Eng Chuan, "National Service in Singapore: Early Years," *InfopediaTalk* (National Library Board Singapore), 1 February 2005, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_692_2005-02-01.html (accessed 28 May 2014).
[45] Those enlisted under the CAS received their last drawn salary (if applicable) instead of the (lower) NS allowance. A-level and HSC students were enlisted almost year-round in January, April, and July of 1970 due to the basic infrastructure in place at the point in time. A cycle was soon established with A-level students enlisting in December and polytechnic graduates in June. All other education levels were dependent on their date of birth, or when they completed their studies. From 1981 onwards, A-level

manpower needs lasted until 21 May 1970 when the NS Enlistment Act (1970) covered all males in the 18 to 40 age-group. On 1 January 1971 the Enlistment (Amendment) Act (1970) rendered all male citizens and permanent residents (PRs) born on or after 1 January 1949 eligible for NS.[46] Service lengths varied from two and three years at different junctures and more than 900,000 have rendered NS in the years since.[47] Bean counters placed the present active strength of tri-service SAF at 50,000 to 60,000 with 15,000 to 20,000 regulars and 35,000 to 40,000 NSFs. The total estimated mobilized strength ranged between 300,000 and 385,000.[48] Another cited an 'active' figure of 82,000 with 10,000 career personnel, 40,000 conscripts, and reservists whose service equalled 32,000 full-time conscripts.[49] Such numbers would be impossible without conscription.

3.2.2 Soldiering: Not an honoured profession

Singaporeans slowly and reluctantly accepted NS as a disruptive necessity where men were placed in uniform and put through the paces of military training.[50] Yet, unsurprisingly, draft evasion manifested itself in various forms despite the initial fanfare and even job assurances.[51] The rich sent their sons overseas for studies while others tried drug consumption or exemptions on medical grounds. Stiff penalties were imposed but the SAF had its work cut out. Former CDF (1974-92) LG (RET) Winston Choo recalled: "We were so busy just trying to raise units, convincing parents that National Service was okay, taking in soldiers who were mostly ill-equipped, ill-motivated and ill-educated, to train them for the SAF."[52] It was little wonder that morale and motivation was low all-around the early SAF.[53] The unfortunate

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enlistments for took place in December and March; and from 1987 onwards, polytechnic intakes took place in June and September. See "Academic Training Scheme (Higher Learning Scheme) for NSF officers," *National Pioneer* (March 1971), p. 3; "New NS enlistment policy for 'A' level students," *Pioneer* (September 1981), p. 8; and "Two NS intakes for Poly grads," *Pioneer* (March 1987), p. 33.

[46] Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 282-5.

[47] The 900,000th enlistee completed BMT on 8 April 2012. See Bjorn Teo, "900,000 Enlistees in 45 Years," *Army News*, Issue No. 199 (April 2012), pp. 10-1.

[48] Current estimates placed 300,000 NSmen in the SAF, 21,000 in the Singapore Police Force (SPF), and 23,000 in the Singpore Civil Defence Force (SCDF). *Supporting Our NSMen*, pp. 3, 8, 10; Huxley, *Defending the Lion City*, p. 93; *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century*, p. 27; Ng et al., *Called to Lead*, p. 11; and Andrew T.H. Tan, "Punching Above Its Weight: Singapore's Armed Forces and Its Contribution to Foreign Policy," *Defence Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, (December 2011), p. 682.

[49] Ng, "'Why Not A Volunteer Army?'" pp. 48, 54.

[50] "Call-up: 'Elite' youths for a full-time Army," *The Straits Times*, 17 March 1967, p. 8.

[51] "First six charged with call-up dodging," *The Straits Times*, 5 May 1967, p. 18; and "Assurance of jobs for National Servicemen," *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1969, p. 6.

[52] Chew and Tan, *Creating the Technology Edge*, p. 26. Penalties in the early days included a $2,000 fine, six-month jail term, or both. See "A Roundup of Call-Up Dodgers," *The Straits Times*, 19 April 1967, p. 5.

[53] "The Typical Soldier — by Dr Goh," *The Straits Times*, 18 September 1975, p. 8; and Stu Glauberman, "10-year-late PR job for SAF," *The Straits Times*, 6 March 1985, p. 9.

circumstances were compounded by issues covering basics such as infrastructure and logistics. One general with first-hand experience lamented:

> "In those days some of the equipment items issued were inferior. The *chankol* (entrenching tool) broke easily so we had to use our steel helmets to dig. Logistics was not so good. Firelighters did not work in the wet. Quality Control [was] not that great. Inferior buys irritates people. Why should it be like that?"[54]

Methods of instruction ranged from "mediocre to appalling" worsened by no common medium of communication which resulted in the segregation of personnel into platoons based on mother-tongue.[55] It also proved difficult to mask the fact conscripts were forced into soldiering even though they tried. Dr Goh shared in May 1978 that:

> "In the course of my work, I often visit military camps. One of the lasting impressions I get on these occasions is the image of the National Serviceman on sentry duty – a bespectacled youth of slender proportions, ill at ease in an unaccustomed environment but trying to conceal it. An improbable soldier."[56]

While legislation kept men in uniform for a limited period they were never obligated to take up a military career. The stigma of military service was amplified by the negative experiences of British colonialism, Japanese occupation, and "the Chinese tradition that good sons do not become soldiers, plus the fact that most of the Singapore Indian community were from non-warrior castes."[57] The Malay community which displayed a greater predilection for military service were restricted in numbers for the SAF to be ethnically-balanced and from security concerns related to the racial and religious composition of Malaysia and Indonesia.[58] In 1972 Dr Goh saw that "a great deal remains to be done before the military profession can occupy the honoured position that it does in modern states" simply because "[a]s a community of traders with no military traditions there was little conception of the role of the military in Singapore."[59] He chided those who belittled servicemen and decried: "Some businessmen are apt to regard soldiers as little better than hired *jagas* (Malay for 'security guards'). They know little about the motivations of the military profession. The

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[54] Interview No. 24.
[55] "Whitlam praises S'pore defence build-up," *The Straits Times*, 31 January 1968, p. 16; R. Chandran, "Govt to improve army training," *The Straits Times*, 21 September 1973, p. 1; "Language Badge," *Pioneer* (May 1975), p. 10; and "Best taking root rapidly in the SAF," *The Straits Times*, 29 March 1983, p. 13. The lack of a common language of communication necessitated the introduction of a 'language badge' which had two parts: "[t]he background colour of the badge indicates the main language spoken while the strips or bars at the side identified additional languages spoken." The main colours covered the most widely spoken languages: English (green), Mandarin (orange), Malay (blue), Hokkien (red), and Tamil (yellow).
[56] Leong, *Youth in the Army*, p. iii.
[57] Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 219.
[58] See for example Stanley S. Bedlington, "Ethnicity and the Armed Forces in Singapore," in DeWitt C. Ellinwood and Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnicity and the Military in Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1981), p. 257; "This is a Singapore Problem. We will solve it ourselves ..." *The Straits Times*, 18 March 1987, p. 10; Gillian Koh and Ooi Giok Ling, "Singapore: A Home, A Nation?" *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2002), p. 260; Azmi Hassan, "Best personnel for defence, regardless of race," *The Straits Times*, Times, 25 September 2003, p. 20; and Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths*, pp. 221-2.
[59] "Raising status of armed forces – by Dr Goh," *The Straits Times*, 2 July 1971, p. 1.

know nothing about how a defence force operates."[60] IDF adviser Lieutenant-Colonel (LTC) Moshe Shefi's experiences also proved congruent with Goh's sentiment:

> "We discovered that there was psychological resistance to conscription in Singapore ... Of 10 professions, that of soldier was ranked last. In first place was the artist, followed by the philosopher, the teacher and the merchant, and the thief was in ninth place. Soldiering was considered a contemptible profession."[61]

It was then hardly surprising that the general tendency was for conscripts "to shy away from a military career because it was just not worth it unless you were desperate."[62]

The profile and prestige of the military career received Dr Goh's personal attention. An exclusive 'Luncheon Club' was initiated specially for civilian defence bureaucrats and senior officers in the rank of Major (MAJ) and above.[63] Mercedes Benz sedans – still a rarity in the 1970s – ferried brigade and division commanders on official duties as status symbols of officership. Cadence was introduced in the units to raise morale, the Music and Drama Company entertained soldiers, and the SAF Reservist Association (SAFRA) handled various initiatives to recognize the contributions of national servicemen.[64] The SAF's official magazine *Pioneer* – initially launched as *National Pioneer* in 1969 – contained numerous photographs and underlined the serious business of defence.[65] Government statutory boards were roped-in to forge relationships between the military and non-security sectors and inculcate a sense of community belonging among service personnel.[66] The now-defunct MINDEF Book Club was established in 1976 and proved vastly popular with officers.[67] Salary was comparably attractive in the early 1970s where:

> "The personnel of the SAF itself enjoy excellent conditions of service rivalled in the region only by those in nearby Malaysia or rich little Brunei. Quarters, rations, uniforms, and equipment are absolutely first class, as are medical services and sports, entertainment, and educational facilities ... The Army Captain, drawing S$720-995, ranks with the junior executive; he is much, much

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Barzilai, "A deep dark, secret love affair," *Haaretz*, 16 July 2004.
[62] "Great little army," *The Straits Times*, 3 July 1987, p. 22.
[63] Samuel, *Working for Dr Goh Keng Swee*, p. 36.
[64] Dr Goh Keng Swee inaugurated the SAF Reservist Association (SAFRA) on 2 July 1972. In 1994 SAFRA was renamed SAFRA National Service Association. See "One roof for reservists," *The Straits Times*, 3 July 1972, p. 9; Samuel, *Working for Dr Goh Keng Swee*, pp. 49-52; and Hoong Bee Lok (ed. Chairman), *Without Reserve: Commemorating 30 years of SAFRA* (Singapore: SAFRA National Service Association, 2002), pp. 278, 283.
[65] Samuel, *Working for Dr Goh Keng Swee*, pp. 42-6.
[66] The six statutory boards were the Housing and Development Board (HDB), the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), Public Utilities Board (PUB), Jurong Town Corporation (JTC), Tourist Promotion Board, and the Singapore Telephone Board. See "Statutory bodies adopt SAF units under Mindef scheme," *The Straits Times*, 4 May 1971, p. 5.
[67] "Where history isn't bunk," *Pioneer* (February 1977), pp. 8-9; and "MINDEF Book Club sales take off," *Pioneer* (August 1977), p. 23.

> better compensated than are his counterparts in Indonesia, Thailand, or the Philippines."[68]

While Dr Goh improved the attractiveness of the SAF career he never compromised on standards of military professionalism and character. Officers deemed incompetent and detrimental to the SAF were swiftly demoted or replaced. [69]

Despite such initiatives it was apparent that the military still suffered from an image crisis in the early 1980s. Defence Minister (1982-91) Goh Chok Tong reiterated that "the preference values of society at present do not put soldiering high on the priority of professions."[70] It reached a point where active personnel seemed ashamed of the uniform. A 1979 article in *Pioneer* questioned:

> "Are you the kind of soldier who hates to be seen in uniform once he leaves camp? Do you jump into civilian clothes the first chance you get? Would you be caught dead walking with your girlfriend or boyfriend if you were in uniform?"[71]

Another defence minister (1991-4) Yeo Ning Hong recalled that "many service personnel changed to *civvies* (civilian clothing) before they left [MINDEF] because of the public's negative attitude of those in uniform."[72] Despite 15-plus years of NS with personnel drawn from different societal strata it proved evident "that we have not yet built up a close and natural relationship between the SAF and the people. There is still inadequate appreciation of the importance of SAF officers. Our society as a whole does not accord SAF officers the esteem they deserve."[73] Lee Hsien Loong also cited the lack of respect for the profession-of-arms in addition to the SAF's inexperience (non-battle tested) as distinct disadvantages of Singapore's military establishment.[74]

3.2.3 Commitment to Defence: A Perennial Challenge

Certain challenges have persisted even though the SAF is now an established institution of almost fifty years. Conscription provided the critical mass and created an impressive entry in the International Institute for Strategic Studies' annual defence almanac *The Military Balance*. What mattered most, however, is the pulse of the SAF and the support expected from the society it pledges to defend. In 1968 Lim Kim San reminded the SAF that:

> "Our military leaders should never be aloof or isolated from the people of Singapore. There must always be an interaction between them, an interaction

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[68] Willard A. Hanna, "The New Singapore Armed Forces," *Fieldstaff Reports*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (1973), p. 7.
[69] Samuel, *Working for Dr Goh Keng Swee*, p. 45.
[70] "Let us find hearts and minds of SAF: Chok Tong," *The Straits Times*, 4 July 1982, p. 10.
[71] "Uniform Pride: Taking it beyond the camp gates," *Pioneer* (May 1979), p. 7
[72] Speech by Minister of Defence, Dr Yeo Ning Hong, at the 1994 MINDEF Workplan Seminar.
[73] "'Use your rank in civilian life'," *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1982, p. 8.
[74] "The Straits Times says More than a fighting chance," *The Straits Times*, 3 May 1984, p. 16.

> that is necessary to maintain the vitality of the armed forces and their combat strength. The days of arrogant commanders are over."[75]

More recently MG (NS) Chan Chun Sing, then speaking as the outgoing COA in 2011, emphasized that:

> "The strength of our Army lies not just in the people that are currently serving. It also lies in the strength of the support from all walks of society – those that have come before us and those that will come after us. We must never forget that we are part of society. We must continue to connect with society to uphold the belief in the importance of our defence, the ethos to serve and spirit to defend what we have."[76]

In an ideal scenario society is whole-heartedly committed to defence. Realities indicated otherwise and a myriad of challenges have eroded the commitment to defence (C2D). Positive and optimistic pictures have been painted of C2D. MINDEF surveys frequently reported 'favourable' public opinions of the SAF and support for NS.[77] In his 2000 memoirs, Lee Kuan Yew declared: "Annual in-camp training is taken seriously by everyone, including employers."[78] An *Army News* reporter proudly proclaimed in 2009: "Even though we are predominantly a conscript force, our National Servicemen are well-trained and possess the will to fight."[79] In 2013 incumbent defence minister Dr Ng Eng Hen mentioned: "Commitment is high but we want to continue to talk to different groups – employers, parents and NSmen themselves – to see how we can increase this commitment."[80] Another politician conveyed similar sentiments after a dialogue session which supposedly confirmed "that commitment to NS is strong. All stakeholders acknowledge the importance of NS."[81] The great unknown is whether this 'support' is grounded in genuine personal ownership or a mere reflection of political correctness. Furthermore, could they and would they say otherwise?

Despite officialdom's positive portrayal of C2D a different picture has consistently surfaced. The SAF has become recognized as a technologically-advanced outfit by 1983 but it was also highlighted that:

> "Mobilising the population for participation in national defence – never an easy task in a society which has traditionally accorded a low priority to a military

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[75] "The Army chiefs we need – by Kim San," *The Straits Times*, 2 October 1968, p. 9.
[76] Jonathan Chan, "MG Chan Hands Over Command of Our Army to BG Ravinder," *Army News*, Issue No. 186 (March 2011), p. 2.
[77] Owyong Eu Gene, "What do Singaporeans thing about National Service?" *Pioneer* (July 1977), pp. 16-7; "It's worth the time and money," *The Straits Times*, 24 August 1982, p. 1; and "People think well of SAF prowess, survey shows," *The Straits Times*, 6 March 1985, p. 40.
[78] Lee, *From Third World to First*, p. 44.
[79] Tan Wee Meng, "A World Class Army: Building Capacity, Creating Value," *Army News*, Issue No. 163 (February-March 2009), p. 7.
[80] Ong Hong Tat, "Committee to strengthen NS hold first meeting," *Cyberpioneer*, 8 May 2013.
[81] Rachael Lim, "Views on strengthening NS sought from community groups," *Cyberpioneer*, 20 May 2013.

> career – has become more difficult. Morale in the services, at least among conscripts, is not what the senior leadership would like it to be."[82]

In 1986 Elizabeth Nair, then Head of MINDEF's Personnel Research Department, wrote in *Pointer* that:

> "War seems to be far from the minds of the public in Singapore … Surveys carried out in Singapore, with various sectors of the general public, has reflected a general lack of appreciation of the primary objectives of national service and reserve service. Lip-service is paid to the necessity for national service in Singapore. However, mothers still hope that their sons will be clerks rather than riflemen so that they can return home every night rather than stay in camp."[83]

In 1994, then-COA BG Lim Neo Chian frankly explained: "If we can get our NSMen to be better motivated and to better understand their roles in national defence, then there is no doubt that this will lead to a more capable SAF."[84] A decade later, Star Soh, then a military psychologist with MINDEF's ABSD, noted that:

> "With a trend towards smaller families and western pop culture, more youths today do not have a sibling, are doted on by their parents (who can provide because of fewer children and strong economic growth of Singapore) and are brought up with western child-rearing styles. As a result, more youths conscripted today are self-focus and questioning, have enjoyed good life and lots of freedom at home, and are obese. Their values, habits and fitness are generally in contrast to the culture and expectations of the military. Youths are aware of the contrast and this in turn affects their commitment to national service."[85]

Even foreigners weighed-in on the issue of NS. One visiting physician decried: "The health-seeking behaviour and conduct of the NS men were sometimes interesting or disappointing."[86] Malaysian academics writing on the outcome of armed conflict between the neighbours argued: "Malaysia is deemed to survive when a war breaks compare (sic) to Singapore for the spirits of Singapore citizen patriotism is weak … it is still lacking in terms of nationalism or patriotic spirit."[87] Even American's Cable News Network (CNN) chimed in recently and reported that "[t]he Singapore government has been criticized for responding to worried parents by making military service safer and softer for recruits – in one case a conscript was famously snapped making his maid carry his military pack."[88]

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[82] Patrick Smith and Philip Bowring, "The Citizen Soldier: Singapore stresses security as an arm of nation-building," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 119, No. 2 (13 January 1983), p. 26.
[83] Elizabeth Nair, "The Singapore Soldier," *Pointer*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (January-March 1986), pp. 85-6.
[84] Mathew Pereira, "SAF units pitted against each other in realistic battle games," *The Straits Times*, 5 June 1994.
[85] Star Soh, "Applications of Psychology in HR and training in a conscript Army," presentation at the *46th International Military Testing Association Conference* (Brussels, Belgium: 26-28 October 2004).
[86] Khalilah Bullock, "Reflection on Tan Tock Seng Hospital Clinical Fellowship Experience," *Singapore Medical Association News* (March 2010), p. 16.
[87] Mohamad Faisol Keling, Md. Shukri Shuib, and Mohd Na'eim Ajis, "The Impact of Singapore's Military Development on Malaysia's Security," *Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 2009), pp. 71-2.
[88] Peter Shadbolt, "Taiwan protests throw spotlight on Asia's military service," *CNN*, 13 August 2013.

What is one to make of the commitment to NS? The reality is most likely found somewhere between both ends of the spectrum. NS is an essential insurance policy but the premiums paid in terms of time, effort, risks, and opportunity costs in a globalised world are increasingly seen as too costly.[89] The efforts of national servicemen are recognized with a growing plethora of rewards and benefits. While these measures are designed to recognize and maintain service commitment, others have invariably viewed them as signs of a conscription system on life support.[90] Singapore's socio-economic advancement does not help the NS cause as Christopher Dandeker observed:

> "It is a well-established finding in military sociology that the long-term shift away from conscription and mass armed force model dating from the 1789-1945 era is caused by a combination of societal and international factors. From a societal point of view, the growth of affluence, individualism, and differing conceptions of citizenship have all undermined the idea that the primary basis of citizenship is military service."[91]

The 'good' news is that Dandeker also attributed membership of an alliance, distance from threat to national sovereignty, frequent participation in peacekeeping operations as external factors of this shift.[92] Those factors have remained opaque in Singapore's context. Even so, the government has continually sought to pre-empt and arrest difficulties in maintaining a conscript-based defence force and society's C2D.

The most effective and appropriate channel has been to educate the nation – literally termed 'National Education' – by shaping "the attitudes and values towards a loyal and committed citizenry" with the message that Singapore can be defended and to instil a "sense of affiliation and belonging to the country."[93] It is no surprise "[t]he Singapore government has not faltered in its conscious and consistent program of political socialization, beginning particularly with the schools."[94] Schools were approached to mentally prepare students for NS and since 1979 familiarization visits to

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[89] Seah Chee Meow, "National Security," in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds.), *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Affairs, 1990), pp. 959-60.
[90] These include the establishment of the Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence (ACCORD) in January 1984; Committee to Recognise the Contribution of Operationally Ready National Servicemen to Total Defence (RECORD) in 1990; National Service Affairs Department (NSAD) in; Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS) in March 2013.
[91] Christopher Dandeker, "Building Flexible Forces for the 21st Century: Key Challenges for the Contemporary Armed Services," in Giuseppe Caforio (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military* (New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003), p. 410.
[92] Ibid., p. 411.
[93] Quah, "Singapore: Towards a National Identity," p. 212; Lee, "Leadership and Security in Singapore," pp. 170-1; Terence Lee, "The politics of civil society in Singapore," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (March 2002), p. 100; Charissa Tan, Beng Chong Lim, and Star Soh, "Understanding attitudes towards national defence and military service in Singapore," presentation at the *45th International Military Testing Association Conference* (Pensacola, Florida: 3-6 November 2003); and Jasmine B-Y. Sim and Murray Print, "Citizenship education in Singapore: Controlling or empowering teacher understanding and practice?" *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 35, No. 6 (December 2009), pp. 705-23.
[94] Chan, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival*, p. 57; H. E. Wilson, "Education as an Instrument of Policy in Southeast Asia: The Singapore Example," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 1977), pp. 75-84.

military installations have formed part of the school curriculum.[95] In 1981, parents first visited their sons during BMT which served to ameliorate concerns and reiterate the important of NS. That same year MINDEF reached out to employers and stressed their important role within the defence ecosystem.[96] The message would be more easily emphasized if Singapore had an identifiable enemy like other states with conscript-based militaries since the conclusion of WWII.[97] The price of peace, however, afforded no such concession and for Singapore to name potential enemies is to make actual enemies.[98] On the flipside, "train[ing] hard and seriously was difficult in peacetime especially when there is no immediate threat to your security."[99]

Two other key avenues have helped in the fight to strengthen C2D. The annual NDP "with its emphasis on spectacle and discipline has been institutionalized as a national symbol" which has carried greater fanfare with each passing year.[100] The show of military strength and organizational efficiency is a subtle hint to foreign dignitaries that Singapore is prepared to defend itself. A message of solidarity and the 'can-do' spirit which enabled Singapore to defy the odds of success is also woven into the accompanying mass performances. Then there is the National Cadet Corps (NCC) which has offered pre-university students the experience of military regimentation, outdoor activities, and at times proffered wider opportunities than those opened to national servicemen.[101] Participation in NCC does not necessarily lead to a military career but it has certainly provided a solid introduction to the military as various flag-officers attested. A medical officer (MO) recalled:

> "I was in NCC land for six years including being the cadet lieutenant in JC (Junior College) one and two (the penultimate and final years of secondary school). This was a shaping experience in terms of familiarity with the SAF and an appreciation for both discipline and regimentation."[102]

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[95] Edmund Teo, "Military Training Plan for schools," *The Straits Times*, 18 October 1980, p. 1.
[96] Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, pp. 289-90.
[97] For example, the Israelis since independence in 1947 had neighbouring aggressor states and subsequently non-state 'terrorist' groups; members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had the Warsaw Pact (and vice-versa) during the Cold War; the Republic of Korea (South Korean) fought a war (1950-3) and still endures uneasy relations with unfriendly brethren up north, and; Formosa (Republic of China/Taiwan) with the People's Republic of China.
[98] Thomson, "Britain's plan to leave Asia," p. 123; and Paul Jacob, "'Educate the public on role of armed forces'," *The Straits Times*, 28 April 1986, p. 14.
[99] Ronnie Wai, "More stress on personnel development," *The Straits Times*, 27 May 1982, p. 1.
[100] Chan, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival*, p. 57.
[101] The NCC has roots in the army cadet corps formed in 1902 which was subsequently formed into land, sea, air, girls, and police units in 1969. With the bifurcation of the MID in 1970, the NCC and its constituent land, sea, and air components continued affiliation with MINDEF while the National Police Cadet Corps with associated with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The NCC Council formed in 1973 provides governance and oversight to NCC activities. See Tan Wang Joo, "Developing leaders from cadets," *The Straits Times*, 7 July 1974, p. 12. The SAF allocates more billets on the Basic Airborne Course at HQ Commando's Parachute Training Wing and Basic Diver Course at the Naval Diving Unit's Dive School for NCC cadets than NSFs not in 'commando' or 'diver' vocations. NSMen are no longer eligible for airborne training.
[102] Interview No. 18.

MG (RET) then-BG Ravinder Singh reasoned:

> "I joined the SAF because I wanted to be a soldier and a leader. I guess in some ways it's related to what I did when I was in school. I was in NCC (Sea) when I was in secondary school and I knew from that experience that I enjoyed leading and getting things done. When I was offered the SAF scholarship, it was very much in line with what I wanted to do … So for me it was a natural choice."[103]

BG (RET) Lim Yeow Beng similarly recalled:

> "I realized that my NCC days have influenced the later chapters of my life in more than one way. Firstly, it inculcated in me a set of values and traits that have helped me throughout my life, even till to-date. Secondly, it provided me with opportunities to greater leadership roles. Thirdly, it influenced my decision of a career choice."[104]

A fourth officer who joined the air force highlighted how NCC catered to his interests and prepared him for enlistment:

> "Prior to NS I was looking to be a pilot or something in the air force like engineer or controller, something that deals with the air in some way. NCC and outdoor activities prepared me for NS and mentally knowing it was part of the process to defend Singapore."[105]

Over the years the NE message has expanded and is now transmitted through various programs. The Temasek Seminar (renamed Temasek Dialogue in 2010) was initiated in 1991 "to increase awareness and appreciation of security-related issues" among student leaders of both genders in the pre-NS age group from junior colleges and polytechnics.[106] The focus on the responsibilities of being a citizen began in 1996. Since February 1999, a uniformed officer has headed NEXUS – formerly called the Central National Education Office – with the responsibility for synergizing NE initiatives across various government ministries and agencies. In 2007, the MINDEF Scholarship Centre and respective service recruitment centres established the MINDEF Internship which offered pre-NS students insights into military life and a thinly-veiled attempt to recruit. Finally, the SAF-School Partnership Programme paired active army and schools which "not only helped the students and teachers to better understand the Army's role in defending Singapore, it also allowed the servicemen involved to appreciate their contribution in national defence."[107]

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[103] Ng et al., *Called to Lead*, p. 22.
[104] "National Cadet Corps (NCC) Affirmation Ceremony," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 82 (July 2002), p. 20.
[105] Interview No. 14.
[106] "Engaging Students and Their Teachers on the Importance of Defence," *MINDEF News Releases*, 25 May 2012, www.mindef.gov.sg:80/content/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2012/may/25may12_nr.html (accessed 28 May 2014).
[107] Tan Wee Meng, "Ready, Relevant and Decisive," *Army News*, Issue No. 187 (April 2011), p. 7; Ling Wei Chao, "Many Faces One Identity," *Army News*, Issue No. 197 (February 2012), pp. 5-8.

Much remains to be done despite the devotion of effort and resources to NE activities with challenges manifested in various forms. Some warned that complacency was the greatest threat to Singapore.[108] Others lamented that Singaporeans do not know their history.[109] Most recently, Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged the need to "… help younger generations of Singaporeans who have grown up in a more stable and affluent environment to understand … strategic realities, and prepare them for their part in defending Singapore, our home."[110] The importance of C2D has taken on greater significance with the unprecedented surge of immigrants in recent years. This is especially so for naturalized citizens and PRs with no effort spared in emphasizing the rationale and importance of NS to them. Visits to military units are arranged for parents and potential enlistees to assuage concerns.[111] While some would question the wisdom of conscripting non-citizens, NS has served to test their commitment to Singapore and partially satisfied the criteria for citizenship. The enlistment of naturalized citizens and PRs has blunted but not silenced the critics of liberal migration policies and their claims of 'NS for locals and jobs for foreigners'.[112] MINDEF publications frequently featured dual-citizens and foreign nationals with PR status who have enlisted for service in the SAF.[113]

The SAF has on the whole conscientiously sought to provide all service personnel with 'meaningful and positive experiences' to sustain their motivation and commitment to defence.[114] Former CDF (2007-10) LG (RET) Desmond Kuek stressed this necessity:

> "The Positive Army Experience is part of our mission. We need the commitment of our people to take our defence seriously … Without commitment we will not have mission effectiveness, competency or readiness … [soldiers must] feel good, proud, passionate and committed. This comes about when our soldiers

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[108] "Complacency greatest threat to S'pore's defence: Dr Yeo," *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1994, p. 30.
[109] Chua Lee Hoong, "Never too late for S'poreans to learn about country's past," *The Straits Times*, 10 August 1996, p. 26.
[110] Goh Chin Lian and Jermyn Chow, "National service a part of Singapore identity: PM Lee," *The Straits Times*, 23 October 2012.
[111] Terence Lim, "First-generation PRs assured after BMTC visit," *Pioneer* (August 2006), p. 14; and "PRs Get National Service Insights at BMTC," *Army News*, Issue No. 138 (January-February 2007), p. 3.
[112] Official figures showed that there were 13,000 NS-eligible male PRs between 2006 and 2011. 8,800 (67.7%) enlisted for NS while the other 4,200 (32.2%) renounced their PR status. Of those who enlisted, 6,100 (69.3% who enlisted for NS or 46.9% of all NS-eligible PRs) became Singaporean citizens while the remaining 2,700 held on to a foreign passport. See "Written Reply by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen to Parliamentary Question on Permanent Residents in National Service," *MINDEF Website*, 22 November 2011, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/ps/2012/15oct12_ps.html (accessed 28 May 2014).
[113] See for example Kelvin Kow, Chia Han Sheng, Samuel Cheam and Marcus Ho, "Our Army, Our People, Our Edge," *Army News*, Issue No. 172 (January 2010), p. 6; "Our People, Our Edge," *Army News*, Special Supplement #2 (October 2010), p. 4; "The Tiger Family," *Army News*, Special Supplement #11 (September 2011), p. 4; Saifulbahri Ismail, "NS enlistment expected to dip to 19,500 in 2025," *Channel News Asia*, 30 June 2012; and Edmund Heng, "Graduating from BMT!" *MINDEF Website*, 13 April 2013.
[114] Soh, "Applications of Psychology in HR and training in a conscript Army".

> perform roles that are personally rewarding, and when they feel satisfied and appreciated for their contributions."[115]

It was recognized as far back as 1985 that "[a]n enlightened reservist or national serviceman who speaks well of his experience was the SAF's best ambassador."[116] Such experiences are presently encapsulated in routing BMT graduation marches past famous landmarks and holding parades within view of Singapore's central business district.[117] It also served to remind society-at-large that the SAF is ready to defend Singapore. Another initiative is the proliferation of uniform insignia which the SAF of yesteryear minimized to reflect a 'citizen's army'.[118] Today this is obviously no longer a consideration and even a hindrance in the quest to foster 'positive experiences' to strengthen C2D.

3.3 Early Leaders

The previous section detailed reasons and problems of defence within Singapore's historical context but three pertinent points must be repeated. First, Singapore did not have an established military tradition or martial spirit even though it was a British colony. Second, Singapore benefitted from the presence of foreign military forces – British and later 'Commonwealth', namely Australian and New Zealand – for defence and deterrence until the mid-1970s even though self-governance (1959) and independence (1965) were achieved earlier.[119] Third, circumstances dictated the political decision and will to implement NS with the primary reason to overcome manpower and treasury constraints in building a credible defence capability. While it could purchase equipment and enlist soldiers to fill the rank and file, the issue of finding officers proved challenging. The question of staffing senior leadership positions in the first two decades (1965-84) before the maturation of the officer corps proved even more so.

The establishment of the MID from 1965 to 1970 proved optimal. The ministry addressed manpower and budgetary constraints while field units focused on the pressing internal security concerns manifested in racial tensions and communist

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[115] Poon Shou Yi, "Our Army Experience," *Army News*, Issue No. 113 (October-November 2004), pp. 4-5.
[116] Stu Glauberman, "10-year-late PR job for SAF," *The Straits Times*, 6 March 1985, p. 9.
[117] Samuel Cheam, "Recruits Graduate at Floating Platform," *Army News*, Issue No. 181 (October 2010), p. 4.
[118] Military regalia such as lanyards, ceremonial belts, brass insignias, and oversized epaulettes were removed. Today a different aspect has been revived with formation sleeve patches, vocation collar insignia, multiple confidence badges, and even a new coloured beret for infantrymen.
[119] The port city could rely on British – and later 'Commonwealth', namely Australian and New Zealand – forces for external defence until the mid-1970s even though self-governance (1959) and independence (1965) were achieved earlier. A New Zealand infantry battalion was stationed in Singapore until 1989. From the early 1990s onward the shift was towards hosting American naval and air assets at Sembawang and Paya Lebar respectively.

subversion. Civilian bureaucrats held the most senior MID positions by constraint and design "to ensure that the SAF remained subordinate to the political leadership by keeping important functions such as manpower and finance under civilian officers in the defence ministry."[120] Officers from foreign militaries on secondment to the SAF also held billets until Singaporeans could assume responsibilities.[121] Changes took place as the MID tapped officers from three areas: the large pool of part-time volunteers, the smaller pool of professional infantry officers who formed the 'old-guard' of the Singapore Infantry Regiment (SIR), and bureaucrats from the Administrative Service who were temporarily seconded to the SAF.

3.3.1 A Volunteer and WWII Veteran

The first DGS from the military was the late Brigadier (commonly referred as BG) Thomas James Duncan Campbell. The former literature teacher was born in Singapore in 1922 and later served as the principal (1961-6, 1971-3) of St Stephen's School.[122] Information is rather scant on this pioneering general of the SAF but there is adequate evidence of his physical fitness, penchant for the outdoors, and the motivation to serve in uniform albeit on a part-time basis. Campbell joined the 1st Battalion, Straits Settlement Volunteer Force, as a private (Service No. 20274) in 1940 after graduating from St. Joseph's School. The infantryman was taken prisoner during WWII, sent to Thailand on 28 April 1943 where he survived forced labour on the infamous 'Death Railway', and was subsequently interned in Singapore's infamous Changi Prison on 21 December 1943.[123]

Campbell's post-war actions and decisions spoke volumes of his commitment to military service. Soldiering was not his profession and his health suffered as a prisoner in both Thailand and Changi.[124] Yet he did not hang up the uniform and instead earned an officer's commission in 1950 and made LTC in January 1962 as Commanding Officer (CO) of the 1st Battalion, Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC).[125] In 1965, he was promoted to Brigadier and given command of the Singapore Infantry Brigade (SIB). Campbell

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[120] Lee, *From Third World to First*, p. 36.
[121] For example LTC David Yakoni, an Israeli adviser, served as Chief Instructor at the Singapore Command and Staff College. See "Eight here to study SAF College set-up," *The Straits Times*, 5 May 1971, p. 7.
[122] St. Stephen's School opened 1957 and is one of the six Christian Brothers' School of the De La Salle Order in Singapore. "Brief History of St. Stephen's School," www.ststephens.moe.edu.sg (accessed 28 May 2014).
[123] Jonathan Moffatt and Paul Riches, *In Orient Primus: A History of the Volunteer Forces in Malaya and Singapore* (Trowbridge, UK: Cromwell Press Group, 2010), p. 74.
[124] "Ex-army chief, BG Campbell, dies in Australia," *The Straits Times*, 22 October 1989, p. 17.
[125] "Col Vij is new General Staff Director," *The Straits Times*, 10 September 1970, p. 2; and "Former SAF Director of General Staff passes away," *Pioneer* (November 1989), p. 43. For more on the SVC see Gabriel Chan Eng Han, *The Volunteer Corps: Contributions to Singapore's Internal Security and Defence (1854-84)*, Supplement, *Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces* (November 1990).

could have taken his leave for the West when Singapore became independent but he remained and faithfully served as Commander 1 SIB (1968-9), DGS (1969-70), and Commandant (COMDT) of the Singapore Command and Staff College (SCSC) – which has since been renamed the Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College (GKSCSC) – until March 1971 when he hung up the olive greens for good. Campbell returned to St Stephen's School and in 1973 immigrated to Perth, Australia, where he remained until his death in 1989.[126]

3.3.2 The 'Old-Guard' of the Singapore Infantry Regiment

The SIR occupies a special place in the annals of SAF history. The first two SIR battalions formed Singapore's corps of professional infantrymen and were raised before the city state's independence in 1965.[127] The first recruitment drive for the 1st Battalion, SIR (1 SIR) on 4 March 1957 witnessed long queues of eager young men at the recruitment centre. Like the rest of the then-Singapore Military Forces (SMF) – the predecessor of the SAF – the SIR's officer billets required time to be filled by locals. The first Singaporean officer in 1 SIR was COL (RET) then-Lieutenant (LTA) Ronald Wee who joined the Australian Imperial Forces in 1942 and subsequently the battalion on 6 November 1957.[128] The other officers were recruited locally and received pre-commissioning training at either Officer Cadet School (OCS) Portsea in Australia or the FMC at Port Dickson, Malaysia.[129]

The career officers who filled billets in the professionally-manned SIR were known in due time as the 'old guard'.[130] BG (RET) Patrick Sim and LG (RET) Winston Choo emerged from their ranks and made general in the 1970s. Sim was a trainee at the Teachers' Training College when by "co-incidence" he came across the recruitment advertisement in the local papers seeking candidates for OCS Portsea.[131] The

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[126] "Ex-army chief, BG Campbell, dies in Australia," *The Straits Times*, 22 October 1989, p. 17.
[127] These include the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps (1854-87), Singapore Volunteer Artillery (1888), Singapore Volunteer Corps (1901-22, 1949-), Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (1922), Straits Settlements Volunteer Air Force (1926), and Straits Settlement Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (1934).
[128] R. Chandran, "Valiant Wees," *The Straits Times*, 17 October 1971, p. 3; and "Perm-sec told me to take on extra work," *The Straits Times*, 16 April 1981, p. 10.
[129] 40 Singaporeans completed pre-commissioning training at OCS Portsea between 1957 and 1985. 35 attended the FMC (29 for the full-course and 16 on the short-service commissioning course) between 1957 and 1965. See Neville Lindsay, *Loyalty and Service: The Officer Cadet School Portsea* (Kenmore, QLD, Australia: Historia Productions, 1995); and Terh, *Sons and Officers*.
[130] 1 and 2 SIR were raised as all-regular battalions on 12 March 1957 and 16 July 1962 respectively and became conscript battalions in 1968. The other infantry battalions raised for NS intakes were: 3 SIR (1 April 1967); 4 SIR (1 April 1967); 5 SIR (1 November 1968); 6 SIR (2 April 1969); 7 SIR (1 August 1970); and 8 SIR (1 April 1974). On 1 December 1969, the SAF Regular Battalion was established and became the SAF Commando Unit a year later on 1 December 1970. On 16 July 1971, the unit was renamed the 1st Commando Battalion and due to a recruitment shortfall of regulars received its first NS company on 15 January 1973.
[131] See "Public Appointments – Singapore Infantry Regiment," *The Straits Times*, 30 March 1957 and 1 April 1957, p. 10.

opportunity for pre-commissioning training overseas instantly motivated the all-rounder who excelled in sports and was an active member of the Boy Scouts. The excitement was amplified by an earlier visit Down Under for the international Scouts Jamboree in 1952. Ninety-eight responded to the advertisement, 20 were shortlisted, 13 interviewed, and three including a 'reserve' candidate were selected. Sim and COL (RET) Lim Poh Weng, Peter, eventually made the trip. In July 1958 the inaugural Singaporeans at Portsea completed their training.[132]

For LG (RET) Winston Choo – arguably Singapore's most decorated and well-known officer – a career in uniform with either the police or military was always on the cards. The avid sportsman's childhood was grounded in many outdoor-oriented activities and he also benefitted from the long association with the Boys' Brigade. Choo's inclination and affinity for the military led him to sign-up with the SVC as a rifleman during his final year of high school. He later chanced upon and responded to an advertisement for the FMC prior to his A-level examinations in 1959. Choo and three other successful applicants formed the fourth batch of Singaporeans at FMC and completed their training in 1961.[133] The lure of a military career and his (misplaced) proclivity towards the outdoors over academic pursuits was evident as he later admitted:

> "My first thought on becoming a soldier was that I did not have to study anymore. As it turned out, while in military service, I never stopped studying. I received my training in Malaysia, England and in various parts of the United States."[134]

Choo went on to serve as Singapore's longest serving CDF (1974-92) which bore testament of his abilities, trustworthiness to the political echelon, and the dearth of possible successors.

3.3.3 Secondment from the Administrative Service

The third talent pool was the Administrative Service (AS) and its complement of Administrative Officers (AOs). These bureaucratic elites are recruited based on stringent Public Service Commission (PSC) criteria and their careers closely managed by the Public Service Division (PSD). AOs are tried and tested through a crucible of challenging postings in government with only the 'best' appointed Permanent Secretary

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[132] "Australia will help train new army," *The Straits Times*, 28 June 1956, p. 7; "Public Appointments – Singapore Infantry Regiment," *The Straits Times*, 30 March 1957, p. 10; "13 interviewed for two awards," *The Straits Times*, 16 May 1957, p. 7; and "3 cadets to train 'Down Under'," *The Singapore Free Press*, 24 May 1957, p. 5.
[133] The inaugural batch of three candidates – Tang Hong Whye, Peter; George Mitchell; and Ahmad Hassan – left for FMC on 31 December 1957 and completed their training in 1958.
[134] Winston Choo, "A Soldier in Diplomacy," in Tommy Koh and Chang Li Lin (eds.), *The Little Red D.T: Reflections by Singapore's Diplomats* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008), p. 171.

(PS) of a ministry. A handful of AOs were personally tapped by Dr Goh for secondment to the SAF with Kirpa Ram Vij and Tan Chin Tiong both making general.

The story of BG (RET) Kirpa Ram Vij is one of an immigrant who seized the most of opportunities and sunk roots in his newfound homeland. A barely teenage Vij and his family fled from an area in modern-day Pakistan during the tumultuous 1947 partition of India and arrived in Singapore later that year.[135] He was educated at Rangoon Road Primary School, Victoria Afternoon School, and the premier Raffles Institution (RI). Vij proved an avid sportsman in hockey and rugby and also held leadership roles including prefect and quartermaster in the uniformed Cadet Corps. Despite such abilities, he was preoccupied with how the family could make ends meet and explained the situation during Singapore's 'era of poverty':

> "My father was a petty trader. I was the eldest of eight children and had no great ambition. It was merely a question of survival. I intended to be a teacher to support the family. It was Mr Philip Liau who advised me to enrol in the university that changed the course of my life."[136]

Vij took the advice and earned an honours degree in geography at the former University of Singapore in 1959. In 1960 he made the grade as an AO and was appointed collector of land revenue at the Land Office before another promotion in 1963 to assistant secretary for methods and organization at the finance ministry.[137]

Vij continued his interest and participation in the uniformed services as a part-time volunteer despite his hectic schedule as an AO and President of the University of Malaya Geographical Society.[138] He was commissioned an officer in the Singapore Volunteer Artillery Regiment in 1960 and earned the Sword of Honour (SOH) as the top graduate in the process.[139] Singapore's independence and the embryonic SAF presented a unique opportunity for fulltime service but Vij recognized the uncertainties:

> "They were actively looking for [individuals] who knew something about military affairs to take up positions in the Defence Ministry. After three years in the Finance Ministry, I was happy to make the change but was unsure whether I should be going there in uniform. I have only a few years of uniform experience

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[135] Patrick Jonas, "In command of his life," *AsiaOne*, 7 January 2011.
[136] Tan, *100 Inspiring Rafflesians*, p. 87.
[137] Arthur Richards, "Seven civil servants take 'Induction course' at Political Study Centre," *The Singapore Free Press*, 30 June 1960, p. 4; "No. 1 soldier Col. Vij promoted to Brigadier," *The Straits Times*, 3 May 1972, p. 1; and "Kirpa Ram appointed envoy to Egypt," *The Straits Times*, 16 May 1975, p. 1.
[138] "Study group to visit Christmas Island," *The Singapore Free Press*, 13 January 1960, p. 7.
[139] "Seven civil servants take Induction course' at Political Study Centre," *The Singapore Free Press*, 30 June 1960, p. 4; and *SAFTI Silver Jubilee 1966-1991* (Singapore: Ministry of Defence, 1991), p. 42. Vij's young brother Sita Ram Vij, then an assistant lecturer in dentistry at the University of Singapore, emulated the feat and received the Sword of Honour in 1967. See Cheong Yip Seng, "VITAL role of Republic's new citizen soldiers," *The Straits Times*, 6 September 1967, p. 8.

> and was a captain in the volunteers. So I did not think I was senior enough for any high-level position in the ministry."[140]

Dr Goh had other ideas and directed Vij with a clear albeit difficult task: "We are starting a new training school for soldiers, officers, and we want you to head the project."[141] Vij was seconded to the MID in 1965 with the rank of LTC and commenced a two-month mission in Israel with DGS ACP Tan Teck Khim to study the IDF systems and associated training institutions.[142] Upon their return, Vij became the inaugural Director of the SAF Training Institute (SAFTI) with help from IDF advisers.[143] Serving in this capacity was senior enough for him to sit on the Army Board chaired by the defence minister.[144] His reward, however, was simply the opportunity to serve:

> "We had a kind of a vision, we wanted to build a nation … and that fired us on! … The proudest moment of my entire career as a soldier was when the first batch passed out. I almost cried that Sunday afternoon – we were all so filled with emotion."[145]

In 1967 Vij received military (to COL) and civil service (to Principal Assistant Secretary) promotions as an AO seconded to the SAF.[146] He subsequently held distinctions as the inaugural Director SCSC from 1968 to 1969 and as commander of the 3rd Singapore Infantry Brigade (3 SIB) from 1969 to 1970.[147] In September 1970 Vij was appointed to the post of DGS and made BG in 1972. He retired from the SAF in 1974 at age 39 and returned to the civil service.[148]

The second individual is BG (RET) Tan Chin Tiong whose career trajectory provided a blueprint for the ascension pathway mirrored later by scholar-officers (defined as recipients of the SAF Overseas Scholarship (SAFOS), SAF Merit Scholarship (SMS), and Overseas Training Award (Academic)). Tan completed a history degree with first class honours at the University of Singapore before joining the AS. He served in the finance ministry from March to September 1967 before the CAS made him eligible for NS by virtue of being a civil servant. Had he joined the private sector, he would have

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[140] Desker and Kwa, *Goh Keng Swee*, p. 94.
[141] Ibid.
[142] "Another step up the scales for 10 top men," *The Straits Times*, 1 August 1970, p. 6.
[143] Since its establishment in 1966 the acronym 'SAFTI' has become synonymous with tough military training. Over the decades the name morphed into a pronoun with its current manifestation as SAFTI Military Institute. "Col Vij is new General Staff Director," *The Straits Times*, 10 September 1970, p. 2; "Last 3 Israeli advisers leaving in May," *The Straits Times*, 14 April 1974, p. 1; "Pasir Laba camp is now Safti once again," *The Straits Times*, 3 July 1986, p. 14; *SAFTI Silver Jubilee*, p. 42; *Lions in Defence: The 2 PDF Story: Commemorating 35 Years of Home Defence* (Singapore: 2PDF Command Officers' Mess, 2000), p. 56; and Menon, *One of A Kind*, p. 39.
[144] "Army Board members," *The Straits Times*, 2 May 1966, p. 4; and "New Army Board members named," *The Straits Times*, 20 November 1967, p. 4.
[145] *SAFTI Silver Jubilee*, p. 42.
[146] "Up the ladder for six S'pore Govt. officers," *The Straits Times*, 6 August 1967, p. 12; and "Col Vij is new General Staff Director," *The Straits Times*, 10 September 1970, p. 2.
[147] Jackie Sam, "S'pore gets a new infantry brigade," *The Straits Times*, 27 June 1969, p. 1.
[148] "Col. Choo gets top job," *The Straits Times*, 31 May 1974, p. 10; and "NOL's Management Team," *The Straits Times*, 30 December 1983, p. 3.

been conscripted the next year by virtue of being a graduate. Tan dutifully enlisted in 1967 and befittingly penned a prize winning essay in the 1968 SAFTI Director's Essay Competition while a recruit.[149] His post-commissioning tours included platoon commander in 6 SIR and staff officer in military intelligence. Tan attended the School of Advanced Training for Officers (SATO) which prepared officers for company command and rounded-off his NS with a promotion to Captain (CPT) in 1970.

He returned to the AS with postings at the law and defence ministries but, together with other AOs, received an offer of secondment from Dr Goh to serve in uniform.[150] Goh recognized that graduates in the officer corps were essential to attract bright individuals for regular service but was under no illusions that a graduate equalled a good officer. Tan was under no obligation and received no promises but rejoined the SAF in 1972 motivated with the opportunity to build a nascent SAF. Later the same year he attended the British Army's Command and Staff College at Camberley and his career took off thereafter with promotions to LTC (1973), COL (1976), and BG (1979).[151] His route of advancement included CO 4 SIR (1973-4); CO OCS (1974); Head of Training (1976) and Plans (1977) departments, and finally the SAF's 'number two' as DCGS (1980-2) including 14 months as the acting Chief of General Staff (1981-2).[152] In August 1982, at age 38, he retired from the SAF and returned to the civil service.[153]

3.4 The Vanguard: SAFTI's First Batch

While the MID could fill officer shortages by tapping the volunteers, the SIR 'old-guard', and seconded AOs, these were merely short-term stop-gap measures. The volunteers had zeal but were at times found wanting in experience, knowledge, and skill. The SIR 'old-guard' while professional and operationally-experienced were small in number and overwhelmingly non-graduates. The AOs were undoubtedly intelligent but few also had what it took to hold senior military appointments. The opportunity cost of an AO in the SAF was counted by their absence in other government ministries. Furthermore, one general observed that drawing 'amateurs' from the ranks of civil servants and the SVC created tensions with the professionals from the SIR:

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[149] *The Scimitar: Magazine of the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute* (March 1968), pp. 80-7.
[150] Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with COL (RET) Ramachandran Menon for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003250, Reel 8 of 17 (2007), p. 178.
[151] "Five New Colonels in SAF," *The Straits Times*, 1 December 1973, p. 17; and Ronnie Wai, "Man who became No. 2 in 10 years," *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 16.
[152] Esther Lew (ed.), *The Spirit of the Cobra: 6 Division Silver Jubilee* (Singapore: Headquarters 6 Division, 2001), p. 60; and "Changes in the general staff," *Pioneer* (September 1983), p. 2. The post of DGS was renamed Chief of General Staff (CGS) in 1978.
[153] "Farewell to BG Tan," *Pioneer* (October 1982), p. 4; and www.iseas.edu.sg/director.cfm (accessed 28 May 2014).

> "In the early days we were short on professionals so sometimes we had volunteers who came in as Lieutenant-Colonels. There was unhappiness with those who were clueless (about the military profession) but still had rank. But the important thing is to do your job as a professional. Don't make a big deal over who gets promoted and why. Just work in peace."[154]

This was especially pronounced when SVC 'part-timers' were seen to 'jump queue' ahead of regular counterparts to more senior appointments but Dr Goh saw it as a temporary and practical solution to buy time. He needed most of the 'old-guard' on the ground as the cadre to instil professionalism and develop the next generation of officers. But this arrangement also posed its own problems between combat officers "who were always dirty from being in the field while the service officers were in the office environment and clean."[155]

The work of Vij and his associates in establishing SAFTI provided a firm foundation for the indigenous pre-commissioning training and education of army officers.[156] The famed all-regular 'first-batch' of 117 officers commissioned at SAFTI in July 1967 formed the new vanguard in preparation for the first conscripts in August 1967.[157] This freed FMC graduates to replace SVC officers in the higher echelons and eventually conscripts would allow the 'first batch' to replace the FMC graduates. In time the SAFTI pipeline delivered a steady and self-renewing stream of officers. Subsequent batches who enlisted between 1967 and 1970 either actively sought a military career or were liable under the CAS initiative. From 1970 onward, all male SAF personnel enlisted under NS obligations and independent of any intentions for a military career.

So what would motivate a young man in 1966 to join an organization in its infancy without a track record or history and tasked to defend a society which frowned on the military profession? For starters, there is anecdotal evidence that a number were teachers who seized the opportunity for adventure and service in uniform.[158] Next, the absence of childhood ambitions and the scant availability of information and options regarding military service were enduring themes up until the 1980s. It was a leap of faith for members of the 'first-batch' and five from the ranks eventually became

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[154] Interview No. 01.
[155] Interview No. 03.
[156] Midshipmen were sent to academies overseas, notably Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth, UK; the Royal Canadian Navy at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Chilliwack; and The Fleet School at Esquimalt. The SAF midshipman school was only established at Jervois Block, Terror Barracks, Sembawang in 1974 with help from the Royal New Zealand Navy. Pilot training was conducted by the British RAF and air force officers attended the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell. The Flying Training School was only established at RAF Tengah in 1969. See "A report from Canada," *Pioneer* (February 1972), p. 17; and "Our men training at Cranwell," *Pioneer* (March 1972), p. 21.
[157] "Officers for new battalions on parade," *The Straits Times*, 17 July 1967, p. 7; "Goh at commissioning parade," *The Straits Times*, 18 July 1967, p. 6; and "President presents swords in historic ceremony," *The Straits Times*, 19 July 1967, p. 6.
[158] Some of the more well-known included LG (RET) Ng Jui Ping, BG (RET) Patrick Choy, BG (RET) Colin Theseira, and COL (RET) Ramachandran Menon.

general-officers. Three shared their stories and while similarities are present the contextual nuances are also clear and present.

The first general grew up in the rough Chinatown neighbourhood where his father, a resistance fighter who fought the Japanese in China during WWII, worked as clerk for an import-export company and doubled-up as a book-keeper at night. The financial burden to provide for six children also obliged his housewife mother to work as a part-time hair dresser. He recollected:

> "Growing up I had no aspirations at that time. I was a very ordinary student. I won't tell people I had a dream and all that. The aim was to pass exams and see which opportunities presented themselves after that. I mean, I didn't have the luxury. My parents were not well-to-do. I just wanted to do well, pass and whatever it is it will be. I took one step at a time. Work? Study? I don't think my father could afford (tertiary education). I was not really a good student. I was more active outdoors than studious. I passed exams but did not excel but I still think I needed to go upward (in terms of education) … I completed my A's (A-level) and concurrently went to be a teacher. Back then it was not difficult to be a teacher. You just attend Teachers College. It was steady, a respectable, steady job. But I felt teaching was not very exciting. I am an outdoor person and what could I possibly be as a teacher? With my qualifications and the (teaching) environment, the army sounded interesting. The job was different where assessment and selection is based on leadership. This was the key to upward mobility instead of education. So you think to yourself I have a chance to be somebody. Between the two (teaching or soldiering), I decided to give soldiering a try. I thought my inclination was that way. Maybe I have what it takes to excel so I decided to try and the SAF provided this opening. Of course, looking at the perks and recruitment brochure with 'Clarence Tan in the red sports car' <laughs> and the salary premium over civil servants; all this enticed me to try. I didn't know anything (about the SAF) so try."[159]

The second general similarly came from what he described a poor background where his father was a clerk and mother a housewife who returned to employment to support the family of four girls and one boy. The family lived in the Magna Road *kampong* (Malay for 'village') where:

> "As a kid I wanted to be a bus conductor so that I could collect money from everybody. <laughs> I was a rascal. I would go under the *wayang* (Malay for 'shadow puppetry') stage to gamble and every three weeks I would also have a 'new' bicycle. <laughs> As a student I failed my O-levels so I had to take them as a private candidate. What happened was this. I was a student at St Joseph's and in those days there was this teacher who used to smack students on the back of the head. I am not sure why he did this at all. <frowns and shakes his head> So one day I thought to myself: 'If he ever smacked me one more time I would punch him'. And I did so I got expelled. I went to take my O-levels at night school and then became a teacher. It was my girlfriend at that time who helped me through by patiently tutoring me. Eventually I became an English teacher

[159] Interview No. 27.

> but found it boring. One day a neighbour down the street by the name of COL April Wee mentioned about prospects in the army and I thought why not give it a shot."[160]

The third general is the eldest of eight children with a father who worked in the clerical line of the family business and a housewife mother. The 'poor' lower-middle class family lived in Kampong Bukit Timah in Jurong Kechil and later a terrace house in Fu Yong Estate. The sense of comparison was not lost on him:

> "Being the eldest and having a big [extended] family, you see cousins doing well; [so] in a sense it came down to me that I must use the academic route as a way forward. I never expected to be in the (particular service) or the SAF. I was on bursary at (an educational institute) and at the end of the course we were directed toward the SAF. They needed people to go into service and I guess as a bursary holder I felt obliged and went in on that basis. I was small and scrawny so I supposed going in it was a different culture. I didn't quite like the culture during the initial training. The whole organizational culture was to make men of boys. The instructors were old soldiers trained by FMC. The approach was to belittle as a form of motivation. For some it did not go quite well. Quite a number left initial training. I did consider leaving but I was under bond so it was a little hard to leave. The pay was also not so attractive compared to my contemporaries (in the private sector). I told myself if I must be in service then I better make the best out of it. I was out to show that it was something to improve myself; if I can make the grade as an officer. That was the way of advancing. Work hard, perform well, and achieve your status as a commissioned officer. I had no preconceived ideas that this is the organization for me and that I would one day make general. It was very much more to prove I was able to make it (to get commissioned)."[161]

Even while these generals were motivated to 'give a shot' at the unknown and newly established SAF, nothing quite prepared them for the shock of training at SAFTI. Indeed, SAFTI's inaugural SOH recipient COL (RET) Kwan Yue Yeong recollected two decades later:

> "I never expected soldiering to be so tough. Our officers and NCOs were either British or Malayan army-trained … Two o'clock in the morning and you had this preparation for boots inspection! Even in the brightest moonlight, you would not be able to see your boots … Every day, it was 5BX (basic exercises) at 5:45 am … Now things are very different; we don't think such practices are necessary for the training of good soldiers."[162]

The rationales behind certain actions were questioned and intestinal fortitude mandatory to overcome the physical and mental challenges. Such actions would be considered 'ill-treatment' today and formed the basis of myths and legends which

[160] Interview No. 26.
[161] Interview No. 24.
[162] Michael Lim, "Col Kwan recalls pioneering days," *The Straits Times*, 6 August 1986, p. 2.

circulate about the SAF's past. For one who was there it was anything but mythical because:

> "There were silly things like polishing boots until you could see your face in the reflection. If you did not meet standards the instructor would throw the pair outside and forced you to leopard crawl and retrieve them. By then your effort was ruined and your starched uniform was too. It was a waste of time. I also remember that being late to fall-in resulted in punishment in the form of running around the parade square. We ran until the officer told the RSM to stop. Culturally the approach sought to turn boys into men but I would do it differently … People at SAFTI had a job to do but the approach was quite distasteful to some. You [had] to show you can stomach it and show you can do what they wanted you to do."[163]

These practices could be viewed in two ways. On one hand, it reflected the training 'philosophy' of breaking and then moulding and building an individual into a soldier. It was a part of military socialization. On the other, and more congruent with contemporary expectations, it was nothing more than brazen 'ill-treatment' which in the West conjured terms such as 'bastardization' or 'hazing'. Such practices invariably decreased in intensity but possessed longevity as another general who enlisted in the 1970s attested:

> "In the past, ill-treatment of soldiers by commanders up the chain of command was rampant. When you go through the army in the 70's and 80's officers made decisions and were not held responsible for the injuries to the soldiers. They also make you do duck walk, star jumps, leopard crawl across the parade square until your elbows and knees were scarred with abrasion. It was just ill-treatment."[164]

For other officers, the physical side of things were tolerable but it was the mental dimension that proved challenging. Even the hardihood of the *kampong* lifestyle almost proved inadequate:

> "I wanted to quit in the first week of training during the first batch. We were asked to do stupid things. Go up the hill to find a leaf and when you return they told you it is the wrong leaf and asked you to go again. I thought it was just stupid. When I went home I saw my dad almost in tears. I asked him what happened and he said he was praying for me. He later told me 'you are my only son how can you give up? At least have the balls and the guts.' So I said 'OK I will try' and just hung in there."[165]

For another it was not the physical exertion or 'stupidity' of certain practices but the taxing nature of leadership assessments:

> "I was a rascal but also a shy person. In a small group I am good but big group it was hard for me. I just joined and be part of it. Army does change you [and]

[163] Interview No. 24.
[164] Interview No. 28.
[165] Interview No. 26.

> draw[s] out your latent leadership. Army forces you into certain situations and draws it out. It matured me because I was able to exploit my innate capabilities. When I joined I was ordinary but I tried to make the most of it. The trainers with Israeli advisers gave us hell but I was quite determined. The physical part I can endure. Waking up early and getting shouted at; I can also take. <grins> My challenge was when you are being assessed. There was a tension and you are exposed to situations you are not used to. You start to doubt your own capabilities but still try your best. You had Israelis who went to war so you learned. <nods>"[166]

On the whole, SAFTI's first batch produced 117 quality regular officers who formed the vanguard for the implementation of NS and later spearheaded various pioneering projects designed to manage infrastructure, exploit the technological-edge, and harness the raw manpower available by conscription.

3.5 Summary

This chapter juxtaposed defence against Singapore's historical context and highlighted the reasons for conscription as a means to meet defence needs under socio-economic constraints. It presented an eclectic array of reasons and contexts which prompted the SAF's early leaders to step forward to serve in uniform. Their motivations included a mix of duty, adventure which suited their outdoor-oriented up-bringing, and the sense of guiding the defence force through its infancy. Yet each was also unique befitting their roots as a volunteer, an 'old guard' of the SIR, or as an Administrative Officer seconded to the SAF on the initiative of Dr Goh. The establishment of SAFTI and the commissioning of the famed 'First Batch' in 1967 established a firm foundation for the development of future military elites and the wider SAF Officer Corps.

[166] Interview No. 27.

CHAPTER 4
MOTIVATIONS FOR MILITARY SERVICE

"How well do we know our people? Do we know what makes them say, stay and strive? Do we give them a reason to join, a reason to give?"[1]

– COL Tan Cheow Han, Bernard (1967-2006)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines why the military elites joined the SAF as regulars and addresses the question "*why were they motivated to sign-on?*" Theory development suggested an eclectic mix of motivations. The sensitising concepts covered in chapter two offered a kaleidoscope of theoretical reasons for motivation to join the military ranging from Huntingtonian ideals, Janowitz's note of urban and rural differences, the altruistic and egotistic reasons noted by Janowitz and encapsulated in Moskos' I/O thesis, the role of parents, and meeting a hierarchy of needs. The existing literature also stressed the importance of cultural-historical contexts and reminded researchers that motivation must be understood beyond causes and "studied within the realm of decision making."[2] The constant comparison of empirical data revealed several thematic categories divided into primary and secondary motivations. The chapter has three sections. The first examines challenges in recruiting officers for regular service. The second looks at categories of primary motivation which are necessary and sufficient for an individual to sign-on. The third contains categories of secondary motivation which are necessary but insufficient reasons depending on individual circumstances.

4.2 The Challenges of Recruitment

In the previous chapter it was argued that Singapore implemented conscription as a means to meet manpower challenges within budgetary constraints. While NS ensured a pipeline of conscripts the challenge to recruit career personnel remained. The hurdles were manifested in the general lack of ambition and the dearth of information regarding a military career. The stigma associated with the profession-of-arms did not help. These issues were partially addressed through advertisements, generous scholarships, and an array of attractive benefits but these 'solutions' have in turn created new problems.

[1] Bernard Tan, "Putting People First in Our Army," *Pointer*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2004), p. 18.
[2] Locke and Latham, "What Should We Do about Motivation Theory?" p. 392.

4.2.1 National Service

The announcement of NS caught the nation by surprise. Even though policies were implemented in a step-wise manner the situation was fluid and shrouded in uncertainties which caught some off guard. A general who enlisted under the CAS recounted:

> "My batch did not *siam* ('avoid') [service]. When we went in, we were told that Basic Military Training was for four months and then we would return to civilian life. But during BMT a law was passed for NS of two years. During our officer cadet course, during the section leader phase, this was changed again to three years for officers. The British withdrawal was used as a justification. <grins> As we were not yet commissioned many tried not to do well so they didn't have to serve three years. I enlisted in September (year X) and was commissioned in November (year X+1), a 14-month OCS course. I remember in those days during OCS training that the failure to evacuate a casualty was grounds for failing the mission because the Israeli advisers wanted to inculcate the value of 'leaving no man behind'."[3]

While this general was surprised with enlistment and the extensions in service obligations, another was caught up in the maelstrom of policy changes and ended up serving NS twice. It would certainly test anyone's view of fairness as he recollected:

> "In 1967 I was in the constabulary on a part-time basis and then went to work after my A-levels … Those were turbulent days. You grumbled like hell. Three nights a week you reported for duty with the Special Constabulary while those younger and the girls did not have to. But we took it in our stride. After BMT I was selected for leadership training. During the course we satirised NS and got hauled up the next day and were called 'subversive elements' … At the announcement (of NS) I had no choice. I could not go to university because I could not afford it. You could not get a job as they (potential employers) asked if you have completed NS. I reached the final interview for an accountant executive position at an advertisement company. The starting salary was $270 a month which was then considered big. I was one of the few with a full A-level certificate and able to go to university. They asked why I did not go and I explained that I did not have money for university studies. I wanted to go to university. I was half-decided that after NS I would go but things changed and I stayed on (in the SAF)."[4]

For the 'younger' ones, policies and infrastructure capacity constraints also threw up uncertainties. The immediate future for those who completed their A-levels in the late 1960s was decided by ballot. Some proceeded directly to university before NS with the remainder scheduled to complete NS before their tertiary studies. This arrangement proved disruptive to both students and the SAF as one general experienced:

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[3] Interview No. 03.
[4] Interview No. 13.

> "In secondary school some classmates, some had to do NS on a part time basis in the Special Constabulary. There were some rather old students. I was not in the Constabulary but we knew we had to do NS. There was a balloting system for those who could do university before NS. Half of my JC class went to [university] while the rest enlisted for NS. It was April [year X] when we started [our studies]. I was enlisted during my studies in May of [year X+1], during the long semester break between [X+1] and [X+2]. In our second year, the rest who were enlisted earlier [were disrupted for studies] after one year plus in the army … We knew at the onset we would serve NS after graduation. We were informed of this in university but did not realize BMT would happen between studies in year one and two.""[5]

Uncertainties also hovered over those who were born overseas and held foreign identification papers. They were initially informed of their exemption from NS but later received notifications to register and enlist.[6]

The Enlistment (Amendment) Act (1970) ended any uncertainties and clearly stipulated the terms of NS.[7] From then onward NS became the conduit through which the military elites would first render service in the SAF. An overwhelming majority of those interviewed expressed similar sentiments prior to their enlistment. First, they possessed a quiet confidence that they could cope with the training regime as the majority were physically fit by virtue of their active participation in sports, outdoor activities, and uniformed groups like the Boys' Brigades, Scouts, and NCC. Second, even though there was little information regarding military life they viewed NS as "a rite of passage" and simply sought to make the most of their time in service.[8] One quipped:

> "I accepted NS as a matter of fact. It was compulsory. There was no way out of it. I did not have any negative feelings. It was something that has to be done; two-and-a-half years. <nods>"[9]

Another said:

> "I did not pay much attention to NS in primary school. In secondary school I was in NCC Land and that provided some exposure to things military. I enjoyed firing the M16 as part of the rifle team. Like many boys my age then, and maybe even now, there was a fascination with all things military. Apart from uncles who did NS and showed me their uniform I did not have many older friends so I did not know much. I saw it as something that needs to be done. So go with the flow. <smiles>"[10]

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[5] Interview No. 20.
[6] Interview No. 15.
[7] Those who became officers and all holding educations above A-level were liable to render two-and-a-half years of service while all others served two years. The length of NS was standardized at two years regardless of rank and education level with effect from December 2004.
[8] "NS defaulters: What happens when they return?" *The Straits Times*, 29 April 1994, p. 6.
[9] Interview No. 17.
[10] Interview No. 21.

For a third officer:

> "I would say people think of going to the army when they think of NS … At the point in time of enlistment there was not much communication of 'duty, honour, country'. The imagery captured of the 70's and 80's were of truckloads of NSFs being ferried to camp. Dempsey Road for those going to OCS and SISPEC (School of Infantry Specialists for non-commissioned officers training) or the community centres near the camps for those who went directly to the battalions. MPs (members of parliament) would grace the send offs but later it was centralized at CMPB (Central Manpower Base). My personal view about NS? It was a rite of passage and part of the growing up process. There was no thought of whether you were Singaporean or PR. There was also not much information (about NS) and people didn't think too deeply about it. In the good old days life was a lot simpler. <laughs>"[11]

NS and military life were particularly welcomed by those who faced great hardships during their formative years. One general who grew up in a single-parent household with half a dozen other siblings recollected:

> "I would say NS was fairly well accepted. Overall it was viewed as 'must have'. There were some protective parents. I remembered visiting my brother during his BMT confinement. Some parents were crying. At another time one parent actually followed behind us in a car during route march. <laughs> But in those days (late 60s, early 70s) kids were rugged, more rough-and-tumble. I actually got my first bed in the army camp. Before enlistment I used to sleep on the floor. There was also better food and amenities. <smiles>"[12]

Another who grew up on a farm in a family of six explained that:

> "During school days I helped my parents with their work and the rural lifestyle built-up my physical strength. When I enlisted in the army life actually got better in that I had more time to myself. The rural up-bringing also gave me a sharp sense of the terrain. Because of the *kampong* community, I was also comfortable walking and talking to anybody."[13]

The interview participants unanimously underlined that NS was, and continues to be, essential for national defence and took an optimistic approach toward the endeavour. This consistency cut across the spectrum of vocations, from the majority who never considered a military career to the handful who intended to sign-on prior to or during the initial stages of NS. A few officers additionally cited regional conflicts which heightened their sense of purpose. This was most acute for those who enlisted in the mid-1970s as American withdrawal from Vietnam gave way to Communist consolidation and the refugee crisis captured local headlines. One officer who kept abreast of current affairs offered an insight into the physical distance but psychological proximity of conflict:

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[11] Interview No. 18.
[12] Interview No. 10.
[13] Interview No. 05.

> "During primary and secondary school it was the height of the Vietnam War. There was also intense fighting in Cambodia and when Pol Pot came to power atrocities were committed in Cambodia. You also read about the Domino Theory in newspapers. As a student in NCC and one with interest in the military it was good to be in uniform. I was looking forward to NS and to serve with purpose."[14]

The first Gulf War in 1991 similarly seeded curiosity in the mind of another officer when Singapore deployed a 30-strong medical contingent to Saudi Arabia in support of international efforts to restore Kuwaiti independence.[15]

Among the many who did not initially consider a military career, very few expressed any NS-specific aims beyond hopes of making it into OCS. For one officer the prospects of OCS trumped service in the famous commando formation where the red berets had become a fixture at the annual NDP:

> "I was selected for Commando but I opted for direct entry into OCS where I was with (a particular class). I indicated earlier an interest for OCS and Commando but since OCS was direct entry it seemed a more attractive posting. <smiles>"[16]

Even if one made it to OCS the array of post-commissioning possibilities were unknown and bounded one's aspiration(s):

> "I was not in any uniform group at school before NS but I was active in sports and took part in outdoor activities. I thoroughly enjoyed BMT. As a recruit my aim was to get into OCS. That was one of the drivers in BMT. At that point in time there was not a very differentiated need in OCS because it was a single-minded track to train infantry platoon commanders. In OCS the goal was to be an OCS instructor after you are commissioned. You're influenced by what you know and we did not have many ideas beyond our immediate scope. We never met a PC (platoon commander) from the unit before. In OCS then, a cadet had no exposure to other arms let alone the air force or navy. There was very little knowledge beyond OCS."[17]

It took on-the-job experience and exposure to the wider SAF for officers to identify possible career challenges and opportunities at hand. As a case in point former CNV (1985-91) RADM1 (RET) James Leo mentioned: "People of my vintage started off in the SAF by doing National Service. During my NS with the Navy I saw the many challenges ahead, like the work that was being done and so decided to stay on."[18]

While NS proved beneficial in recruiting certain members of the military elite, the associated experiences hindered recruitment efforts at times. For some it came from misconceptions of 'not wanting a desk job' and the romantic ideal of 'defending the country'. For others, NS was simply downright discouraging. Furthermore, former

[14] Interview No. 14.
[15] Interview No. 23.
[16] Interview No. 11.
[17] Interview No. 23.
[18] "Interview with COL James Leo Commander RSN," *Navy News* (October 1985), p. 3.

PS (Defence) (1981-94) Lim Siong Guan cited the limited and peripheral experiences gained during NS:

> "Very often a man only knows the SAF through the eyes of a national service officer or other rank. What then happens is that in his national service he is in his unit as a platoon commander, for example, and that is all he knows about the SAF. It would be very unfortunate if that was also the basis on which he decides whether the SAF offers him a lifetime career. What he is exposed to in the field is not all that the SAF is about. And when we talk about the higher levels the work expands much more than what he can see at ground level."[19]

This truism has remained as COL then-LTC Goh Si Hou, a 1997 SAFOS recipient, reasoned: "When we first enlist into the Army at 19, our perspective of the SAF can be limited by our personal experience at the basic training stage."[20] Negative experiences pre-, during, and post-NS do not favour recruitment efforts either. MAJ Narayanan Letchumanan (SAFOS 2001), then an officer cadet trainee (OCT), explained:

> "I was quite sceptical about the scholarship and in particular, about working in the forces … There are a lot of impressions that people get when they deal with the SAF during their time in National Service and not all of them are flattering."[21]

Similarly, CPT (NS) Toh Weisong (SAFOS 2001), a former regular naval officer and now an NSman, argued that mandatory NS:

> "… has produced attitudes toward military service that that (sic) make it difficult to recruit regulars … this grudging acceptance of NS is accompanied by a perception of it as two years of drudgery, which dilutes the regard for regular military service."[22]

What can one say about NS and the making of Singapore's military elites? First, it is undeniable that since 1971 NS has provided the defence establishment with access to the total talent pool of male Singaporeans and PRs. It gave the SAF an edge in the 'War for Talent' as these men rendered between two to three years of service independent of whether they decided on a military career or simply served out their terms as conscripts. Second, the military elites harboured a positive outlook of NS but the overwhelming majority did not consider a career in the SAF. They certainly possessed the latent talents as their careers and pinnacle ranks attested. But why did they not consider a career in the forces? The answers are found in their ambitions (or lack of) up until the point of enlistment and the channels through which they learned about possibilities of a career in the forces.

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[19] Ronnie Wai and Paul Jacob, "Pay boost for SAF officers," *The Straits Times*, 1 April 1982, p. 1;
[20] Alex Lim, "Leading with distinction," *The Straits Times*.
[21] Noel Hidalgo Tan, "Unique Chance," *With Honour: A MINDEF/SAF and DSTA Scholarship Special* (*The Straits Times)*, 10 March 2002, p. R4.
[22] Toh Weisong, "High Flyers: Implications of Short Officer Careers in the SAF," *Pointer*, Vol.38, No.3 (2012), pp. 11-2.

4.2.2 Ambitions and Advertisements

It might be common nowadays for Singaporean children to speak of ambitions but this was hardly the case for the interview participants, all of whom were born between the Japanese occupation (1942) and national independence (1965). Ambition, if it could be considered as such, was simply to obtain the highest education level possible as the means of upward social mobility. Limited financial resources commonly obliged one or more siblings to forgo tertiary education. Once an individual reached an education plateau it was then his duty to help ease the family's financial burden and repay parental hardships. This practice was encapsulated in the childhood of former COA (1992-5) MG (RET) Lim Neo Chian (SAFOS 1972):

> "My father was the manager of a rattan shop in Boat Quay. We lived in a two-room SIT flat in St Michael's road and I was the second of 7 children. My father had the added responsibility of looking after us when my mother died of breast cancer when I was 10 years old. He impressed upon us the importance of studying hard as this was the path to a better life. He gave us prize money whenever we did well in school and I really appreciated the hard life he must have led. I attended Towner Road Primary School. One day, as we were travelling in a bus when it passed Bras Basah Road, my father pointed RI out to me and said he hoped that I would study there."[23]

RADM1 (NS) Tan Kai Hoe (SAFOS 1985) similarly explained: "My mother had to toil from dawn to dusk for the family and I had always told myself that I must push myself to succeed in order to add meaning to her tireless efforts."[24]

Similarly, the completion of pre-tertiary education is almost a given for any Singaporean child today but was by no means the case for bygone generations.[25] Even those with intelligence were at times uncertain of how far they could go:

> "For us at that time, standard seven was the leaving school [certificate] which was the equivalent of [secondary] three, or two today. We had little ambition. My father sent me to an English school (English medium of instruction) for a better future. I went to (a De LaSalle school) for moral training. The schools then were also limited. There were very few English schools. My ambition was to get to standard seven, then onward to O-levels, from O's to pre-university, and from there to university. At each stage it was on the condition that my parents could support me, [bearing in mind they] had 2 boys and 5 girls. I went to university but the opportunity cost was that my (younger) brother did not."[26]

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[23] Tan, *100 Inspiring Rafflesians*, p. 131. The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) was an initiative by the colonial government to address housing needs of the indigenous population. "Singapore Improvement: Report of Trust for the Year 1924," *The Straits Times*, 11 August 1925, p. 11.
[24] "Educational opportunities and a challenging career," *Pioneer* (October 1986), p. 2.
[25] Sherlyn Quek, "Training every soldier to be a leader," *Cyberpioneer*, 27 July 2011. The percentage of national servicemen with 12 years of pre-tertiary schooling ('A-level') or specialized education ('diploma') has risen steadily from 30% in the 1980s to 75% today and is expected to hit 85% by 2015.
[26] Interview No. 03.

Another officer relied on bursaries and scholarships without which it would have been impossible for him to realize his educational aspirations:

> "Ambition? In those days you take things as they come. When you are in primary six, you aim to take secondary four. Those who pass were usually listed in the newspapers. Then you go to work and earn a few hundred dollars. After secondary four you considered the options. To be honest in school I was usually in the top three. In fact I was in primary one for only a few months then my mother got me transferred to primary two. In terms of the calendar year I was one year ahead of my cohort. When I was at [school] you take life a step at a time. Ask yourself after A's (A-level) what is possible. If you don't do so well, perhaps join the maritime command. <smiles> Perhaps take the opportunity of training at an overseas academy. You read about the heroes who went to Dartmouth. So that was one career option. The other was admission to the University of Singapore where I could earn a degree. In those days you also needed a certificate of suitability to get into university because they wanted to weed out those with communist inclinations. Option three was to get a scholarship. In those days naval architecture and nautical studies were in demand. It was also something out of the ordinary. In the end, since I received a scholarship I took it. I also did not need my uncle to support me. Anyway for pre-university I got by on an ASEAN scholarship. In secondary school days I also received the Tan Jiak Kim scholarship for less well-off families."[27]

The experiences of others were rather consistent. One who described his family as "lower socioeconomic" but "not struggling" and the usual "man on the street" explained:

> "I had no real ambition. I did not have an ambitious mind and I just hoped to earn a decent living. I did desire for university education. All the primary and secondary schools I went to while growing up are already gone. <smiles> They were neighbourhood schools. I did well for my [O-levels] but did not take part in any uniform groups."[28]

Another, the grandson of a fruit and vegetable farmer and son of an automobile spray-painter, highlighted the years of studying hard but without many signposts in life:

> "Growing up I did not have any real ambitions. There were limited options and also a lack of information or exposure to possibilities. I am the only graduate in my family and there wasn't really anyone to look to for advice or guidance. So I looked to peers and friends. All my cousins went to one school so I followed. For secondary school I followed others in applying to RI but I could not get in so I followed my neighbour to Thompson secondary. <laughs> I was prepared to attend [polytechnic] if I did not do well but I was one of the top students and was admitted to (a prestigious school) where I took science and maths. I also considered being an air steward because I wanted to see the world."[29]

[27] Interview No. 15.
[28] Interview No. 17.
[29] Interview No. 11.

Three categories emerged from interviewees who expressed any sort of ambition. To be a pilot was most common but as seen later in this chapter this was more a dream, a childhood fantasy, and for many proved a mere secondary motivation for joining the SAF. The second category was to do something 'scientific', most likely in the sciences or engineering. Personal interests and ability coupled with the fact they performed well in school spawned this ambition. It was standard practice to place top students in the science stream (as opposed to arts) to read subjects in the natural and physical sciences. Some may have toyed with professions such as law or architecture but this gave way to what they did best at school. The government's early initiative to train more engineers as part of national industrialization efforts in the 1960's and 1970's reinforced such thinking. One officer elaborated that:

> "When you are 17 and 18 you listened to the government. The only source of information was through reading newspapers and the government wanted to train more engineers so I wanted to be an engineer. The key focus as a student was to do well and then get an engineering degree. Even though I took one step at a time I hoped to get a scholarship for overseas study. But the immediate aim in school was to do well for A-level and then to do well in university."[30]

Another officer's penchant for things 'scientific' came from his interests, abilities, and the role model provided by his father:

> "My father is a doctor, still practising even though he is 79 already. One reason. In terms of ambition I was always interested in science and by extension science and technology. I was a science nerd in school and medicine has a scientific angle to it. Engineering also has a scientific angle. Since my father was a doctor and a father figure I tried medicine but I did not get admitted. So engineering. The one common theme throughout my life is science. You could say it was my motivation in life."[31]

MOs formed the third category who expressed ambition specific in their pursuit of medicine. The first MO gave personal reasons:

> "Ever since I was in primary school, around primary four and five, I decided I wanted to do medicine. I had a younger brother who was sick with asthma and admitted frequently to hospital. When we visited the hospital we would see the poor guy standing in the doorway. I would also see other children there. So you could say I had a one track mind all the way. In my time the top students wanted to do engineering. I applied for Colombo Plan (a now-defunct scholarship tenable at various universities in the Commonwealth) and during the interview they told me to give up med[icine] and do psychology instead. Of course I rejected it! <laughs> Some class mates of mine decided to follow the trend and do engineering."[32]

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[30] Interview No. 10.
[31] Interview No. 21.
[32] Interview No. 20. The Colombo Plan Scholarships gave many bright Singaporeans students from the early 1960s onward the opportunity to earn an undergraduate degree in participating Commonwealth

A second MO wanted to be a pilot but when his eye-sight became less than perfect simply sought:

> "… to be a good person. It was only in junior college that I seriously looked at medicine. You know, at JC you need to evaluate career options by looking at your strengths and possibilities. All my older siblings furthered their education. My oldest sister earned her ACCA (professional accountancy qualification) but did not go to uni[versity] and so did not burden the family in anyway. My second sister was awarded a PSC merit scholarship to study medicine. My brother was awarded a SAF Training Scholarship … My two other sisters were funded by my parents to NUS (National University of Singapore) … Yes, 'papa mama' (parental-funded) scholarship. <smiles> I am the youngest and was funded by the rest of the family. <laughs> $100 per month from each sibling. <laughs> I was thinking of a non-bonded scholarship. PSC was restrictive and only gave out a few. The bond for medicine was for five years including NS but not houseman. Fees were manageable at $1000 for medicine and dentistry while the others were $700 which was affordable back then."[33]

For a third MO, the son of a professional architect, it was a not-so-simple process of deduction:

> "Like most kids I did not know what I wanted to be. In secondary school I had the inclination to be a doctor. The thought of being a regular officer came only after medical school and after I re-enlisted for NS during MOCC (Medical Officer Cadet Course). Why did I decide I wanted to be a doctor in secondary school? Good question. I would not say there was some seminal event that made me want to be a doctor. I thought it was something I could do. Maybe I was inclined to the biological sciences and could do well. I was also less inclined to be an engineer or in finance. So partly it was a process of elimination. I also wanted to do something the deals with people. There was a tussle between medicine and humanities such as law, architecture. In JC I took triple science which made medicine a tangible goal. I was also not financially motivated and money was definitely not a factor … My dad did say 'don't do architecture'. <laughs> I think it is one of those things when fathers tell their sons not to join them in the same industry. <laughs> I did adequately well in secondary school and pre-U[niversity] to apply for medicine but not well enough to be eligible for a PSC scholarship. In those days medicine was perhaps a little less competitive than today."[34]

Regardless of one's ambitions growing up, one consistent and common theme was the lack of information regarding SAF career possibilities. When this revelation is juxtaposed against the competition from other sectors of employment, the defence establishment's need for consistent investments in advertisement campaigns and competitive employment conditions becomes clear. The early leaders of the SAF relied

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countries, mainly Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. See Nancy Byramji, "The Colombo Plan Scholars," *The Straits Times*, 4 July 1976, p. 17.
[33] Interview No. 18.
[34] Interview No. 23.

on newspaper advertisements, recruitment brochures, radio, and the word of mouth. The avenues of communication were soon extended by virtue of NS with circulars in routine orders and periodic recruitment talks. Additionally, the pre- and post-NS audiences (including females) were exposed to career possibilities through security-related seminars at schools, recruitment talks at universities, and the former Junior Flying Club (JFC) known today as the Singapore Youth Flying Club.

Advertisements were especially important in the early days when the SAF was synonymous with the army while the air and naval services were still in the embryonic stages of development:

> "After commissioning there was a circular in SAFTI regarding the initiative to set up the air force. A handful of us, 20 to 30, went for aptitude tests. (A number) were eventually selected for air force training and sent to MID. There was no air force yet and the infrastructure was rudimentary so we were temporarily posted to MID as staff officers. I spent my time writing letters to senior officers, and staff papers but not training. <laughs> My claim to fame was that I got the SAF to buy the Unimog. <laughs> Ronald Wee was the department head and he struck me as a kind, nice, gentle, and encouraging individual. I could also draw so he tasked me to design formation patches and I ended up with insignias like cobra, marlin etc. It was a labour of love. It was not an official job but I had an interest in these kinds of things."[35]

The navy was also an unknown entity in search of a few good men:

> "I went to BMT and three months after I was selected for section leaders' course. One day I saw an advertisement on the company-line notice board about navy scholarships. It was for studies in university and asking interested recruits to reply. Successful candidates would transfer to the navy."[36]

It did not help that the nascent navy then had fewer ships than most had fingers on two hands and paled in comparison to the merchant fleet. Another officer recalled his time flipping through the broadsheet in search of opportunities: "There were quite a few advertisements for careers at sea with companies such as NOL (Neptune Orient Lines). Some advertisements also with the maritime command. <smiles>"[37]

With all but eight military elites having entered the SAF via NS it is evident that conscription has become the chief conduit for military service. But how do ambitions and advertisements add to the contextual role of NS and the motivation to sign-on? First, the majority of the interview participants did not have much by the way of ambitions with the exception of studying hard and securing the highest education level possible. The minority with ambitions were interested in flying, an occupation related to the sciences, and medicine. These ambitions provided a direction but for most were

[35] Interview No. 24.
[36] Interview No. 17.
[37] Interview No. 15.

neither concrete nor certain. Second, information pertaining to military careers proved scant, or was simply inefficient in reaching the target audience. Pre-NS avenues of communication were reinforced with recruitment talks and circulars in routine orders. Today, such efforts are extended to unsolicited mailers, career brochures, scholarship tea sessions, and visits to different units across the SAF despite the hectic NS training schedule. Even when an individual completed NS, recruitment efforts could bear fruit when a dormant interest is present and economic circumstances proved less fortuitous.

4.2.3 Scholar-Officers: Appealing to Confucian values

A critical problem for the SAF was that a military career was not accorded the rightful status as an 'honoured' profession. This invariably hindered the recruitment of the 'right' people, namely "highly educated men with disciplined minds and a higher level of general knowledge, articulation and mental training … necessary to improve the army's calibre."[38] In the shadow of an impending British withdrawal, Lee Kuan Yew highlighted the urgency and challenge of recruiting quality individuals:

> "… we got to break down this prejudice, the pre-conception, you know, that the armed forces comprise of people who can't make the grade in the professions or in the traditional occupations like lawyer, doctor, engineer and the armed forces, particularly in a developing country, comprise one of the most important sectors of life."[39]

The undesirable nature of a career in uniform was most apparent when 'superior candidates' opted instead for public service, government-linked companies, and the private sector.[40] This problem was compounded by the ephemeral albeit unpopular policy in 1969 where an officer's commission attracted three years of NS while other ranks served only two.[41] As a result and "[n]ot unnaturally, some of the smartest opted for the anonymity of followership rather than the spotlight of leadership, taking their first steps toward becoming captains of industry a year ahead of their colleagues."[42]

The 'scholar' tag grounded in Confucian values was utilized in an attempt to attract the country's 'top brains' which resonated within Singapore's Chinese-ethnic

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[38] "SAF university scholarship details," *The Straits Times*, 19 May 1971, p. 9.
[39] "When scholars become officers," *The Straits Times*, 15 October 1971, p. 18.
[40] Among the more attractive public sector employers were the Administrative Service, Economic Development Board (EDB), Jurong Town Council (JTC), Development Bank of Singapore (DBS), Telecommunication Authority of Singapore (TAS), and Public Utilities Board (PUB). See "Ensuring quality of leadership in the armed forces," *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 16; and *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 16.
[41] Despite the strong reactions from graduates and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on behalf of employers, MINDEF stood firm on the decision based on "uncritical adoption" of recommendations from IDF advisers. See "Why graduate refuses to be an officer," *The Straits Times*, 15 August 1970, p. 9; "Goh: We must preserve our reputation," *The Straits Times*, 11 July 1975, p. 15; and Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, p. 282.
[42] Ramachandran Menon, *To Command: The SAFTI Military Institute* (Singapore: HQ SAFTI Military Institute and Landmark Books Pte Ltd, 1995), pp. 112, 115.

majority.[43] The scheme was reminiscent of imperial China's selection of scholars and the recruitment of military officers and civil servants in medieval Korea.[44] Mr Lee Onn Pong, then MINDEF's Director of Employment and an architect of the scheme, elaborated:

> "During one meeting in 1970, Dr Goh discussed with me the problem of very few NSMen, particularly university graduates, wanting to become officers. After 1970 it was decided to call up A-level passes for NS. I suggested that SAF should attract the best A-level holders to become officers, by giving them scholarships for their higher studies. They would be bonded to serve in SAF. My recommendation was to give SAF scholarship more money, though President's scholarship would still be higher in status. The scholars would sign up as regulars before they went off to university; they would get their rank pay and the scholarship, plus any other scholarship that they won, such as the President's or PSC scholarship. Dr Goh asked about the likely pitfalls; I said there would eventually be a logjam of SAF scholar officers in the upper echelons of the SAF, which, if not managed well, could cause a big problem, possible even a coup! So after serving their bond in SAF some of the senior officers should be assigned to the Administrative Service. Dr Goh liked the idea and, after discussing it with senior MINDEF directors, took it up with the Prime Minister and Cabinet for approval."[45]

Simply put, "SAF scholars can enhance the image of the SAF because they can attract other brains."[46] Cabinet approval came swiftly enough for the first batch of five officers, which included Lee Hsien Loong, to receive the SAFOS – originally named the SAF (UK) Scholarships until tenable at non-UK universities – in 1971. If it was good enough for the PM's eldest son surely it was good enough for anyone.[47]

The terms and conditions were extremely attractive at a time when scholarships were a rare commodity and most of society belonged to the lower socio-economic strata. For the overwhelming majority of recipients it was a windfall which catered to all the financial needs of an undergraduate and more.[48] Recipients were bonded to the SAF for eight years – which was subsequently revised to six in line with other government scholarships – in return and in earlier time even included caveats on

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[43] George Yeo quoted in Warren Fernandez, *Without Fear or Favour: 50 years of Singapore's Public Service Commission* (Singapore: Times Media for the Public Service Commission, 2001), p. 78.
[44] See Benjamin A. Elman, *A cultural history of civil examinations in late imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000); and Eugene Y. Park, *Between Dreams and Reality: The Military Examination in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600-1894*, Harvard East Asian Monograph No. 281 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[45] Desker and Kwa, *Goh Keng Swee*, p. 108. The President's Scholarship remains the most prestigious scholarship awarded by the Public Service Commission. That said, at least one student turned down the scholarship. See "Temasek JC maths whiz turns down President's Scholarship," *The Straits Times*, 11 August 1991, p. 3.
[46] Choo, *The Singapore Armed Forces*, p. 144.
[47] Hanna, "The New Singapore Armed Forces," p. 5.
[48] The scholarship included air travel, tuition fees, college fees (if applicable), an annual stipend, a regular salary which differed from the rest of the officer corps (until 1982), and other eligible allowances. "16 get SAF Study Grants," *The Straits Times*, 22 September 1972, p. 21; and *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 2.

marriage to Singaporean citizens only.[49] Some four decades later, several former SAFOS recipients heralded the initiative as "a proven source of the best talent for the defence of Singapore" and depicted scholar-officers as a "national resource."[50] This scholarship system is a unique sociological aspect of Singapore as it was observed:

> "Elsewhere around the world, 'scholars' are people who are university academics where a measure of respect is accorded to them and their views. In Singapore, however, the general attitude elevates the 'government scholar' onto a pedestal far beyond the reach of the ordinary man. This observation highlights the technocratic nature of the Singaporean state, in which the technical competence of an individual in highly prized."[51]

While the profile of SAF officership rose over time, it was the scholar-officer's career that was most conspicuous. Since its inception the SAFOS has served as an investment in leadership potential and the key vehicle for transporting its recipients to the apex of the SAF. Various authors have noted the rapid promotion of scholar-officers with the fastest among them making COL by their early 30s and in some cases even their late 20s.[52] This created an atmosphere whereby:

> "The scholars automatically became the crème de la crème of the SAF and could reasonably expect to attain the rank of Colonel within 10 years after they returned from their degree studies … Around the beginning of the 1980s, the issue gained notoriety as the categorization of career officers in the SAF into 'scholars' and 'farmers' (non-scholar-officers), but the outcome of the debate about who would inherit the highest strata of the SAF was a foregone conclusion."[53]

This conclusion, however, is not necessarily 'foregone' as empirical evidence presented in chapter six suggested otherwise.

While the SAFOS attracted 'bright' individuals it was necessary to maximise the perceived talents of this esteemed group not just for the SAF but also for Singapore at-large.[54] The Dual-Career Scheme allowed SAFOS recipients to join the AS and those who made the cut as AOs became civil servants seconded to the military. At the

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[49] "'Marriage to S'pore citizens only' for SAF award holders," *The Straits Times*, 31 December 1970, p. 3.
[50] Geraldine Yeo, "Without peer," *The Straits Times*, 9 March 2003, p. 2; and Nicholas Yong, "Six join ranks of 'national resource' with SAF Overseas Scholarship," *The Straits Times*, 12 August 2009.
[51] Da Cunha, "Sociological Aspects of the Singapore Armed Forces," pp. 466-7.
[52] See for example Da Cunha, "Sociological Aspects of the Singapore Armed Forces," p. 467; Ng Pak Shun, "From 'Poisonous Shrimp' to 'Porcupine': An analysis of Singapore's Defence Posture Change in the early 1980s," *Strategic and Defence Studies Centre Working Paper* (The Australian National University), No. 397 (2005), p. 26; and Walsh, "The Roar of the Lion City," p. 270. For example Lee Hsien Loong, Boey Tak Hap, and Sin Boon Wah who received the SAFOS in 1971 made LTC in 1981, COL a year later, and in time BG. See also "Salute The Young Top Brass!" *The Straits Times*, 30 August 1980, p. 1; "Pips & Crests," *Pioneer* (August 1981), p. 8; and "Promotion: Ranks and Responsibilities," *Pioneer* (August 1982), p. 6; and Menon, *One of A Kind*, pp. 337-8.
[53] Menon, *One of A Kind*, pp. 337-8.
[54] Leslie Fong and Ronnie Wai, "Top officers given exposure," *The Straits Times*, 17 September 1982, p. 1; "The SAF personnel management philosophy," *Pioneer* (February 1984), p. 4; "SAF will free staff to All Civilian posts if required: Lt-Gen Choo," *The Straits Times*, 12 August 1990, p. 3; and "National Day Honours," *Pioneer* (September 1990), p. 22.

conclusion of their SAF careers they could then serve in other areas of public service.[55] By the late 1980s former SAFOS officers had made headway into the upper echelons of the political and civil service arenas. Recruitment advertisements proudly declared that the SAFOS "is not just a passport to one pyramid – the SAF – but the first stepping stone to that pyramid and beyond. The world is the scholar-officer's oyster."[56] This scholarship took on a trophy-like status for the top schools and at one point a senior defence official even declared: "We will not require an application … those who are eligible for consideration will be invited."[57] In the 2000s the SAFOS sale pitch promised "a pedigree education, a challenging career and maximum satisfaction."[58] The ultimate endorsement, however, came from Lee Kuan Yew who once shared that if he was to re-live his life:

> "… he would opt for a Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) or Overseas Merit Scholarship (OMS) to study at a top American university, followed by a career in the SAF or civil service and a stint in one of the statutory boards or government-linked companies. Then, he would enter politics and serve as a minister for two or three terms."[59]

He reiterated that "what you want in life is a passport you can flash."[60] The SAFOS is that passport.

4.2.4 Pandora's Box

While the SAFOS attracted a premium slice of the annual leavers there was a pressing need to raise the general education level of the officer corps and increase the number of graduates within their ranks. The solution was a two-pronged effort to offer more opportunities for university education coupled with higher salaries and benefits. The Local Study Award (LSA) tenable at local universities and the Overseas Training Award (OTA) for pre-commissioning training at foreign military academies

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[55] Speech by PM Lee Kuan Yew at the SAF Day Dinner on 1 September 1981. Reproduced in "Ensuring quality of leadership in the armed forces," *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 16. See also Paul Jensen, "Getting the Best Brains into SAF," *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 1; and "For potential SAF scholars – no application required," *Pioneer* (June 1992), p. 27.
[56] "A complete employer," *The Straits Times*, 19 March 1989, p. 19.
[57] "For potential SAF scholars – no application required," *Pioneer* (June 1992), p. 26.
[58] Edmund Tee, "The leading edge," *With Honour: A MINDEF/SAF and DSTA Scholarship Special* (The Straits Times), 10 March 2002, p. R2. The benefits included three to four years at the very best American and British universities on full salary and allowances in exchange for an eight- and later six-year bond in uniform. After taking the mandatory period of NS into account, this equates roughly to a year of service for each year of tertiary education. Remuneration was always at a premium and is today pegged at 20 per cent above the already handsomely paid Administrative Service. Since the mid-1990s SAFOS recipients were allowed to pursue a master degree as long as it was completed within four years inclusive of the undergraduate degree. See "Revised SAF Scholarships and Awards," *Army News*, Iss. 15 (April 1996), p. 3.
[59] Chua Mui Hoong, "Schooled for Leadership," *The Straits Times*, 13 August 1994, p. 30.
[60] Quoted from an SAF Recruitment Advertisement, *The Straits Times*, 5 March 1996, p. 7.

commenced in tandem with the SAFOS in 1971.[61] It is no surprise, however, that opportunities for tertiary education have proliferated steadily over the years and a tiered-system established based on prestige (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Evolution of the SAF Scholarship hierarchy for combat officers.[62]

<table>
<tr><th>1970s</th><th>1980s</th><th>1990s</th><th>Present</th></tr>
<tr><td>SAF (UK) Scholarship</td><td>SAF Overseas Scholarship (SAFOS)</td><td>SAFOS</td><td>SAFOS</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Overseas Training Award (OTA)</td><td>OTA (Academic)[63]</td><td>SAF Merit Scholarship (SMS)[64]</td><td>SMS</td></tr>
<tr><td>OTA (Graduating) [65]</td><td>MTA (Graduating)</td><td rowspan="3">SAF Academic Scholarship (SAS)[66]</td></tr>
<tr><td>OTA (Non-Graduating)[67]</td><td>MTA (Non-Graduating)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Nil</td><td>Academic Training Award (ATA)[68]</td><td>ATA</td></tr>
<tr><td>Local Scholarship</td><td>Local Study Award (LSA)[69]</td><td>LSA</td><td>LSA</td></tr>
</table>

While the scholarships undoubtedly attracted a fair share of intelligent individuals to the military it created two problems. The first – the Achilles Heel of the

[61] The first two OTA recipients received their training at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. The OTA has since included academies in Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, The Philippines, India, and the United States. "SAF university scholarship details," *The Straits Times*, 19 May 1971, p. 9.
[62] Three other scholarships include the SAF Medicine Scholarship, Local Dentistry Scholarship, and the Defence Merit Scholarship (DMS), with the latter designed for grooming civilian bureaucrats in defence.
[63] OTA (Academic) – initially given the confusing name 'SAF Overseas (Non-Oxbridge) Scholarships' – was tenable at renowned universities abroad. See *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 17.
[64] The SMS is tenable at both foreign civilian universities and military academies and is open to both 'A'-level and diploma holders. See "Scholarship for outstanding officers," *Pioneer* (November 1990), p. 15; "Cream of the Crop," *Pioneer* (October 1992), p. 18; and "Revised SAF Scholarships and Awards," *Army News*, Issue No. 15 (April 1996), p. 3.
[65] OTA (graduating) was tenable at military academies where tertiary education is provided, e.g. US Military Academy, US Naval Academy, US Air Force Academy, The Philippines Military Academy, Japanese Naval Academy, and the Royal Military College, Duntroon when undergraduate education was offered. See *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 17.
[66] Chia Han Sheng, "At the Pinnacle of West Point," *Army News*, Issue 167 (June-July 2009), p. 8.
[67] The OTA (non-graduating) is for training at military academies where tertiary education was not included such as RMC Sandhurst and subsequently RMC Duntroon with the establishment of the Australian Defence Force Academy. See *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 17.
[68] The Academic Training Award (ATA) was tenable at local and approved foreign universities.
[69] The SAF Local Study Award (LSA) introduced in 1987 to attract combat officers. It was initially offered only to OCTs within three to six months of NS but eventually opened to reserve officers and also NCOS who have performed well (1989). See "A chance to advance – the SAF Local Study Award for aspiring combat officers," *Pioneer* (March 1988), p. 26; "SAF launches new study scheme to woo promising A-level holders," *The Straits Times*, 6 March 1988, p. 1; "Local study award now open to undergrad reservist NCOs," *Pioneer* (April 1989), p. 13; and "Leader of Leaders: MINDEF/SAF Scholarships," *Scholars' Choice III* (The Straits Times), March 2010, p. 5.

scholarship system – was evident early on. Martin Choo, one of the earliest authors on the SAF, perceived that:

> "It is ultimately a question of commitment and dedication to the SAF. The last thing the SAF needs is clock-watching officers who are not interested in their work, but bent on spending much of their time counting the days when their contract with the SAF expires so that they can leave the military for greener pastures elsewhere."[70]

The second problem came from perceptions that an officer's career prospects were not based on abilities but on the scholarship received. Indeed, an SAF recruiter recently questioned what an individual considering regular service would:

> "... think if presented with the above scholarships and information concerning their terms and eligibility? Beyond any politically correct message, which we in the SAF tend to dismiss quickly in any case, can we truly expect him to give a sterling military performance, trusting that the award which he will obtain subsequently will not affect his career progression? If one isolates and points out the rare individual who painstakingly clawed his way up without the 'doors of opportunities' opened up by a more prestigious scholarship ... [one can cite] the prevalence of luck and low probability and thus concluding that this example is not reflective of the norm."[71]

Aside from those scholarship issues broad recruitment challenges remained and hit rock-bottom in 1981. The recruitment of combat officers fell from "199 in 1978, 145 in 1979, 74 in 1980, to a mere 32 in 1981" despite proactive political support and widespread publicity from advertisement campaigns.[72] Of the 450 recruited in this period only 10 were graduates.[73] The decision to raise the minimum education for officers from O- to A-level – or from ten to 12 years of pre-tertiary schooling – in 1980 played a part but so did uncompetitive salaries which were pegged at O-level expectations.[74] An increasing number of active service officers also "request[ed] early release or [declined] to extend their contracts, in most cases due to better terms offered them in the private sector."[75]

The solution was to raise salaries and benefits. The year 1982 proved a watershed for the SAF's recruitment efforts as MINDEF conducted its second salary restructuring exercise since 1969 and its first comprehensive revision of salaries and benefits.[76] Officer salaries increased "by an average of 26 per cent" as compensation for

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[70] Choo, *The Singapore Armed Forces*, p. 145.
[71] Lim Wee Tong, Stanley, "Discourse on Army Recruitment: In the Context of Generation Y," *Pointer*, Vol. 36, No. 3-4 (2011), p. 67.
[72] "Brighter Pay Days For SAF Officers," *Pioneer* (May 1982), pp. 2-3.
[73] "Salaries for Regular SAF Officers – 1982 Revision," *The Pointer: SAF Officers' Quarterly*, Special Issue (1982), p. 1.
[74] Ronnie Wai and Paul Jacob, "Pay boost for SAF officers," *The Straits Times*, 1 April 1982, p. 1.
[75] Ibid.
[76] In June 1969 the SAF revised the salary scheme by eliminating various allowances (e.g. marriage, ration, rent, utilities) and based the monthly pay for all service personnel on 'rank' and where applicable a

the "tough physical demands, irregular working hours and regimentation of military life."[77] LTAs and CPTs with tertiary qualifications received the greatest increases.[78] Scholar-officers received promotions more quickly than civil service scholars from the same cohort serving in other areas of government.[79] As a guide, civil service salaries were pegged to the private sector and in 1984 SAF officer salaries attracted a 20% premium above the civil service and 10% above the police force.[80] Such perks were also extended to graduates and civil servants who had performed well in NS and rejoined the SAF as regular officers.[81] Other tangible benefits included priority in purchasing government apartments, medical and dental care for officers and their immediate family members, recreational facilities and welfare amenities.[82] Salary increments have since taken place periodically with the last comprehensive revision in 1998 when all regular officers were placed on the Savings and Employment Retirement (SAVER) Plan designed to aid post-SAF career transitions. This was especially important for combat officers whose skills and experiences are "less directly marketable" and hence "the expected greater difficulties in career transition."[83]

'vocation' component (to reflect education, expertise). See William Campbell, "Pay conversion: Problems of adjustment," *The Straits Times*, 13 October 1970, p. 10.

[77] Ronnie Wai and Paul Jacob, "Pay boost for SAF officers," *The Straits Times*, 1 April 1982, p. 1; and "Towards A Dynamic, Thinking Man's Army," *The Straits Times*, 27 May 1982, p. 10.

[78] The revisions differentiated between graduates and non-graduates, and also degree classes within graduates (e.g. honours classes and basic) at junior officer ranks. Convergence took place in senior (MAJ and above) ranks so that there is no differentiation between graduates at the rank of MAJ, and at LTC a cessation differentiation between graduates and non-graduates. See Ronnie Wai and Paul Jacob, "Pay boost for SAF officers," *The Straits Times*, 1 April 1982, p. 1.

[79] Speech by PM Lee Kuan Yew at the SAF Day Dinner on 1 September 1981.

[80] In line with the civil service military officers also received bonuses predicated on individual performances and the national economy. Paul Jensen, "Getting the Best Brains into SAF," *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 1; "High priority on expertise," *The Straits Times*, 17 March 1984, p. 18; "Pay rise for servicemen," *Pioneer* (January 1994), p. 24; and "New Service Schemes for SAF officers," *Pioneer* (January 1994), p. 25.

[81] The Combat Graduate Officers Scheme was formulated to entice NSMen holding at least a second class upper honours degree to join the SAF at the rank of captain for an initial three-year contract with a salary pegged at 20% higher than the civil service. NSMen in the civil service and government affiliated units were offered a 20% pay increase if they accepted a three-year voluntary secondment to the SAF with job guarantees and no loss in salary increments should they opt to return to the civil service. Those who stayed on as a regular also had salaries backdated where applicable. See Ahmad Osman, "Join-As-Captain plan to attract top talent into SAF," *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1982, p. 1; and "Secondment scheme for graduate reservists," *The Straits Times*, 25 April 1982, p. 9.Ahmad Osman, "Join-As-Captain plan to attract top talent into SAF," *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1982, p. 1.

[82] "Are you suited for command?" *The Straits Times*, 5 December 1983, p. 21. Other perks included an increasing plethora of education opportunities and heraldic expansion. Prior to 2007, an officer with 25 years of service would receive two medals: The 'Good Conduct Medal' after five years and the 'Long Service and Good Conduct Medal' after 12 years with a clasp after 22 years. A third, the 'Long Service Medal' is bestowed after 30 years. 2007 heraldic revisions now schedule four medals within a 25-year career: The 'Good Conduct Medal' after five years, the 'Long Service and Good Conduct (10 Years) Medal' after 10 years with a clasp after 15 years, the 'Long Service and Good Conduct (20 Years) Medal' after 20 years, and the 'Long Service Medal (Military)' after 25 years. A clasp is added to the 'Long Service and Good Conduct (20 Years) Medal' after 30 years. See "We Wear 'em Ribbons with Pride!" *Navy News*, Issue No. 4 (2006), p. 11; and Gail Wan, "SAF Medals: Recognising dedication, reflecting the time," *Pioneer* (January 2007), pp. 7-9.

[83] "Savings & Employee Retirement Plan (SAVER)," *MINDEF Website*, 12 Jan 1998, www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/1998/jan/12jan98_nr.html (accessed 28 May 2014).

Generous salaries succeeded in stabilizing recruitment numbers but created concomitant problems. In 1982, Goh Chok Tong distinctly cautioned that:

> "Singaporeans are pragmatic people. They respond to tangible incentives. But we do not want to over-emphasise the material rewards. They are important but not the most important. To over-emphasise the monetary aspects is to stand the risk of attracting the wrong types of candidates."[84]

The problem is that metrics are almost non-existent and no one will ever know if this is so. However, getting the 'right people' seems a perennial concern as one former service chief attested:

> "The issue of grooming leadership is not so simple. There is the need to balance motivation and incentives. You get what you pay for but you cannot make salary so high that people only do it for the money. The career is front-loaded because if you cannot get people in you have no chance of getting people to stay."[85]

Others have voiced similar concerns. In 1991, BG (RET) then-MAJ Tay Lim Heng questioned:

> "... how to maintain military professionalism, with its implicit notions of self-sacrifice, in an affluent society in times of peace, where the pursuit of self-interest has become pervasive and all important ... most clearly manifested in the increasing need to resort to monetary incentives to recruit and retain regular service, just so to compensate for 'additional hardship' of military service. Monetary remunerations feature strongly in our recruitment advertisements."[86]

Tan Tai Yong agreed that "[m]ore and more the SAF must resort to monetary incentives and generous scholarships to recruit and retain regular servicemen as compensation for the hardship that is associated with military service."[87]

The SAF continued to struggle with challenges in retaining officers with temporary respite during infrequent economic downturns despite generous scholarship opportunities and handsome remuneration.[88] The government frankly acknowledged in the late 1990s that:

> "To have a strong SAF, MINDEF needs to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of good officers from each cohort. Past trends have shown that despite efforts to enhance the attractiveness of the SAF career. MINDEF is still falling short of its

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[84] "Let us find hearts and minds of SAF: Chok Tong," *The Straits Times*, 4 July 1982, p. 10; and Ronnie Wai, "Mass-media drive," *The Straits Times*, 7 January 1983, p. 18.
[85] Interview No. 15.
[86] Tay Lim Heng, "The Regular Military Career: From Profession to Occupation?" *Pointer*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (April-June 1991), pp. 96-7. For a more recent and congruent view on the importance of benefits to officer recruitment see Yip Kin Cheng, *The Professional Soldier: Organizational and Occupational Commitment of Regular Officers in the Singapore Army* (Singapore: Honours thesis at the National University of Singapore, 2002), p. 34.
[87] Tan, "Singapore," p. 289.
[88] Tay, "The Regular Military Career," p. 97.

> required recruitment and retention targets. If this trend continues, the future operational capability of the SAF will be affected."[89]

There are two key reasons why this is so. The first is the difficult mixture of limited knowledge of what the military career entailed coupled with negative NS experiences, society's lack of respect for the profession-of-arms, and the lure of long-term economic potential beyond the military career. For starters, the tyranny of peace has had a somewhat paradoxical effect on defence. Defence is portrayed as essential to Singapore but in a way congruent with insurance is seen by society as a luxury when its benefits are not immediately required. The 'premium' paid in economic terms of land, labour, and capital always seem too steep in peace. This combination created a milieu where members of other professions and civil servants "ordinarily enjoy esteem from the larger society, [but] regulars in the SAF apparently do not enjoy such esteem."[90]

Second, every regular officer must accept that the SAF career is not a life-long commitment and in all likelihood a 'second career' is necessary. The shifting mandatory ages of retirement have not helped. The pendulum has swung between "50 for MAJ and below, and 55 for LTC and above" to "retirement at 40 for MAJ and below and 45 for LTC and above."[91] In 1998 this was as early as 41 for LTC and below.[92] In 2010 the Enhanced Officer Scheme revised and standardized the retirement age for officers at 50.[93] MINDEF candidly acknowledged the difficulty of mid-life career transition:

> "Owing to the policy to keep the SAF young, younger officers do not see any incentive to stay until the age of 40 to 45 when transition to a second career will be more difficult. About two-thirds of every cohort leave after the first contract to start a new career."[94]

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[89] "Factsheet – Dr Tony Tan's Announcement at the SAF Day Dinner for Senior Officers," *MINDEF Website*, 4 July 1997, www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/1997/jul/04jul97_nr/04jul97_fs.html (accessed 28 May 2014).

[90] Chia Eng Seng, Aaron, "Are we Military Professionals or Professionals in the Military?" *Pointer*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (April-June 1997), p. 56.

[91] *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 24; "Pay rise for servicemen," *Pioneer* (January 1994), p. 24; and "New Service Schemes for SAF officers," *Pioneer* (January 1994), p. 25; and "New office formed to develop second careers for retiring personnel," *Pioneer* (March 1995), pp. 16-7.

[92] "SAF pay 'not competitive enough'," *The Straits Times*, 5 July 1997, p. 39; David Miller, "New SAF rewards package," *The Straits Times*, 13 January 1998, p. 3; "Career Management in 'The New Partnership'," *Army News* (September 1998), p. 5; and Ansley Ng, "New ranks, pay benchmark in SAF career scheme overhaul," *TODAY*, 8 October 2009, p. 6. Before 1998 officers were placed on one of the following service schemes: Contract (MINDEF and officer each contribute 15% of the officer's gross monthly salary to CPF with gratuity based on 9% of last drawn basic rank pay and length of service); Full-CPF (MINDEF and officer each contribute 20% of the officer's gross monthly salary into CPF and the officer receives a special gratuity calculated on last-drawn salary); and Pension (MINDEF and officer pay equal amounts into CPF based on a pensionable and non-pensionable component. On retirement pension calculated is based on pensionable component of last drawn salary). In 1998 a '23-/25-year route of advancement' was introduced meaning an 18 year old would retire at 41 (LTC and below) or 43 (pilots and ranks of COL and above).

[93] At the time of writing the retirement age ceilings were: 50 for Specialists; 55 for Warrant Officers; 50 for Officers; 60 for Military Experts, and; 62 for civilian employees.

[94] "Factsheet – Dr Tony Tan's Announcement at the SAF Day Dinner for Senior Officers," *MINDEF Website*, 4 July 1997.

Whether monetary-based incentives and the raised retirement age to 50 – perhaps a late transition to a second career and yet too soon to retire – have improved officer retention rates is unknown.

The difficulties associated with mid-life career transition are exacerbated by the military profession which offered limited skills beyond the oft-quoted 'leadership and management'. Even scholar-officers who in the past had their career transition "managed in a more structured and systematic" manner faced the need for current and relevant skills and knowledge in the highly competitive job market.[95] In 2006 *The Straits Times* painted this broad picture:

> "Things are getting tougher for military or civil service high-fliers nearing or past their shelf life. Previously, most were absorbed by government-linked companies (GLCs) or statutory boards when it was time to leave. But these days, GLCs ... prefer to hire those who can hit the ground running from Day One. These would be people with experience in global banking, financial services, mergers and acquisitions, leisure entertainment and customer relations. Unfortunately, those leaving the military and civil service lack that global perspective and struggle to keep up ... Finding them a job in the private sector is also a problem. Singapore's contract manufacturing industry is shrinking and the growth of home-grown companies with pockets deep enough to hire such high-calibre candidates is just not able to keep pace with the conveyor belt of government scholars today."[96]

While this is not necessarily true of all officers, the potential negative publicity generated from a community of unemployed ex-regulars obliged MINDEF to act. The Career Transition Resource Centre was established in 2009 to aid around three-fifths of the annual "100 to 200" retirees across all ranks to ease into second careers as "supervisors, managers or directors in defence manufacturers, banks and security firms, while others set up their own businesses."[97]

4.3 Primary Motivation

The interview participants were motivated to join the SAF from a combination of primary and secondary factors despite the recruitment challenges faced by the armed forces. Primary factors are necessary and sufficient for an individual to join the SAF. Secondary motivations, on the other hand, are necessary but insufficient on their own merits. Five primary motivation categories surfaced from constant data comparison. First, the scholarships proved the greatest lure for those who qualified. Second, non-scholarship recipients viewed the SAF as the best opportunity at that point in time.

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[95] Goh Chin Lian, "Army man taking over as defence force chief," *The Straits Times,* 7 February 2003, p. 4.
[96] Ho Ai Li and Susan Long, "Don't knock us, our rice bowls are not iron," *The Straits Times*, 16 December 2006.
[97] Jermyn Chow, "8 in 10 land new jobs within 6 months," *The Straits Times*, 27 December 2011.

Third, the military offered an atypical medical career for MOs. The fourth motivation came from opportunities to work on cutting-edge technology and gain technical competence which attracted the engineers and those in platform-centric vocations. Finally, there were the few who harboured genuine interests in the military from an early age.

4.3.1 Scholarships

The opportunity for tertiary education (especially overseas) enticed many a scholar-officer into the SAF. Although NS channelled all male citizens into the SAF, nothing obliged them to stay beyond statutory limits. Military scholarships commenced as a way for the SAF to attract and hopefully retain its fair share of the country's limited pool of 'top brains'. If the SAF did not secure their services another employer certainly would through an ever increasing plethora of scholarships with more and more tenable overseas and some even bond-free. It was envisaged that these top brains would in turn attract others and in due time create a 'talent pipeline' for the SAF. This would also eradicate the stigma that society's finest avoided uniformed service. These individuals are undoubtedly book-smart and possessed top grades which were once the top discriminating factor in the search for scholar-officers. This evolved into a holistic approach which considered Extra-Curricular Activities (ECAs) that illuminated leadership potential (e.g. school student council, prefect etc) and military-relevant attributes (e.g. sports, uniform groups).

At the very basic level, one can understand that the motivation presented by the opportunity to earn a university degree on a government ticket. This was especially noteworthy for the lower socio-economic class which in the days before Singapore's economic success encompassed virtually every scholar-officer. As one SAFOS recipient surmised:

> "It benefits the students by getting an overseas education they otherwise wouldn't be able to afford and on the part of the government, its way to attract the best and the brightest; it benefits both sides."[98]

This simple explanation has resonated strongly. MG (RET) Lim Neo Chian (SAFOS 1972) candidly stated his motivation was the opportunity for tertiary education overseas while his $1,500 monthly salary (a large amount in those days) contributed

[98] Jennifer Sabin, "Countries fund future leaders' Yale study," *Yale Daily News*, 26 March 2004, www.yaledailynews.com/news/2004/mar/26/countries-fund-future-leaders-yale-study (accessed 28 May 2014).

the financial needs of his father and six siblings.[99] For BG (NS) then-MAJ Gary Ang (SAFOS 1986), the scholarship met twin aspirations:

> "My parents would not have been able to send me overseas; the SAF sent me to Oxford, one of the best universities in the world … I also had aspirations of serving the nation. The scholarship gave me the opportunity to see the big picture of life in Singapore and why defence is the backbone of the country. Not many people have the chance to understand the importance of military defence."[100]

Such sentiments echoed with former COA (2010-1) MG (NS) Chan Chun Sing (SAFOS 1988) whose mother struggled single-handedly as a cleaner and machine operator to raise him and his sister.[101] "When your back is against the wall and you don't have many options, your mind is more focused right?" said the incumbent cabinet minister. "Also, if you see your mother working very hard to bring up the family, and if your heart is not made of stone, you'd want to do something."[102] He harboured a childhood ambition to be a librarian but credited the President Scholarship and SAFOS which allowed the top student from Raffles to realize his "ridiculous dream" for a world-class education in economics.[103] Then-CPT Chan reasoned upon his return from Cambridge University that he "accepted the SAF Scholarship because it offered the best 'package deal' – not just the chance to pursue [his] subject of choice in a respected university, but also a very well-planned route of advancement in the SAF."[104]

The scholarship is a primary motivation because its presence or absence often, *but not always*, determined whether an individual opted for regular service. This explained why the tiered-scholarship system has endured and flourished since 1971. Only few would say that the scholarship was not a primary motivation. For example, BG (RET) then-OCT Wesley D'Aranjo (SAFOS 1972), who also received a dual Colombo Plan scholarship, maintained: "I've always wanted to make a career in the army. It's an interesting life. I guess the scholarship is more of an incentive to me."[105] Yet for the other flag-officers, the attributes of a scholarship are increasingly multifaceted beyond the educational opportunities. Two characteristics are particularly notable. First, scholarship applications took precedence over inclinations for a military career. The opportunities and benefits were too good to pass up and there was 'nothing to lose'. The scholarship application net was cast far and wide and decisions based on what was

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[99] "From Chief to Chairman," *The Straits Times*, 24 February 2001, p. 24; and Tan, *100 Inspiring Rafflesians*, p. 132.
[100] "Winning an edge in life," *Pioneer* (November 1996), p. 25.
[101] "Chun Sing: 'Ridiculous dream' comes true," *The Straits Times*, 20 August 1988, p. 18.
[102] Wong Sher Maine, "The boy who scored with Ds," *Voices: Magazine for the Central Singapore District*, Iss. 61 (November-December 2011), p. 8.
[103] Wong, "The boy who scored with Ds," p. 8; and "Chun Sing: 'Ridiculous dream' comes true," *The Straits Times*, 20 August 1988, p. 18.
[104] "No blues at all about scholarship and career choices," *The Straits Times*, 20 February 1995, p. 4.
[105] "From a mangrove swamp to a military byword," *Pioneer* (July 1972), p. 19.

reeled in. Second, the prestige associated with a scholarship was a differentiating factor for those with multiple offers. A pecking order established itself after the initial batches of scholarships were awarded. The nascent manifestation of this order started with government declarations, the word of mouth, eligibility, and associated benefits. In time, the success of earlier recipients cemented the prestige of a particular scholarship.

Nothing to lose

There was nothing to lose and very much to gain given the primacy of education in sorting out potential members of Singapore's civil and military elite from the remainder of the public service. In colonial times, "those who had performed best in school exams were admitted to Singapore's elite school, Raffles, and then went to England for further training, with the expectation that they would return and serve the government."[106] In early post-independent Singapore the relatively small crème de la crème of pre-university students were enticed into government service through the President Scholarship and the Colombo Plan Scholarship tenable at universities across The Commonwealth. Military scholarships arrived belatedly in 1971. Most families then could ill-afford tertiary education for their children. Local tertiary education was limited to the University of Singapore and Nantah while foreign institutions were a pipedream for most.[107]

Over time, the concentration of top students in only a handful of top schools led to concerns over potential breeding grounds for "elitism and complacency."[108] Eligible students were encouraged to accept scholarships to maintain or improve the standing of their respective schools. Events are held annually for organizations to court students with scholarships and challenge those with potential to consider possible futures. Male students shortlisted as potential recipients of PSC-administered scholarships based on school assessments and ECAs are then enlisted for NS in December of a given year.[109] This schedule allowed the SAF to assess and confirm potential military scholars based on performances in BMT (December to March) and the junior term in OCS (March-

[106] Ezra F. Vogel, *The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 78-9.
[107] The University of Malaya in Singapore (1949-61) became the University of Singapore (1962-79). The latter and Nanyang University (Nantah) subsequently merged to form the present day National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1980. Part of NUS formed Nanyang Technological Institute in 1981 which later in 1991 became the present day Nanyang Technological University (NTU). See Low Kar Tiang and Peter K. G. Dunlop (eds.), *Who's Who in Singapore* (Singapore: Who's Who Publishing, 2000), pp. xix-xx.
[108] Woo Sian Boon, "Spread young talent among schools," *TODAY*, 30 August 2012, p. 4. The top schools are Raffles Institution (RI), Hwa Chong Institution (HCI), Victoria Junior College (VJC), National Junior College (NJC), and Temasek Junior College (NJC).
[109] These scholarships presently include: the President's Scholarship, the SAF Overseas Scholarship, the SPF Overseas Scholarship, the Overseas Merit Scholarship, the Local-Overseas Merit Scholarship, the Local Merit Scholarship (Medicine), and the Singapore Government Scholarship (Open).

August). Dreams take a step closer to reality (or become nightmares) when examination results are released in the first quarter of the next calendar year. By July, the annual list of selected PSC scholarship holders is released and the overwhelming majority commenced their undergraduate studies between August and October the same year.

This schedule is double-edged for the defence establishment. The advantage of conscription allowed close scrutiny of all potential candidates and their mandatory attendance at various recruitment-oriented events. In practical terms an OCS 'scholars platoon' of individuals earmarked for the SAFOS, PSC merit, and Colombo Plan scholarships was conceived back in 1972 "to induce 'top brains' already serving under National Service to stay on as regulars."[110] These 'scholars' were put through their paces and tested for leadership potential. It proved far from 'easy' as one from the initial platoon reflected: "Some of the other platoons thought we were privileged. But in fact, the pressure was intense: if we didn't perform the program would have been canned."[111] The platoon has since evolved into a present day company-sized 'wing' of OCS at SAFTI MI.[112]

The disadvantage is that the SAF usually only has one chance to net potential scholars, a difficulty exacerbated by increasing competition from other scholarship. For example, for an admiral whose parents ran a Laundromat, poor performances during internal school assessments meant missing out on top-tier scholarships which would have sunk any thoughts of regular service:

> "I was a unique case. When I applied for the scholarship most of my contemporaries had secured scholarships already. I did not do well for my school-level exams in my last year but my A's were superb surprising everybody including myself. But by then all the scholarship applications were already closed. So I applied for it (military scholarship). I think the recruiters were happy to get a crop like me. If I had done well (for the school-level exams) I would have taken another scholarship and the navy career would not have happened."[113]

This instance proved fortuitous for both him and the navy but the SAF cannot rely on such instances to woo talent.

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[110] "From a Mangrove Swamp to a Military Byword," *Pioneer* (July 1972), p. 18.
[111] Li Xue Ying, "Star Platoon," *The Straits Times*, 22 August 2004, p. 12. In the first Scholars Platoon of 43 cadets, 42 eventually passed the cadet course. The single failure reportedly committed suicide later on.
[112] Officer Cadet Trainees (OCTs) in OCS were once organized by 'companies' and headed by a 'senior' CPT or MAJ. In the 2000s they were redesignated 'wings' under the supervision of a 'senior' MAJ or LTC. The change in nomenclature did not affect subdivisions which remained as 'platoons' (led by a LTA/CPT platoon commander) and 'sections' (led by 2LT/LTA section instructor). Potential scholars were once attached to 'Charlie', 'Foxtrot' and 'Delta' companies at different points in SAF history. 'Delta' wing is presently the designated scholar wing with an annual intake of OCTs in March and almost exclusively manned by platoon commanders who are themselves recipient of SAF scholarships or graduates of foreign military academies.
[113] Interview No. 17.

For most of the military elites who were also top students their part was simple. One reasoned: "Results allowed you to apply so [I applied] for SAFOS. It was prestigious and there was nothing to lose."[114] The attraction of government-sponsored studies was there for another even if it was not a top tier scholarship: "Of course. It made sense to do a degree so I went to university. No ifs or buts."[115] The outcome at best would be a scholarship congruent with career aspirations (if any) at the point of leaving school. At worst, one decided on employment or local studies if the prospects for self-funded overseas education were ruled out. For the top students this was a rare contemplation. Consider this officer who harboured ambitions for a medical career:

> "I was given brochures for SAFOS in school. Being one of the top students the principal gave us information on the PSC selection. My father encouraged me to take up the scholarship. If the government is willing to pay me to study why not? <smiles> I did not consider a career in the SAF but the scholarship came along so why not? I had no particular ambition. I went through a couple of interviews. It was provisional based on results and interviews. Of course performance in OCS. They (PSC) wanted me to do management studies but I thought: 'What the hell is management studies?' I also received information on PSC scholarships immediately after the medical thing fell through. We were invited to apply for local scholarships. They said: 'We give you a scholarship, just tell us what you want to do'. <smiles>"[116]

Former CNV (2007-11) Rear-Admiral (two-star) (RADM2) Chew Men Leong (SAFOS 1987) also considered medicine but the issue of affordability intervened:

> "I joined the RSN while I was still in Officer Cadet School. Honestly at that point, I had no intention to join the SAF at all because I was more interested in pursuing medicine. I came from a pure science class, and my friends and I wanted to be doctors. Medicine is a good career with good prospects and you get to help people. However, I also realised that I could not afford medical school because bursaries and scholarships are very limited. Having said that, the navy was actually recruiting and they offered me a scholarship plus an adventure of a lifetime. They told me I could go to the UK and train with the Royal Navy as a Midshipman (MID). It was difficult weighing between being a doctor and joining the SAF, but in the end I took a leap of faith. I joined the navy in 1986, took a year to complete my MIDS course and in time was interviewed and offered the SAF Overseas Scholarship. It was truly an opportunity of a lifetime and after that leap, I have not looked back since."[117]

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[114] Interview No. 12.
[115] Interview No. 22.
[116] Interview No. 21.
[117] Casey Rafael Tan, "At the pinnacle of the RSN," *Navy News*, Issue No. 1 (2011), p. 33. Some other SAFOS recipients who once harboured a career in medicine include: MAJ Yoon Kam Choon (SAFOS 1985), COL Frederick Chew (SAFOS 1994), and MAJ (NS) Kevin Siew (SAFOS 2002). See "Medicine's loss was the Navy's gain," *Scholars' Choice: A Special Feature on Scholarships (The Straits Times)*, 17 March 1994, p. 4; "The SAF Overseas Scholarships," *Pioneer* (October 1994), p. 14; and "Leaders in the making," *Army News*, Issue No. 89 (Aug-Sep 2002), p. 3.

For another officer a SAF scholarship similarly clinched his services that would otherwise have been directed elsewhere:

> "I started off life with changing ambitions: lawyer, psychologist, cartoonist, and architect. I got good grades and secured a Colombo Plan scholarship for physical sciences. The SAF also offered and gave me the choice to study anything. Growing up I was fascinated with all the great scientists like Oppenheimer so I decided to take the SAF offer. My obligation was to be a good soldier but any of my secondary school classmates will tell you they never expected me to be in the SAF. <laughs> I didn't want to join the army. I am the last person you would think who would join the army. It was easy to get straight A's in school. The defining moment for me was the scholarship to [a military academy]. I did not know what it meant to be in a military college … It seemed odd to all my friends and no one really thought I would join. I was ill-disciplined even though I was in the Boy Scouts."[118]

Even if one applied for a scholarship there were no obligations attached at any point prior to contract signing. In certain cases this worked out well for both the individual and the SAF:

> "I applied for the SAF OTA scheme in the hope of attending the military academies in either Germany or Japan. I was asked to attend the interview but it so happened that the day before the interview I received the admission to NUS medical school. So I informed PSC that I wanted to be a doctor and then join SAF later. The other option was to study to be a vet (veterinary surgeon) in Australia. I was aware that SAF was not offering medicine [scholarships] (at that point in time). My interest and passion was to do medicine, then the military, and then the public service."[119]

<u>The Pecking Order</u>

A decision must eventually be made even though an individual had 'nothing to lose' by making a scholarship application. A pecking order is frequently utilized to discriminate and rank the respective offers predicated on the awarding organization, and the 'exclusiveness' – in terms of quality and quantity – of recipients which is in turn reflected in the terms and benefits.[120] This practice established itself early on. Leong Choon Cheong's 1978 micro-sociological study of youth in the SAF recounted that then-OCT Lee Hsien Yang "believe[d] in pursuing his interests, either at the practical or the research level and these, at the moment, are Physics and Engineering."[121] Several years later, however, then-MAJ Lee Hsien Yang (SAFOS 1976)

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[118] Interview No. 28.
[119] Interview No. 18.
[120] At the apex is the President's Scholarship which does not take applications and is awarded by the Public Service Commission based on their assessment of the annual A-level cohort. At one time the SAFOS also did not require an application but this policy has since been altered. See "For potential SAF scholars – no application required," *Pioneer* (June 1992), p. 26.
[121] Leong, *Youth in the Army*, p. 187.

revealed that his decision to join the army was an 'obvious choice' as "[i]t seemed to be what a lot of people were doing and the SAF Scholarship was one of the most prestigious awards to apply for."[122] LG (RET) then-COL Lim Chuan Poh (SAFOS 1980) also considered the quality of recipients:

> "The army had a good reputation when I joined. Many of the best people in my school, Raffles Institution, had gone before me. But it was in OCS that I really appreciate the infantry vocation … The SAF scholarship is definitely a premium scholarship. One important question is 'why the SAF?' It depends on how a person wants to contribute to society. If you want to contribute to the nation, the SAF scholarship or PSC scholarship is the best way to do so." [123]

The interview participants who joined the SAF via the NS and scholarship route did so between 1971 and 1981. The scholarship hierarchy in this time frame was limited to various offerings from the PSC, the SAF (such as SAFOS and OTA), and the then-Colombo Plan. Despite the short list a pecking order existed. One officer experienced the loss of the family home during the Bukit Ho Swee fire in 1961. He hailed from a poor and large family with eight siblings and explained his decision:

> "I just wanted to fly. I wanted to fly and be a test pilot because it allows me to push the envelope and exploring flying close to the edge. I cannot attribute this to any one 'trigger' point. Perhaps was it subconsciously linked to my elder brother's ambition to be a pilot but we did not talk much about it. Growing up this was my aim so I made sure of my physical condition was right, especially my eyesight. Besides that it was just to study hard and enjoy life. <laughs> … My eldest brother joined the air force after his A-levels but he was not selected for pilot training so he joined SIA (Singapore International Airlines) instead. I did not talk much about military life with my brother. Actually I did not have much knowledge about the SAF at all. I was applying for scholarships after my A's and my brother was in the process of joining SIA. He had a $50 monthly trainee allowance. There was no way I could study on a 'papa' (parental-funded) scholarship. I applied for a range of scholarships including the Colombo Plan. I selected Naval Architecture at Newcastle because I did my research and realized not many applied for the course so [there was a] higher chance (of receiving the scholarship). <laughs> I just applied for the scholarships and then decide later (once offers were made). There were a lot of uncertainties. I selected the SAF scholarship because it provided a salary and an allowance. I was prepared to test it due to my outdoor nature. They asked for my choices and I put down air force, commando, and then navy. It allowed me to fulfil my desire (to fly) and also help support my family. I later found out the British government was paying for my studies at (a British university). <laughs> I think they gave quite a few and so some were allocated to the SAF. <laughs>"[124]

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[122] "Major Lee leads 46th Battalion," *The Straits Times*, 27 April 1985, p. 17.
[123] "Ready for any mission," *The Straits Times (Scholarship Special)*, 7 March 1997, p. 15.
[124] Interview No. 25.

Another officer who was the seventh of ten children with only one bread winner gave a similar account of maximising scholastic opportunities:

> "After OCS I went to [a battalion] as a PC. It was a good few months. Sometime in November [that year] MINDEF asked if I was keen on the Overseas Training Award. OPC (Officers' Personnel Centre which used to managed the careers of all regular SAF officers) at CMPB was in charge of the admin[istration]. Ya, why not? If it allows me to earn a degree within a military environment, why not? The options available included Duntroon, Japan, West Point, and Sandhurst … Although I did not get SAFOS I also secured a Colombo Plan Scholarship for Manchester University in the UK or UNSW (University of New South Wales in Australia) for engineering. I could have disrupted from fulltime NS to study at either but since [the opportunity to attend a world-renowned military academy] came [along] I took the OTA … I was open to either Colombo or OTA and not too concerned of a uniform or civilian career. Both provided a scholarship, monthly allowance, and importantly allowed me to study engineering. <pause> Plus both had a bonded period attached. <smiles>"[125]

A third officer also used a pecking order but his intention was not just to secure an education but one that would immerse him in a completely different culture beyond the confines of South-East Asia:

> "I did not decide to sign-on because of the military. My aim was more to head overseas for exposure. If I did not secure the OTA I would not have joined the army. The other scholarships available then included the Colombo Plan, SAF, and PSC. It was during a scholarship talk that the OTA was introduced with opportunities for Sandhurst (UK), Philippines, Japan, Australia, and India. I was interested in Sandhurst, Australia, and Japan as it was an opportunity to be schooled (further) overseas."[126]

The final example is an officer who encapsulated the 'ambition' of doing well in school and also subjected the scholarship hunt to a pecking order:

> "I did not really have any specific ambitions in school. The aim was to do well and secure a scholarship. The top scholarships were the SAFOS and the OMS. The Colombo plan was seen as a second-tier scholarship. I was open to a military scholarship. In school I was in NCC and also active in sports as a cross-country runner. If I did not secure the SAFOS I would have considered the OMS or the OTA. My parents were ok with me taking up the scholarship and a career in the military. If I did not get a scholarship then I would not be a regular but I would still put in my best effort during NS. The SAFOS was an extremely important part of my decision to sign-on. The lure was the opportunity for overseas studies. It was also the promise of a new experience and independence."[127]

These insights highlighted the importance of the scholarship in enticing and securing the services of bright individuals who would eventually become military elites.

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[125] Interview No. 14.
[126] Interview No. 11.
[127] Interview No. 02.

There were, however, individuals who took up scholarships with the intention of checking the contractual-binding boxes before leaving active service. They are frequently depicted as 'not interested' and 'lazy' by superiors despite the great resources expended by the state. Cabinet minister BG (NS) Tan Chuan-Jin has consistently addressed this point. Even as a young LTA he emphasized that in taking up a scholarship: "The most important thing is that the person must be interested in carving a career in the SAF. If he signs-on, he must be prepared for the challenges ahead."[128] The benefits and limits of the scholarship scheme are further explored in subsequent chapters but for now its importance in addressing the 'motivation to join' is adequate.

4.3.2 The Military Solution

While an increasing number of military elites took the NS-Scholarship route a minority did not. These individuals were instead motivated by their unique circumstances and sought to make the best out of a given situation where the 'solution' was to join the SAF. This category included both non-graduates, graduates on SAF study awards (lower-tier 'scholarships') tenable at local universities, and non-SAF scholarship recipients. What mattered most were the employment prospects, the people they led, and the military life.

One officer lost his father during his O-level year which left him and 12 siblings to meet household subsistence. Government policies had just given birth to conscription and after performing well during NS weighed his options:

> "I wanted to go to university. I was half-divided after NS I would go but things changed and I stayed-on. Why did I join the SAF? <pause> First, the pay was relatively good compared to outside. An OCT was $360 a month. A 2LT $460. Second, I liked the outdoors. It suited me. I grew up in a mixed kampong-city environment and took on a lot of leadership roles in school. I was the athletics 'A' division champion. In secondary school I was the captain of the football (soccer) team, Queen's Scout, Head Prefect, athletics. I used to be the second best high jumper but today I cannot clear two feet. <laughs> I was relatively active then … [a department head in MINDEF later] offered me the opportunity to go to university but I decided it was wasting time."[129]

For RADM2 (RET) Kwek Siew Jin, who lost his father in secondary three, the choices were narrowed by the 'push' from serving as a conscript in the army and the 'pull' of a regular career in the navy when his flying aspirations failed to take off:

> "I had to look for a job after my HSC (Higher School Certificate, an A-level equivalent). National Service was beckoning. I thought that instead of spending three years in the army as a foot soldier, I could do better by signing up as a

[128] "SAF Scholars," *Pioneer* (April 1991), p. 18.
[129] Interview No. 13.

> regular in the SAF for six years. I had always dreaded joining the army and having to crawl in the wet mud and dirt in a mosquito-infested jungle."[130]

The former CNV (1992-6) elaborated:

> "When I was in school, I had always wanted to be an Electrical Engineer. However, I was not able to secure a scholarship to continue my studies after my A-levels. My family was poor and could not afford to support me through university, so I was faced with the prospect of serving two and a half years of full-time National Service. Two choices were available to me then: do full-time NS and then go to University if possible, or join the SAF as a regular. I decided to take the latter as the better option available to me at that time. Although I applied initially to be a pilot, and had passed all the medicals and tests, the Air Force decided that I was too vertically-challenged to meet their needs, and turned me down. Not wanting to be an Army officer, I joined the Navy."[131]

A third officer who was the middle of three children with a housewife mother and father who worked as a clerk spurned the option of returning to the civil service. Superiors noticed his positive NS performance and encouraged him to stay in uniform, an eventual decision aided by a lack of attractive alternatives:

> "Growing up I did not have any high ambition. After my A-levels I had a clerical job at MOH (Ministry of Health). I was NS liable but enlisted under the civil servant category so I was on civil service pay. This meant I received $180 a month instead of $60. Through NS I had no intention to sign-on but I did so on the last day before I ROD (completed fulltime NS). The Head MPO (manpower officer) asked me about signing-on. It was straight away pensionable service then. I was the SOH … I had job offers from the outside but there was nothing interesting. I had a job offer at National Semiconductor as supervisor. What I wanted was to be a SIA steward but I did not get the job. The MOH position was also kept for me until ROD. Life would have been different and I would not have realized my potential without the SAF. I would definitely be less confident. Signing-on was simply the best thing I could do at that point in time."[132]

This need for a job and the role of superiors resonated with BG (RET) Ong Boon Hwee who played an instrumental role in the 1997 non-combatant evacuation of Singaporean citizens from Cambodia:

> "I was enlisted in end 1974, Boxing Day 1974, and completed my National Service full time. Almost at the end of the two and a half years National Service, I signed on. That was about 1976. So, why did I sign on … If I may put it in crisp form, number 1 (sic): the need. I needed a job, to support my family then. Number two: the inclination, meaning that I felt through serving my national

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[130] Tan, *100 Inspiring Rafflesians*, p. 96.
[131] Speech by RADM2 (RET) Kwek Siew Jin, President of the National Council of Social Service, at the Singapore Institute of Management University Convocation Ceremony 2011 (The Grand Hall, SIM HQ, Singapore on 7 October 2011), www.ncss.gov.sg/About_NCSS/download_file.asp?speechid=121.
[132] Interview No. 09. The date an individual completed fulltime NS was known as ROD or 'Run Out Date'. This had the negative connotation that conscripts could not wait to 'run out' of the army. The nomenclature changed in 1994 to the more positive sounding ORD or 'Operationally Ready Date'. Similarly, the term 'Reservist' was replaced with 'Operationally Ready National Serviceman' to convey the positive idea that conscripts were not second-tier 'reserves' but held an 'operationally ready' frontline role.

> service, having been commissioned, having led as a platoon commander, having been through overseas exercises, battalion exercises and so on, and having seen the way that I was able to perform in the military field related work, and having seen the effects of men and also superiors telling me that I should sign on; … I think I had the inclination for the military. So, there was this interest in the work, the yearning for adventure, which was reason number two. And number three: a sense of purpose, and indeed a tinge of duty, honour, country. So, reasons for joining the Army: need, inclination, a sense of purpose."[133]

Another general, the only child of a bus inspector and housewife, grew up in a Ponggol *kampong* and considered the military as a means to further his studies overseas:

> "During NS I was not interested in making the military a career. It was something we all had to do and so you gave it your best shot. During the last six months of service I was selected to attend SATO (School of Advanced Training for Officers) as a NSF so this was an indicator that I was doing quite OK. I considered signing-on but only on a short-term contract. Finally, I signed a three-year contract one day before ORD (as ROD is known since 1994) and this was driven by two circumstances. First, I qualified for entry into an arts degree but all the while I was in science. At that time arts was viewed as for those who 'cannot make it'. I toyed with the idea of saving some money and then heading overseas for my studies. Second, I asked for an eight-to-five job and my request was granted when I was posted to [a staff appointment]. I took a City and Guilds certificate for computer programming. Back then it was COBOL programming. It was the way people were heading so I took this course via evening classes. The three-year contract was also a way for me to save money to get an overseas education."[134]

Finally, a fifth officer performed so well as a PC that he was judged one of the best officers in the battalion and also attended the SATO course as a NSF. It was circumstances in the immediate aftermath of leaving the army that provided the catalyst to return:

> "I was actually offered a local study award but I did not take it up because it did not cross my mind to be a regular. I wanted to go through NS … (but) [w]hat should I do after completing NS? Should I go back to the farm and help my family? An insurance (sales) manager recruited me during my leave period before ROD. I found [insurance sales] very mercenary. It was like asking one person for a bowl of rice. I saw the satisfaction in the SAF of leading men, of achieving results. Then one day my CO … called me and asked: 'Do you want to come back?' He immediately spoke to OPC and arranged for an interview … OPC (subsequently) offered me a contract including backdated pay for 9 months which was the middle of my PC tour."[135]

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[133] Ng et al., *Called to Lead*, p. 24.
[134] Interview No. 06.
[135] Interview No. 05.

The satisfaction of leading men was most apparent for those in the army especially within the combat arms (infantry, commando, guards, and armour). A young 2LT serving as a PC is tasked to lead around 30 soldiers, something counterparts in the navy and air force – perhaps with the exception of air defence artillery and field defence units – will not be responsible for in terms of manpower. Satisfaction in leading men comes not only in meeting mission success but also in looking after them. One general took this as a personal mission:

> "I harboured the ambition to be a RSAF pilot but it waned and eventually gave way to something of greater importance. I dropped the idea because I gained the satisfaction of influencing people in front of me and making it better for them. It was about making the difference for NSFs in the platoon who did not want to be there. This is the reason I decided to sign-on and stay-on. To make things better for them. I decided to sign-on one month before we were to be commissioned. I was offered the Local Study Award and signed the contract in (year X) but it would take five months before there was confirmation that I was a regular due to background checks by MSD (Military Security Department). And this has to be the way."[136]

Even non-SAF scholarship recipients were not spared the need to make the best out of their respective situations and circumstances varied.[137] For one, the option could have been to complete NS and serve out his bond elsewhere in a civilian occupation. This, however, proved unpalatable:

> "In those days returning scholars had to serve three years NS. When I returned home (to Singapore) after my studies I harboured the desire to serve in the navy. If I was going to spend three years in NS I might as well be in the navy as an NSF after which I could work in the port industry or for shipping companies. I wrote in (to the authorities) but they never replied. I was posted to OCS and during the SMC (Standard Military Course) I asked myself: 'What am I doing here? Why muck around the army for three years?' I would rather be in the navy but I had to be a regular and the navy intake was in December. In those days a lot of people came in (to the navy) as engineers so I asked if I could come in as an engineer or logistician but I was told 'no' I had to be in combat. So I signed-up as a regular on pensionable service. It did not bother me. If it did not work out I could always resign."[138]

There was no breakage of the scholarship bond as the PSC was flexible enough to accommodate this officer's desire to serve in uniform demonstrated by him signing-on

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[136] Interview No. 07.
[137] The practice of Colombo Plan scholars opting to transfer their bonds to the SAF commenced early in the 1970s. One of the first was Lye Heong Sai who completed a Bachelor of Applied Science (First Class Honours) in Electrical Engineering from the University of British Columbia in Canada. He joined the navy as a Weapons and Electrical Officer serving in the Systems Integration and Management team after attending the weapons and electrical engineers application course at the Royal Naval Engineering College at Manadom, Plymouth in the UK.
See "Two officers for technical courses overseas," *Pioneer* (March 1973), p. 23; and "Maritime Command's Able Seaman," *Pioneer* (April 1974), pp. 3-4.
[138] Interview No. 15.

in the SAF. For another officer, his decision to return to the SAF despite having completed NS and an outstanding non-SAF scholarship bond was made within the context of a trough in the economic cycle. He benefitted from personal experiences, information, and the PSC's willing accommodation:

> "I had doubts where PSC would put me in. One of my friends told me about the air force. He was happy being there. It brought me back to my NS days. The RSAF also gave recruitment talks in university. They were trying to ramp up engineers in the air force, the air engineering officer vocation. So I applied in university or there about and in May (of year X) signed-on. The PSC bond was transferred to RSAF."[139]

The SAF provided the 'solution' for these individuals but each had various factors that contributed to their unique circumstances for doing so. For some it met the need for employment. For others it was about making a difference in the lives of those they led.

4.3.3 Not a standard medical career

The MOs who became military elites as the Chief of Medical Corps (CMC) were exposed to career opportunities in the SAF after (re)enlistment upon completion of their medical degrees and houseman training. It could be during MOCC or subsequently during their first tour. SAF scholarships for medicine are a relatively recent initiative such that none of the six officers who made one-star as CMC (first in 1994 and the latest in 2013) were recipients. The majority also did not receive bonded government scholarships for their studies. Scholarships certainly did not entice them to sign-on nor was it a matter of meeting bond obligations. These doctors were motivated by the opportunities to utilize their medical skills in different settings – beyond "four walls and a patient" – even though more lucrative pathways lay elsewhere.[140]

The late BG (RET) (Dr) Lim Meng Kin (1950-2013) joined the SAF in 1975 motivated by the unique opportunity to serve Singapore in a medical capacity. The pioneer in aviation medicine cemented the foundations for the SAF Medical Corps (SAFMC) to build upon during his nine-year tenure as CMC (1986-95).[141] When the Hotel New World (HNW) collapsed in 1986 Lim embodied 'leadership by example' and crawled through tunnels to save trapped survivors despite his status as a senior officer.[142] Lim, together with another CMC (1995-2001) BG (RET) (Dr) Lionel Lee and a

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[139] Interview No. 21.
[140] Interview No. 20.
[141] Gan Wee Hoe, Robin Low Chin Howe, and Jarnail Singh, "Aviation Medicine: global historical perspectives and the development of Aviation Medicine alongside the growth of Singapore's aviation landscape," *Singapore Medical Journal*, Vol. 52, Iss. 5 (May 2011), pp. 324-9.
[142] Lai Yew Kong, "Nation salutes rescue heroes," *The Straits Times*, 26 April 1986, p. 1; Lee Siew Hua, "Families share joy of their brave men," *The Straits Times*, 27 April 1986, p. 9; "SAF needs more medical volunteers," *The Straits Times*, 29 March 1987, p. 12; "A doctor's anguish," *The Straits Times*, 5 September

third MO were decorated for their tireless efforts.[143] The disaster also proved decisive for the late BG (RET) (Dr) Wong Yu Sie (1960-2010) to contribute his medical skills in uniform. The PSC Local Merit (Medicine) scholar was on track to complete NS and serve his bond in a government ministry but instead transferred his service to the SAF. A eulogy carried by the Singapore Medical Association captured seminal events in Wong's motivation to do so:

> "As an NSF medical officer, he spent days at the site of [HNW] collapse, helping to coordinate the medical resources mobilised. It was during crises like this, and in his daily NSF work as a medical staff officer when he realised that there was plenty of work to be done, and that good people needed to step forward. Not being one to sit back and complain, he decided it was his duty to stand up and be counted upon, and signed on as a regular medical officer."[144]

For the other CMCs the inspiration to contribute their skills in a different setting to the traditional practice of medicine was also evident, each under unique circumstances. For one the dream of a medical career almost proved stillborn from the seemingly insurmountable socio-economic hurdle:

> "Affordability was a problem. Dad was a clerk for Singapore Telecommunication. He had five extra mouths to feed plus mum. We were not rich. I went through school winning awards. I was hoping that even though there was no scholarship for medical schools I could get the Singapore Finance Scholarship for top undergraduate students in university."[145]

This situation prompted contingency plans if medical school fees proved beyond reach but eventually proved unnecessary. Even then it was the twin factors of paltry NS allowances and the opportunities in military medicine which proved decisive:

> "If I did not enter medicine I would be a scientist, something with a research bent in my career but I never figured I would join the SAF. Why did I sign-on? Frankly speaking I needed the money. NS pay was really quite low compared to regular. <grins> Actually for one year I had placed a down payment on a HUDC flat. I was not yet married. I got married to my wife-to-be in NS. Second, there was a SAF hospital at Changi so I decided why not do medicine in the SAF? I could commence post-graduate studies quite quickly. After two years I could go back to the hospital to complete training."[146]

Another CMC was inclined for military service and explored possibilities after completing his medical degree. Although more lucrative pathways existed elsewhere he stayed true to his interests in both medicine and the military:

1987, p. 1; and Melissa Lin, "Hotel collapse hero loses fight with cancer," *The Straits Times*, 8 February 2013, p. B2.

[143] Beng Tan, "Two who had to cut up a corpse," *The Straits Times*, 26 April 1986, p. 13.

[144] Ng Yih Yng and Lionel Cheng, "In remembrance: Wong Yue Sie (1960-2010)," *Singapore Medical Association News* (June 2010), pp. 12-3.

[145] Interview No. 20.

[146] Ibid. HUDC is the acronym for Housing and Urban Development Company which was responsible for constructing affordable housing for middle-income citizens during the 1970s and 1980s.

> "I intended to serve for six or 12 years to live out the career goal to be a surgeon. But being a military surgeon you had the challenges of maintaining currency. Being qualified is no issue but maintaining currency is difficult. (Specialization X) was an important area. The SAF saw a need in the area of (specialization X) and I could do both. There was an opportunity to grow something."[147]

A third CMC considered the possibility of regular service when he resumed NS after medical studies and housemanship. For him it was the satisfaction of practising medicine in an environment beyond the clinic or hospital:

> "During MOCC our course commander was co-opted into [overseas] ops (operations). It highlighted medicine beyond the clinic. Medicine in an international context was about adventure and the ability to do things in a larger perspective. I was motivated by the chance to do something different. It was exciting and less conventional. Was it about 'duty, honour, country'? <pause> Perhaps it was more a sense of self-fulfilment. It was not about material gain. Definitely not about money. It was about satisfaction, the ability to achieve more than a 'standard doctor'. It was a different, less conventional path but one where I could also succeed in achieving something with my career … I soon disrupted for my three (years at hospital) plus three (in the SAF) but it became 17. <laughs> With time I realised the original motivation was to go and see the world and do something different. I asked CMC for the opportunity and was the third MO deployed (on a specific mission). It was something beyond the usual clinical and hospital rotation. I wanted to do some international work."[148]

One thing is certain regardless of their motivations. These men probably had the least to gain by joining the SAF compared to those who came in as top students on scholarships, or were skilled military leaders who made the most of opportunities. As CMCs they collectively pushed the capability frontier of the SAFMC which has matured into the most operationally experienced formation second to none in the SAF.

4.3.4 Technology

The fourth primary motivation is technology. The SAF's unending quest to harness technology as a force multiplier has been a constant feature of its metamorphosis from infancy to the present 'Third Generation' (3G) manifestation.[149] Deviation from this path is unlikely and the journey to leverage on the 'tech-edge' to address both realized and potential threats will continue. This is hardly surprising as

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[147] Interview No. 18.
[148] Interview No. 23.
[149] The 1G SAF existed from independence until the early 1980s and was an era of growth in terms of manpower and equipment. The key focus was on doctrine development, achieving operational capability of individual units, and elementary combined arms operations. The SAF HQ was run by the General Staff. The 2G SAF consolidated combined arms capabilities and ventured into the realm of joint-operations. The Joint staff ran the SAF HQ and coordinated the capabilities of the tri-service outfit. From the early 2000s to present the hallmarks of the 3G SAF are service sensor-shooter integration matched with unprecedented information superiority and weapon lethality.

"[a]rmed forces naturally look to improved means of fighting not only to increase their ability to weaken and hurt the enemy, but also to reduce the risks to their own personnel."[150] The constant stream of new and exciting tech-based projects has become a fixture in the SAF. One positive outcome is that those involved – from frontline operators to engineering support – are constantly faced with challenging projects from fielding and integrating new platforms, to extending equipment lifespan through maintenance and upgrading, and innovation to adapt off-the-shelf technology. The military is the one place where aircraft did not simply fly or ships simply sail 'from A to B'. Many are also armed, armoured, and advanced war-machines by design.

The officers who cited technology as a primary motivation were mostly inclined toward platform-centric vocations such as engineering and combat vocations across the navy and air force. In the army, this motivation was most evident for armour, artillery, combat engineer, and signals vocationalists. The primary reasons for this were an inherent interest and ability in the physical sciences and curiosity about technology. These factors converged nicely for one general:

> "I chose the air force based on a process of elimination. I was in NCC Air and so I had an affinity for the service. The air force is also platform-centric which provides the excitement of working with cutting-edge technology. But I was open to all. If I was channelled to the navy I would have given it my best all the same."[151]

Another general deconstructed the logic behind his choice of vocations in the following manner:

> "Before the air force was well established and with my technical background I thought I would fit in well as an engineering officer. Infantry, well, if they posted me there I supposed I would have to sweat it out. Artillery; they also told me it was not too bad because you need to be able to calculate. There was another choice. Combat engineer, especially the bridging engineers. If I had a choice I would like to have served in something equivalent to the British Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) and the second choice would be artillery … After commissioning I made the grade as an officer. There was a new dimension in the air force. In the back of my mind I thought that if the Singapore Air Defence Command (SADC) could be like RAF (Royal Air Force) then it would be a good organization to be in and flying was more technical and hands on. It was academic and practical like engineering. It all flows together in that you study the theory then you do it practically. It reinforces the idea that it was something worth pursuing. If I remained in the army it was about serving your duty and not so much about interest. The air force provided the opportunity and my interest were a match so that was the

[150] Hugh Smith, "What Costs Will Democracies Bear? A Review of Popular Theories of Casualty Aversion," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Summer 2005), p. 491.
[151] Interview No. 02.

> key. At that point in time, 'duty, honour, country' was a catch word. Whether it was … there was a bit of that."[152]

A third general viewed technology beyond the immediate technical aspects and focused on its utilization to accomplish a mission as a team:

> "My ambition growing up? I was fascinated with planes and saw myself as a pilot or engineer in the military. It was a noble career of defending Singapore. Looking at planes in the sky it conveys a sense of the high-end technology associated with flying. The design and construction of the aircraft, the sophistication required of the pilot, (air traffic) controllers, and engineers. It was the ability to meet the mission, vision, and outcome in a purposeful manner. It was fascinating. The combination of team work required from air control, technicians, and pilots. It conveys team work and sophistication with a purpose in mind. The pilot had to handle six-degrees of motion while taking into consideration weather, wind conditions, the machine which can break down, the target which is the mission, and the challenges posed by the enemy. Individually as well as a team you plan ahead, to bring force to bear to meet the objective in a deliberate manner. As a student I saw a plane flying through clouds during a thunderstorm and it reminded me of the challenges in life. You need a route and you go through rough weather to reach the end point. This is life. So I said one day I must be up there flying it or on the ground maintaining it. I must be part of the team."[153]

While technology is a primary motivation it was sometimes aided by other factors. One scholarship recipient who took engineering was funnelled into the career from his technological interest coupled with the prevailing economic conditions, and an outstanding bond with the public service. It helped that the air force proved a perfect fit:

> "At that time in 1986 there was a recession. Rumours circulated that the PSC was releasing Malaysian scholars because they did not have jobs for them. There was an economic depression. It weighed on my mind of where PSC could put me. That was the tone of the time but it was not a major factor for me. The other factor was my own interest in aviation. I was a science nerd but also interested in aircraft. I entertained being a pilot until I wore glasses. I was posted to an air base and in the control tower seeing aircraft take off and landing was a lot of fun. I could see the air force is different from the army in one sense. It is involved in real operations. Flying. Everyone is professional in their job. The business of flying is professional. The pilots, technicians, (and) controllers. That impressed me. The nature of army is preparing for something that may or may not happen. Whether you train well or not, who knows? So you do all kinds of rubbish things. You put in resources to train and train. In the air force launching an aircraft is real. At the back of my mind it was something I could look at."[154]

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[152] Interview No. 24.
[153] Interview No. 14.
[154] Interview No. 21.

Another officer described his family of four comprising parents and one younger sibling as 'modest' but strongly contemplated employment to contribute financially to the family. This consideration was all the more urgent in light of his mechanic father's impending retirement. The SAF met this need and his long-standing technological interests:

> "In my earlier days, in Primary School, I already had a fascination with all things mechanical. At that time it was F1 and fast cars. Back then being an engineer was the cool thing, especially in mechanical engineering. In secondary school, I spent quite a lot of time on aero-modelling, and from planes to tanks. It was also during this time that I developed an interested in military history. This battle, that battle, who won. I became fixated on armoured vehicles but I did not think about a career in the military. Since I had to be in the military anyway I thought I could work with equipment I had fascination for. I signed-up in BMT. It was a five year contract which was a salary for a good five years when people were bumming around for two-and-a-half years (of NS). I thought a better script would be for university studies to be included and so the bond was extended. It was not a bad job because it was interesting and challenging."[155]

Interests in technology did not only restrict one to 'hands-on' engineering. The flexibility of engineering and the physical sciences had multifaceted military applications. Officers with tertiary qualifications took such disciplines in overwhelming proportions until the mid-1990s. One example is BG (RET) Lee Fook Sun (SAFOS 1975) who was intrigued by engineering and spending time "[p]laying with radios, amplifiers, oscillators, modulators and transmitters" at an early age.[156] As an engineering science undergraduate at Oxford he already envisaged that:

> "You can do a lot with a basic tank. Make it a recovery vehicle or convert it to an Armoured Personnel Carrier. I would certainly like to do a bit of innovation on my own – but all this in good time."[157]

His technical ability served him well as an armour officer and he later applied related concepts to the intelligence field where large information sets were mined efficiently.[158]

4.3.5 Interest in the military

The final primary motivation is the military itself. Officers in this category are in the minority as other military elites cited the other four primary motivations more frequently. This is not surprising considering the lack of, or limited, ambitions and information on possibilities they had while growing up between the 1950s and 1970s.

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[155] Interview No. 22.
[156] Pan Zhengxiang, "Interview with Mr Lee Fook Sun," *National Engineers Day 2011* (Institute of Engineers Singapore), www.ies.org.sg/ned/intweb/leefooksun.html (accessed 28 May 2014).
[157] "Fourteen 'Firsts' from crowd of SAF scholars," *Pioneer* (September 1975), pp. 6-7.
[158] Ibid.

Even those who cited the military as a reason for signing-on did not ground their decisions on knowledge of what the military career entailed. What they saw in their adolescence tinged with vicarious experiences held more significance.

One general was born in China amidst the tumultuous period of the "Great Leap Forward" and the concomitant famine forced his mother's relocation to Singapore in 1960 with her two boys. His early exposure to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Singapore seeded a penchant for uniform service while ECAs entertained his curiosity. He explained:

> "Growing up in China I admired the PLA soldiers and so had the ambition to be an army officer. Then I saw the air shows and glamour of the pilot in Singapore. I was so impressed by the Hawker Hunter when I first saw it at an air show in Changi Air Base – the 'Blue Node' of Hunters flying at low altitude struck a deep impression. At age 12 I joined NCC Air and later the air cadets. On Saturdays we would meet at Ghim Seng School with those from other schools. I also flew gliders during my [junior college] years because I was too young to take the private pilot license course with the Junior Flying Club. I was motivated to join the air force because of my love of military stuff and the romantic ideals and experience of aviation. There was no question of joining SIA. I was fully set on the air force only."[159]

It was the sea that caught the attention of another officer. This admiral lost his father barely into his teenage years which obliged his mother to juggle part-time work to provide for her two boys. He was also exposed to the possibilities of a naval career through vicarious experiences:

> "When I was 15 or 16 I wanted to join the navy. The primary motivating factor came from documentaries. This was reinforced by two secondary reasons. The first was the image projected through the bearing of naval personnel in public. I used to catch the bus from the front of my place and there would be navy personnel dressed very smartly in their uniform. I saw the 'Marlin' formation insignia on their sleeves and knew I wanted to wear it one day. The second reason was my uncle's sharing about ships and his travels. Those were lasting impressions that motivated me to join the navy. That said, I wanted to try military life first so I served as a NSF. I would be one year behind my peers but it was OK. I had to ensure I could take the regimentation … I could take the regimentation in the army and so I decided to sign-on. Furthermore, the pay looked quite ok. The recruitment tagline was 'join the navy, see the world' which meant travelling and voyages. The benefits and career progression were also attractive."[160]

While the scholarship proved a primary motivation for many scholar-officers it would be erroneous to think none had an interest in military service. Although the scholarship was instrumental in their decision to sign-on there were those who were

[159] Interview No. 08.
[160] Interview No. 04.

also attracted by the promise of challenges and adventure. BG (RET) then-LTA Chua Chwee Koh (SAFOS 1982) quipped: "I was interested in the army even before my enlistment into service. The military environment toughens you up. You learn to lead men. More importantly, it is not a routine job, there are many challenges to face."[161] RADM2 (NS) Joseph Leong (SAFOS 1990) described himself as "a restless young man who craved a sense of adventure and the challenge of mastering a variety of professional disciplines."[162] For incumbent COA BG Perry Lim (SAFOS 1991) the army allowed him to combine brain and brawn. As an OCT he revealed: "I prefer to be in the infantry where I can manage men as well as plan their exercises. I like the tough infantry life; it suits me."[163]

4.4 Secondary Motivation

The previous section covered primary motivations which were necessary and sufficient for military elites to join the SAF. This section focuses on secondary motivation factors in the form of salary, flying, the sea, 'escaping' conscription in the army, and the family's influence on the choice of a military career. These secondary considerations are often additional considerations and are insufficient on their respective merits. They must instead be paired with at least one primary motivation for regular military service.

4.4.1 Salary

Setting the officer salary scale is a sensitive issue. Salaries must be high enough to compensate for the rigours of military life, address the relatively short SAF career, and reward consistent performers. As Samuel Huntington reasoned remuneration must be "continuing and sufficient" for officers to focus on their profession and not worry about making ends meet.[164] That said, salaries cannot reach a level where it becomes a primary reason for regular service and turns the SAF into a quasi-mercenary outfit. This concern is reasonable but Charles Moskos observed that intense competition and increasing pressure to secure manpower has forced the American military to adapt market principles.[165] This phenomenon is also applicable to Singapore where soldiering

[161] "Educational opportunities and a challenging career," *Pioneer* (October 1986), p. 2.
[162] Gabriel Ong, "Charging the FLEET Forward, Onward and Upward," *Navy News*, Issue No. 6 (2010), pp. 16-7.
[163] "SAF Scholars," *Pioneer* (November 1991), p. 32.
[164] Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 15.
[165] Charles C. Moskos, "The Emergent Military: Civil, Traditional, or Plural?" *The Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (April 1973), pp. 271, 276; Charles C. Moskos, "From Institution to Occupation:

was once frowned upon, competition for talent is increasingly strong, and conscription has proven to be double-edged.[166] On one hand, conscription slowly eradicated the stigma associated with the profession-of-arms. On the other, every Singaporean son is obligated to wear the uniform and so career personnel are not accorded due societal respect because they are not necessarily viewed as 'exclusive' or 'set apart'.

Although salary expectations were not a primary motivation they still mattered in the overall 'package' that the SAF career offered and few could say otherwise. For the scholarship recipients this was secondary because the biggest lure was education at prestigious foreign universities and/or military academies. Salaries and maintenance allowances were bonuses which sweetened the scholarship package. Salary was also a secondary motivation for non-scholars because the SAF offered the best opportunity at that point in time. This reason explained why most non-graduates signed-on only toward the end of their NS obligations. If salary was a primary motivation they would in all likelihood have opted for regular service much earlier. The non-SAF scholarship graduates were enticed with the opportunity to pursue an avenue of interest but compensation expectations had to commensurate with one's education level. Although the SAF salary scale was attractive in the 1960s it soon proved inadequate and remained attractive to those with O-level education. A general contextualized this in another way:

> "I mentioned pay is low but still attractive enough for a single person. No family, no children. It was about feeding yourself and having enough to give some to your parents. SAF provided lodging, food, and at that time you can still afford a small car. I paid two thousand which I don't think you can get today. <laughs> It was easier in those days. <laughs> So it was adequate. We were placed on the pension scheme but when you joined the SADC it was a fresh contract. I went in with my eyes open. It was [a 12-year contract] at once. I did not look too far. It looked exciting but I did not think too far."[167]

An admiral sacrificed making more in the private sector but this was partially offset by compensation for graduates who then formed a small minority of naval officers:

> "In the late 70s the SAF pay was 'shitty' compared to other sectors. I could get more outside than as a regular. In those days, the navy also had a lot of COs who were Lieutenants. There was no annual promotion. Captains and Majors were rare. Only a few went for the promotion interview and I heard it was not exactly a good experience. Not all who went got promoted. The officer pay was also pegged to O-levels. Graduates had some sort of education allowance but the overall pay was lousy. When I decided to sign-on there was a combat graduate scheme. There was the promise of a promotion to Captain if I did well. But it

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Trends in Military Organization," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 4. No. 1 (November 1977), pp. 42-4; and Moskos, "Institutional/Occupational Trends in Armed Forces," pp. 380-1.
[166] Tay, "The Regular Military Career," pp. 96-7; Chia, "Are we Military Professionals or Professionals in the Military?" p. 56; and Tan, "Singapore," p. 289.
[167] Interview No. 24.

> was only verbally communicated to me. If I had more than a second class upper honours degree, I would get Captain in 31 months of joining. In those days there were not so many Captains. A Captain's pay was not a big deal compared to outside but better than O- or A-level pay scale. This scheme was OK as it mitigated the (remuneration) situation."[168]

The failure to recruit enough officers prompted the drastic salary revision of 1982. For some salary was a significant motivator due to financial considerations for an overseas education or housing. Yet salary remained secondary because the primary motivation was the work and opportunities available in the armed forces. As one general revealed:

> "My initial thoughts were to complete the initial three-year contract and head overseas to further my studies. The other point was at the end of the (subsequent) six-year contract but there were two considerations due to the high opportunity cost in terms of skills and salary. First, I was still hoping for SAF sponsorship for higher studies but it did not occur. Second, I made the difficult and bold decision to purchase a terrace house. It was a heavy investment of $500,000 at that time. Money was not an issue at any other time in my career except this period as a Lieutenant/Captain."[169]

Salary was a secondary motivation to sign-on and served as an attractive addition either as part of a scholarship package or to a meaningful and stable career for those with non-tertiary education. Yet, there were also those who signed-on despite the lower compensation package compared to what they would command in the private sector. The 1982 salary revision and its constant update ensured that SAF officers are now remunerated in line with Huntington's reason that it must be enough to keep officers focused on their duties. Whether such high salaries have crossed, or will cross, the Rubicon between secondary and primary motivations for the military elites of tomorrow is unknown.

4.4.2 Flying

The attraction of flying featured prominently in no small way in the lives of a third of the flag-officers interviewed. For many, however, their childhood ambitions would remain unfulfilled. Pilot traineeship required stringent physical standards for height, reach, and eyesight in the first decade and a half of the air force and this shattered many dreams. From a non-pilot air force general:

> "I did not get into the air force. Body, physical dimensions mattered to fit into the Hunter or Skyhawk and I did not fit those dimensions."[170]

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[168] Interview No. 15.
[169] Interview No. 06.
[170] Interview No. 14.

To an army general:

> "Growing up, I had the ambition to be a pilot. This lasted right until I completed junior college and enlisted for NS. I always marvelled at people who can fly. To me flying a plane is awesome. I had great respect for them. This was also due in part to the status and influence by television shows. After I enlisted I approached the possibility of a flying career with the RSAF but in those days the standard was 6/6 and no less. I was 6/9 or 6/12 and so that dream was out."[171]

And an admiral:

> "I had two ambitions while growing up. The first was to be a pilot, either in the air force or commercial, but this lasted until I became myopic in primary three."[172]

For those who made the cut as RSAF pilots, an overwhelming majority had shown interest in pursuing flying from the very early stages in life to those who were exposed to this possibility late into their teenage years. Before Singapore's independence such interests came by exposure to the RAF but without any avenues for realization. For one of the early pilots this was seeded at school:

> "I was also a lot more hands on. We walked at Bukit Timah Hill with neighbours, walked to Pierce Reservoir and camped out there as well. I was involved in a lot of outdoor activities. Bukit Panjang government high school was two to three miles from home where I joined the Scouts. The [class] teacher was very good. Lessons were conducted outdoors for science and nature studies. We went outside to see how things actually are. We also went to Tengah Air Base because one of the teachers Mrs Boswell brought us there to swim. You saw the squadrons and it kindled a subconscious interest in the RAF of how profession they were in their work. In those days you didn't know what type of aircraft you saw. It was just a lot of noise, people running around, base security and the organization. Even as a 14, 15 year-old you could see that they were well-organized. People were working in harmony. People looked satisfied. There were amenities on base, welfare, and the family setting. The family unit was contained within the base. As a kid something like that impressed you but it never triggered [that] it was a possible profession."[173]

This changed with the establishment of the air force and affiliated organizations. Some entertained their desire to fly in part from books to aero-modelling through to participation in NCC and the JFC.[174] For BG (RET) Jek Kian Yee (SAFOS 1983) model airplanes gave way to NCC (Air) because "[f]lying is a thrilling experience, it's something which few have a chance to experience. It's such a rare opportunity and I

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[171] Interview No. 06.
[172] Interview No. 18.
[173] Interview No. 24.
[174] The Junior Flying Club was established in 1971 and subsequently renamed the Singapore Youth Flying Club. The interest in taking to the skies was so great that the first JFC flying course in 1973 had 1800 applications of which 42 eventually earned the private pilot's license. See "Top Student Pilots," *Pioneer* (February 1973), p. 11; and "Creating Pilots – The SYFC Wings and Awards Ceremony," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 106 (July 2008), p. 11.

would not want to miss it."[175] Another individual destined for the skies was BG (RET) Charles Sih. His father flew a Cessna and their common love for planes translated into time spent plane-watching at Changi Airport. Sih furthered this interest through biographies, journals, magazines, and earned his Private Pilot Licence (PPL) with the JFC before he could drive.[176] Incumbent CDF LG Ng Chee Meng also flew with the JFC in junior college and earned his PPL before NS because "being a pilot is a job that you enjoy."[177]

Although many aspired to fly there were no guarantees of making the cut as a RSAF pilot even if one held a PPL. Low graduation rates attested to the stringent competency requirements and the fact flying is very much a matter of "you either have it or you don't."[178] The air force is thus hard-pressed to recruit intelligent individuals with the necessary attributes to make the cut as pilots coupled with the cerebral capacity and character to lead at higher echelons. Potential pilots are courted with a contract that eliminated the dilemma of choosing between flying or tertiary education and packaged them in a symbiotic manner. One SAF general recalled his experiences:

> "I did not have any particular ambition. I was too pre-occupied doing what I enjoyed. No long term view. It's not like growing up I already mapped out what I wanted to do. In the 80's I believe parents would like their children to get a degree and professional recognition. Engineering, accountancy. It was going to be one of those but flying came along and Junior Flying Club opened up. Signing up to be an air force pilot was a convolution of various factors. One, I was interested in flying and I also received encouragement from my parents. Two, there was the university cadet pilot scholarship scheme which provided tertiary education and meant my parents did not have to pay any money for my education. <smiles, pauses> Three, the air force was expanding and there was a lot of publicity in the papers. And finally people said pilots made good money <laughs>. Incidentally I was not attracted or influenced by the image of pilots. I also did not attend air shows or spend time reading (about the air force). I had no time as I was too busy pursuing my interests in sports <laughs>. I applied (to the air force) before completing my A's. I can't recall if I proactively pursued it or if I responded to a letter. I did not call up CMPB. I think it was because of Junior Flying Club then the letter came and I applied and met them (the recruiters). The conditions were also attractive. There was a one-to-one exchange where one day in flight school was considered one day of NS in should you be unsuccessful. I thought 'what the heck' and I did not have to do BMT <laughs>. That is incidental reasoning. <laughs> My first payslip was $520 and I thought 'wow, this is fantastic'. <laughs> But the primary aim was flying. After applying the rest was up to the air force evaluation system. I mean, I was blessed with good eyesight, good genes, and physical dimensions. I met the prerequisites. <smiles> From there I was pushed along. I did not dictate the

[175] "Soldier Scholar," *Pioneer* (September 1982), p. 27.
[176] Low Mei Mei, "Move over Airforce, here comes the real McCoy," *The Straits Times*, 8 May 1988, p. 2.
[177] "Gateway to Rocky Mountain High," *Pioneer* (March 1988), p. 15.
[178] Interview No. 25.

> tempo but wherever I was I did my best. I am one of those who feel things will happen if you do your best and they usually do. I was not looking for reward. The terms were straight forward: a 12-year bond with emplacement on pensionable service until 50. I did not see the bond as an exit point. Then again, if I felt I had to exit for any reason I had the confidence I could 'make it' elsewhere outside."[179]

Flying eventually came into the picture for pilots whose primary motivation was the scholarship even if they never thought seriously about it. Consider the example of former CAF (2001-6) MG (RET) Rocky Lim (SAFOS 1977) who revealed:

> "I did not come from a well-to-do family. All I wanted was to go to university and have a good career. It has certainly been an eventful and rewarding career, all thanks to the defence ministry. I had no real aspirations to fly, but since I was physically fit for the job, I accepted the challenge and soon fell in love with it. I started with the A4 and subsequently, with the F16 fighter jet. There is no greater thrill than to get out of the office and fly. When you are in the air, there are no distractions. You are free and focused to kill your adversary. It is a great get away."[180]

4.4.3 The Sea

Flying in the air force was an attractive option from the onset but the same could not be said of the sea. The early pioneers were cobbled together from various sources and experiences with the simple goal to earn their keep and in the words of Singapore's first navy chief LTC (RET) Jaswant Singh Gill: "The main driving force was to protect Singapore and be independent of our colonial masters so that we could chart out our own destiny."[181] Despite their intestinal fortitude, limited budgetary and strategic considerations relegated the navy to third-fiddle among the services with the sole purpose for coastal defence. The procurement of naval assets paled in comparison to raising an army battalion or the more visually apparent and appealing squadron of planes. Shortages in the quantity and quality of manpower and equipment became painfully apparent against the backdrop of operational requirements. One admiral vividly recalled:

> "In the 1970s when the navy was in its infancy we got people from all over the place. Civil service, merchant navy, some former Malaysian navy, from the army. In 1975 there was Operation Thunderstorm to handle the Vietnamese refugee situation and the navy could not cope. It was not really a navy then but a motley crew who tried to hold things together in a period of adversity. After 1975 there was increased patrolling in the straits to keep them out. The problem was we had very poor night vision capabilities then. You literally had to pull

[179] Interview No. 16.
[180] Tan, *100 Inspiring Rafflesians*, p. 127.
[181] Yeo Kei Seen, "The First Decade (1967-1966) – Humble Beginnings," *Navy News*, Issue No. 2 (2007), p. 6.

> alongside [refugee vessels] to identify them. A lot of them (refugees) slipped through at night. There were also other problems. A harbour launch list at Brani [Naval Base] was an indicator to the higher up of things not running properly. This equipment problem is linked to the strategic view and use of the navy for coastal defence purposes only. Most of the budget went to the air force and army. The navy had high ops tempo but very little new capabilities. The people were just working a lot. We wanted to beef up the fighting capabilities but it was difficult to ask for resources because of the perceived strategic contribution from the navy. Was the money better spent on a ship or a squadron of jets? Potential aggressor naval capabilities at that time were also not so great."[182]

Naval personnel were also relatively lowly ranked with a LTC at the helm, a LTA commanded a ship, while a corporal served as coxswain and chief radar plotter.[183] It was little wonder that COL (RET) Peter Ho (SAFOS 1973) depicted the RSN as a "demoralised, down-and-out outfit" even in the 1980s.[184]

Beyond the question of budget, the importance of morale in the navy and indeed the wider SAF depended on the senior civilian leadership.[185] An admiral contextualized the situation and explained why this was so:

> "One of the political leaders implied the navy should put a gun on a barge and tow it with a tug and on another occasion similarly opined that since the Japanese came on bicycles and crossed rivers on wooden bridges there was no need to procure expensive and modern bridging equipment Now, what would junior officers think if they heard this? So morale was low and it was not a place you would want to be. There were hardly any chances for overseas courses. Perhaps India. The ops tempo was high and your family did not know when you would return (from sea patrols). It did not help that we did not have many qualified watch-keepers. Comfort on the ships was also minimal. Toilets were converted to keep equipment. Officers bunked seven to eight a cabin. <pause> You can do this for a few years but not for 20. Then there was the issue with food. There was a trial to replace fresh rations prepared by naval chefs with catered pre-prepared food like those served on airlines. It failed after a three-month trial. <laughs>"[186]

It is perhaps not surprising that the navy was not attractive except to true-blue 'sea dogs' and those for whom it was a rice bowl. SAFOS officers from the early batches were channelled into the navy, not by choice but to make up for small numbers of graduate officers who chose to be there. The first SAFOS naval officer LTC (RET) Tan Kian Chew (SAFOS 1972) had never been to sea but reasoned he "was looking for

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[182] Interview No. 15.
[183] "Ahoy There Mates!" *Pioneer* (July 1972), pp. 22-26.
[184] Chew and Tan, *Creating the Technology Edge*, p. 160.
[185] See for example Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with Mr Lim Siong Guan for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003060, Reel 5 of 14, pp. 63-4; and Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with COL (RET) Ramachandran Menon for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003250, Reel 11 of 17, pp. 238-40.
[186] Interview No. 15.

something adventurous."[187] In the next batch, two SAFOS officers were channelled to the navy and their pioneering work paved the way for the RSN's development. Deputy PM and former CNV (1991-2) RADM1 (RET) Teo Chee Hean (SAFOS 1973) revealed as a COL that:

> "The idea of sitting behind a desk doing paperwork didn't appeal to me. I wanted something more attractive and the SAF offered the variety I was looking for … I was asked to give the Navy a try and found I like it."[188]

Beyond the low priority and low morale of the navy, scholar-officers who were then small in number were deployed to areas deemed more important and pressing to defence development. This soon changed as one admiral observed:

> "Scholars were assigned to the navy. It was hardly a choice they had. They were a strategic asset and had to be assigned around the SAF. Some of them justified a greater role for the navy that threats came from all directions. How about the projection of SAF forces? Singapore is also surrounded by sea. How could we safeguard our territorial integrity like Pedra Branca? We were outgunned by some others … The police craft was only deployed in local waters. The possibility of a blockade is also high if the navy is weak. Even then the acquisition of mine hunters was problematic because they were single-use and expensive. But on the whole the role of the navy became more obvious. In the late 1980s things started to change. Things improved, it became a more credible outfit and more scholars joined."[189]

The ground work by those early SAFOS naval officers proved instrumental in lifting the RSN's profile as another admiral noted:

> "When I got to HQ (headquarters) and saw the larger issues the Ministry of Defence already saw the importance of the navy. Teo Chee Hean and Peter Ho got navy prominence and a larger slice of the defence budget and initiated various projects. In (the plans department) the main project was to upgrade the missile gunboats. We had to argue piece-meal, system by system like missiles, electronics. Each upgrade had to be justified in context and arguments made from the beginning from where the system fits into the platform, the platform within the navy, and the navy within the SAF's mission."[190]

From then onward the recognition of the navy's importance in maintaining Singapore's territorial integrity and keeping its sea lanes of communication open have ensured it is well-funded. Today, those looking to serve in a close-knit family of professionals flock to the RSN which has successfully attracted around a third of SAFOS recipients.

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[187] Felix Siew, "SEAsons in the sun," *Pioneer* (May 2002).
[188] "Uniform Life," *Special Life! Soldier, Scholar and Leader (The Straits Times)*, 18 March 1991, p. 4.
[189] Interview No. 15.
[190] Interview No. 17.

4.4.4 'Escaping' the Army life

In earlier sections some of the interview participants indicated their desire to avoid conscript service in the army as a contributing factor in their decision to sign-on with the RSAF or RSN. This trend continued with others and some common reasons surfaced. First, the desire to utilize skills in the engineering or nautical-related disciplines was strong. Second, the professional manpower required to master sophisticated air and naval platforms meant they would be serving with other regulars who wanted to be there, as opposed to conscripts in the army who were fulfilling a legal requirement. Third, the competencies required of naval and air operations were conspicuous. Shortcomings resulted in accidents and at worst the inevitable loss of life. Finally, the army career is not for everyone as it is literally 'less than comfortable'. For these individuals, the line 'I don't want to live an army life' from a popular army cadence proved more than tongue-in-cheek. The army's loss was very much the RSN and RSAF's gain.

BG (RET) Gary Yeo, a mechanical engineering graduate from Singapore Polytechnic and member of the 'first-batch', reasoned that army "life was too regimented … I think an air force career is much more professional. We are disciplined, but we are required to use more brain than brawn."[191] Yeo was one of four graduates from the inaugural batch of six Singaporean pilot trainees sent to Yorkshire in 1968 and became the first local Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI) when the others were British and Australian.[192] For another officer it was a 'push' from the army and a 'pull' from the navy. The prospects of a scholarship also outweighed the litany of problems which plagued the navy back then. He said in retrospect:

> "The advertisement was for the navy. It was out of the blue and not a conscientious choice. If it was for air force I would also apply. You know, the army is not all that comfortable but I was prepared to struggle through the two-and-a-half years if I was not successful. If no scholarship I would just carry on with NS and decide what to do after."[193]

Although the navy was a well-established and well-known entity by the mid-1990s the less than appealing 'army life' also resonated with RADM1 Harris Chan. The first SAFOS officer to command an international task force at sea related his motivation:

> "Actually, it was a little bit of a coincidence of fate! I wanted to take up the SAF Overseas Scholarship, so I needed to decide which of the three services to choose. I wasn't too taken by army life, and with my spectacles … I would not be

[191] Lim Suan Kooi, "The most exciting … most exacting …" *The Straits Times*, 9 August 1971, p. 15.
[192] "Six to be trained as jet pilots," *The Straits Times*, 6 August 1968, p. 14.
[193] Interview No. 17.

> able to be a pilot. These, plus the fact that the Navy Recruitment Centre was the first to talk to my platoon [at OCS], made me sign on with the Navy."[194]

For another general, things were not so straight forward but conscription in the army proved less than appealing. He tried to engineer his way to better things but events did not unfold as planned. Medicine's loss was the RSAF's eventual gain:

> "In OCS things did not make much sense so I tried to [disrupt and become] a doctor. I was a straight 'A' student so I could be anything I wanted. Those who had applied for medical studies were disrupted from NS and were attached to hospitals but only a selected number was actually admitted to medical school. This whole medical disruption issue was quite a farce. They (those responsible for this scheme) must have realized it was really disruptive for the people involved and also for MINDEF. We had to return to the Army and initially we were going to become corporals but after a couple of days, we were sent back to OCS. Some of us grumbled and bitched about it. The next year, they did selection first and only disrupted those who had been accepted. Later (when we were about to finish OCS) they told us 'you are not graduating' as we had missed two months on disruption. We went for an additional course before we got commissioned. We were a funny (an odd) group. I guess it messed up some of our lives. There was a tight quota for medicine so today we are short of doctors. Then the prevailing view was that doctors and lawyers generate business for themselves."[195]

For a segment of the non-army military elite the prospects of two to three years as a conscript in the army proved less than appealing. This was only a secondary motivation but one which surfaced frequently enough to warrant its inclusion as a factor for regular service.

4.4.5 The Family

One factor addressed in the literature is the impact of parents on the career choice(s) of their child(ren). It is relevant to this study because of the onerous nature of a military career. Furthermore, those who sign-on are young, impressionable, and the SAF would in all likelihood be their first employer, one that is incredibly inelastic in recruiting.[196] The defence force of any state seldom recruits personnel from other militaries in the way a company in any other industry would. Promotions are almost exclusively from within its ranks.[197] Singapore, in the period when most of the interview participants grew up, had strong familial roots which meant kids were 'not left to their

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[194] Young Yi Yong, "Mission Success First Time, Every Time: A chat with the Commander of the Maritime Security Task Force," *Navy News*, Issue No. 2 (2012) p. 27.
[195] Interview No. 21.
[196] The maximum entry age of officers is usually capped at 25 and in some cases up to 27 for university graduates.
[197] There are some exceptions and examples include the colonial armies of the British Empire and in present day the close relationship between the defence forces of Australia, British, and New Zealand.

own devices' in the name of independence. Parental views were often congruent with societal views of the profession-of-arms. This proved double-edged with objections in the early days giving way to encouragement, all the more as the military career gained greater acceptance with scholarships playing no small part.

One officer who joined the armed force in pre-independent Singapore faced parental concerns over how far his career could go and harboured these thoughts:

> "My parents and relatives asked me: 'What can you become?' Remember at that time there was only one battalion – 1 SIR. The CO was a British LTC and all the Majors were British. I thought I could be a Major one day. You get a Land Rover to send you home. <laughs> At that time there was no scope beyond LTC which was the CO. There was no 2 SIR yet. <smiles>"[198]

For another who joined in the early days of independence it was the stigma attached to the military profession which attracted objections:

> "I would say at that time Singapore was a young country and national education was not quite there so you did not see much of it. It is more a personal motivation to join. For better prospects [and a better] future. I won't say that 'duty, honour, country' was not important. Remember that there was resistance from old folks about the military. My dad, even though he fought the Japanese in China, and my relatives were resistant. It was seen as a crap thing where only the bad went to the army. For me, I saw the opportunity to help Singapore by moulding or building something that is necessary. The education sector did not need much help and how much could I help? You also think 'I am a part of history'. Whether I am glorified or not did not matter but I did lasting and important things for the army, for Singapore."[199]

BG (RET) Leong Yue Kheong's father was a WWII veteran with service in the British Army's REME Corps. He remembered how his decision to sign-on drew mixed reactions at home despite receiving a merit award as a top graduating officer cadet in 1976:

> "My mother was quite upset. She asked me what was so great about an Army career. Perhaps, as one married to a soldier mechanic, she was not sanguine about the Army. And after that there was a quarrel between my dad and mum. I felt very bad to have started the argument."[200]

Parental concerns remained even with the introduction of military scholarships. Liu Tsun Kie (SAFOS 1971), a President Scholar and former army MAJ, revealed: "At first, my mother was rather surprised and she raised strong objections to me giving up the Colombo Plan Scholarship to take up the SAF Scholarship but she had to give way

[198] Interview No. 19.
[199] Interview No. 27.
[200] *40/40*, pp. 100-4.

to my personal convictions."[201] LG (RET) Lim Chuan Poh (SAFOS 1980) recalled a similar situation:

> "I can remember my mother's disappointment when I told her I have switched from Overseas Merit Scholarship to the SAF Overseas Scholarship … Around the time I was making that decision, about three months into my National Service, I asked myself a very simple question. Who are the people who have made that decision before? And the list of names was obviously very impressive. I must say I had faith in these people and in their having made a very good and conscious decision. I decided if it was good enough for them, surely it must be good enough for me."[202]

By the mid-1990s parental concerns were still evident at times. Madam Wong Kock Sum, mother of incumbent Commander 3 Division (3 DIV) COL Ong Tze Ch'in (SAFOS 1994) admitted: "At first I was taken aback that he wanted the scholarship and objected quite strongly. I was afraid that the army training would be very tough."[203] Such concerns were assuaged at the SAFOS Tea Session where conversations with attendant scholar-officers provided assurances that Ong "had made the right choice."[204] This example highlighted the importance of tea and recruitment information sessions and why no effort is spared in wooing potential scholar-officers.

Even if one's family could afford tertiary education, the thought of a son signing-up as a regular after studies seemed like a 'waste' of resources and the opportunity cost of 'better' career prospects elsewhere. This was especially glaring for one general whose family was comparably well-off:

> "My parents asked me: 'Are you sure you want to sign-on?' <laughs> Well it was a contract for six years so if things don't work I had a way out. I would finish six years and then decide but the pension was offered in the sixth year. The thoughts of signing-on were seeded in OCS. The initiative to sign-on took place in OCS and within a couple of months of being posted to a [manoeuvre] battalion I signed-on."[205]

Other officers also experienced parental concerns as one could expect but the prestige and benefits of a scholarship, even if non-SAFOS, more than made up for it. Like so many in the past and also the present, the opportunity to study at a prestigious university or military academy overseas would remain a pipedream if not for a scholarship:

> "My parents were OK with the scholarship. My mother said: 'You are going away? No way!' <laughs> It was a motherly reaction. There were no real

[201] "When scholars become officers," *The Straits Times*, 15 October 1971, p. 18.
[202] "Army's New Chief – The Man Himself," *Army News* (June 1998), p. 5.
[203] "The SAF Overseas Scholarship," *Pioneer* (October 1994), p. 14.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Interview No. 23.

> objections. In some ways they were glad I got a scholarship so there was no need to fund my education."[206]

Apart from individual gain some parents also saw it as a way to break free of the socio-economic trap faced by families of that generation. Without a scholarship one might very well be obliged to find employment to supplement the family income at the opportunity cost to realize one's potential as a military leader. One general said rather plainly: "My parents were quite happy and supportive as it was a scholarship. My older siblings had to forgo university after secondary school or pre-university to contribute to the family."[207]

Over time the SAF has become normalized and referential stigma seemingly consigned to the pages of history. At times it came from immediate family members who had a direct influence on career decisions. This included sons who followed the paths of their fathers who were often SAF pioneers.[208] One such second-generation officer is BG (RET) Bernard Tan (SAFOS 1985) who as an undergraduate cited his father, LTC (RET) Albert Tan, and the scholarship as motivating factors:

> "My dad is someone I look to with admiration, and I feel that I must continue a tradition that he started … The scholarship is attractive in terms of benefits like full officer's salary, educational and challenging career opportunities but it is not a piece of cake."[209]

Then there were cases of siblings who entered regular service and entered the ranks of the military elite. Lee Hsien Loong and Lee Hsien Yang both made BG as did Chin Siat Yoon and Chin Chow Yoon. The most conspicuous is the Ng family which counted incumbent CNV RADM2 Ng Chee Peng who followed his elder brothers MG (NS) Ng Chee Khern who is presently MINDEF's PS (Defence Development), and current CDF LG Ng Chee Meng into the SAF. As a 2LT he reasoned "that the best way to contribute to the nation is to work for the security and defence of the nation as this will provide a safe haven for political, social and economic prosperity."[210] He added two decades later that: "Having joined the National Cadet Corp while in school and with brothers choosing the military path, a career in the SAF was a natural choice.[211]

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[206] Interview No. 17.
[207] Interview No. 14.
[208] The number and proportion of trans-generational (parent-child, uncle-nephew, siblings etc) families within the officer corps and among scholar-officers are unknown but present. For some anecdotal evidence see Timothy Lo (ed. Team Leader), *Onwards and Upwards: Celebrating 40 Years of the Navy* (Singapore: SNP Editions, 2007), pp. 147-8; and "More than one generation of RSAF Airmen in the Family," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 107 (September 2008), p. 15.
[209] "Educational opportunities and a challenging career," *Pioneer* (October 1986), p. 2. LTC (RET) Tan Yang Wah, Albert, graduated from the Federation Military College in 1962. He held appointments such as CO 3 SIR, Commander 4 SAB, and Assistant Chief of General Staff for Personnel and later Intelligence during his career.
[210] "Cream of the crop," *Pioneer* (November 1989), pp. 4-5.
[211] Lee Kwok Hao, "A Man who Walks the Talk," *Navy News*, Issue No. 3 (2011), pp. 31-3.

The role played by parents and siblings constituted a secondary motivation to join the SAF. Some received parental support especially when they secured a scholarship. Yet others faced concerns over their future, the rigours of military life, and questions whether they had carefully considered their choices. Parental objections invariably gave way as they acquiesced to their son's decisions. With the passing of time following the footsteps of parents and siblings into the military has also become an added feature of this secondary motivation.

4.5 Summary

The establishment of SAFTI and the introduction of conscription provided the SAF with a desperately needed indigenous self-sustaining pipeline of commissioned officers. The defence establishment benefitted from the services of all eligible males even though not all conscripts wore the uniform willingly. This proved beneficial because without NS an overwhelming proportion of military elites would have never considered a military career in light of their ambitions (or lack of) and the dearth of information about the SAF career and organization. The 'best and brightest' from the general pool of national servicemen were enticed to accept scholarships which proved to be a primary motivation. Military elites who did not receive military scholarships signed-on because the SAF offered the best opportunity to the respective circumstances faced. Some needed a job, others did not want to 'waste' their time as a conscript, and others sought to leverage on their education background and interests. These factors were bolstered by opportunities that only the military could offer ranging from the practice of medicine 'beyond a patient and four walls' for MOs, to the lure of high-tech machines in the platform-centric RSN and RSAF, to pure interests in a military career. To top it off, there were also secondary motivations in the form of salary, flying, the sea, 'escaping' conscription in the army, and the role of parents. The combination of primary and secondary motivations made the military career very attractive to these young men who would one day become Singapore's military elite.

CHAPTER 5
COMMITMENT TO MILITARY SERVICE

"If we do not remember our heroes, we will produce no heroes. If we do not record their sacrifices, their sacrifices would have been in vain ... the greatest strength we have as a people is our common memories of the past and our common hopes for the future ... For without those memories, the next generation will not have the fighting spirit to carry on."[1]

— BG (RET) Yeo Yong Boon, George

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter covered the primary and secondary motivations of Singapore's military elites to join the SAF. This chapter examines their commitment to active service and specifically asks "*why were they committed to stay-on?*" Sensitising concepts covered in chapter two framed an individual's commitment to a military career. Affirmative commitment came from a desire to maintain employment for reasons of goals and values, benefits and rewards, the lack of a better alternative, and interpersonal and organizational attachments. Continuance commitment was grounded in the cost of not maintaining employment for economic reasons, and the time and effort already invested in an organization. Finally there is normative commitment which arose from the obligation to maintain employment in the armed forces. There is also the need to consider changes in commitment prior to and after the commencement of employment. Empirical studies further indicated that commitment could be attributed to a 'calling' and/or experiences unique to the profession-of-arms, both of which can only be fulfilled in a national defence force.

This chapter contains three sections. The first explores the wider context of SAF officer retention and captures why the interview participants *considered* leaving active duty. This provides a background with which to compare and contrast reasons for why they stayed. The second section covers elements of *transactional commitment* which vary in importance according to individuals and are manifested in obligations to stay in service, remuneration, and career progression. The final section is on the convergence toward *transformational commitment* where the military elites stayed-on because of the camaraderie with their comrades-in-arms, their dedication to the profession-of-arms, and the sacred mission apportioned to the SAF. Coverage is also extended to

[1] Speech by BG (NS) George Yeo, Minister for Information and the Arts, at the launch of SCCI publication "The Price of Peace", 21 June 1997.

episodes where officers faced personal danger or challenges which highlighted instances of commitment beyond simply staying in uniform in times of peace.

5.2 The Challenges of Retention

SAF officer retention figures, as with all 'sensitive' data in Singapore, are extremely rare unless revealed during episodes of candour. In 1998 the attrition rates for non-pilot officers after the first contract (usually six years) was two-thirds.[2] The number of regular officers since then is believed to have remained steady at 4,000.[3] Officers who leave the SAF invariably re-entered the 'civilian world' for the simple reason that Singapore, like many other countries, only has one defence force where one can render uniformed military service.[4] Even those who remained in MINDEF or affiliated entities such as intelligence or the vast military industrial complex do so as civilians.[5] Unlike other professions where one could leave an organization to join another with the same job description this is not entirely possible for Singapore's military professionals.[6] The rare exceptions were possible pilots, doctors, engineers, or AOs with opportunities for temporary secondments to other government ministries. Others who sought change from the military life or the general focus of work despite periodic posting rotations had to resign.[7] For example, cabinet minister Lim Hng Khiang (SAFOS 1973) who left active service as a LTC after 15 years reasoned: "I needed a change. The idea of staying 30 years in the SAF was neither realistic nor desirable."[8]

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[2] "Factsheet – Dr Tony Tan's Announcement at the SAF Day Dinner for Senior Officers," *MINDEF Website*, 4 July 1997; and "SAF pay 'not competitive enough'," *The Straits Times*, 5 July 1997, p. 39.
[3] David Miller, "New SAF rewards package," *The Straits Times*, 13 January 1998, p. 3; and Jermyn Chow, "SAF adds a new rank: Senior Lt-Col," *The Straits Times*, 27 October 2009, p. 4. Another source from a junior SAF officer placed the figure at 5,000. See Yip, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 31.
[4] The rise of private military contractors obfuscates this in some way but remains a non-issue within the Singapore context. Certain responsibilities within the SAF have been outsourced to civilian contractors such as Singapore Technologies (maintenance, logistics), Singapore Food Industries (catering), and different transportation companies.
[5] It is possible for officers to leave uniform service and remain serving in MINDEF as defence executive officers. Civilians also fill the majority of billets in the external (Security and Intelligence Division, Ministry of Defence) and domestic (Internal Security Department, Ministry of Home Affairs) intelligence apparatus. The military industrial complex includes entities such as ST Engineering, Defence Science and Technology Office (DSTA), and DSO National Laboratories.
[6] This is most significant for combat officers as Private Military Companies are almost non-existent in Singapore. Furthermore, the majority of SAF officers lack the operationally-relevant experiences sought after by international firms. This leaves a handful of private security firms with Certis CISCO the most notable among them. Not all SAF officers face this challenge. Pilots (especially fixed-wing) frequently transfer to civil aviation companies and together with engineers and MOs possess arguably the most transferrable skills and experiences.
[7] Examples of secondments include Perry Lim (SAFOS 1991) to the Ministry of Education; Melvyn Ong (SAFOS 1994) to the Ministry of Social and Family Development; Ng Chad-Son (SAFOS 1994), Teh Hua Fung (SAFOS 1997), and Ng Pak Shun (SAFOS 2000) to the Ministry of Trade and Industry; Frederick Choo (SAFOS 1998) to the Ministry of Finance; and Tan Yueh Phern (SAFOS 1999) to the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sport.
[8] Ng Kai Chee Wah, "Chance of a lifetime," *Special Life! Soldier, Scholar and Leader (The Straits Times)*, 18 March 1991, p. 2.

5.2.1 Hurdles to Retention

Just as there are various motivational factors to join the military it comes as no surprise that officers left active service due to an eclectic array of reasons. The six broad and sometimes overlapping categorical reasons contained in this subsection were gleaned from the author's personal observations over a 16-year period. It became apparent that officers left active service because of: opportunities on the 'outside', some were simply opportunists, society and the profession-of-arms, meritocracy and its discontents, disillusionment and cynicism, and other unique 'miscellaneous' factors.[9]

The first and most common category is the lure of seemingly 'better' opportunities on the 'outside'. This reason manifested itself in various forms and a non-exhaustible list included financial gain, change in pace or lifestyle, exposure to another industry, following 'real' interests or 'true calling', seeking more 'specific' and 'relevant' skills, and the possibility of a life-long career which is impossible in the SAF. These reasons, perhaps with exception of the last, are also applicable to other professions and become more enticing when juxtaposed against the perception that the military environment limited cognitive growth and stifled entrepreneurial possibilities. Even scholar-officers with their high profile and career advantages appeared in this category. One dual SAFOS and President's Scholar reasoned:

> "When I went to the Ministry of Finance after my SAF stint, I had a 20 percent cut in salary. I have no regrets at leaving, since I wanted to have some private sector experience rather than one of a generalist."[10]

Similarly, former submariner MAJ (NS) Tan Gim Chong (SAFOS 1992) left the RSN for a career in wealth management because "[he] felt the urge to explore other opportunities on land. Influence from friends in the industry gave [him] insight to the banking world and it sparked [his] interest."[11]

The second category consisted of opportunists who were never really interested in a military career but optimized their extraction of 'front-loaded' benefits in terms of scholarships, relatively handsome starting salaries, and valuable network connections within Singapore and afar. Their motivation for military service was purely contractual at best and a zero-sum transaction at worst. Superiors commonly depicted such clock-watching officers as 'lazy' and 'disinterested'.[12] The responsibilities of higher office, assuming they got there, would have unmasked their intentions in any eventuality; hopefully before any real damage was done.

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[9] Based on author's conversations with (ex-)regular officers between 1997 and 2013.
[10] Gerry De Silva, "The bright young bond-busters," *The Straits Times*, 4 December 1988, p. 16.
[11] Jeremy Au Yong, "Hottest job in town: Private bankers," *The Straits Times*, 16 April 2006.
[12] Several interviewees, including COL-grade officers, levelled such adjectives against scholar-officers under their charge.

The third category came from the perception that the military profession did not and still does not hold an esteemed place in society and even among active service personnel. This was most striking in the conscript-dominated army among the three services. Recruiters periodically hoisted the slogan 'A Career that demands Respect' and the most recent tag line declared 'Our Army – Ready, Decisive, Respected'.[13] The word 'respect' surfaced time and again as one senior officer reasoned:

> "Just because the Army is Ready and Decisive does not mean it will be Respected, so we must respect the sacrifices that our soldiers have made in serving the country. In doing that, they will then respect themselves as soldiers of the Army."[14]

The demand to be respected has remained unfulfilled for various reasons. The tyranny of peace meant the SAF has hardly been called upon for missions of necessity. Such rare occasions have also remained shrouded in secrecy and involved only a select few. Their bravery has remained untold while society-at-large relegated their actions to a historical footnote at best. Those interested in their stories grasped at morsels of information only to find frustration and eventually joined the disinterested masses. Furthermore, conscription is applicable to almost all males and in a superficial sense a NS officer, especially in the army, can make COL while holding a civilian career. Sure, the gulf between appointments apportioned to NS and regular officers at senior levels is wide but this is also irrelevant to the average citizen. Conscripts also served in almost every area of the SAF with few exceptions such as pilots and sensitive billets within special operations, intelligence, and signals units.

The fourth category came from discontentment with meritocracy despite ubiquitous proclamations of performance-based advancements. This problem was bi-dimensional. First, there were *structural* concerns that certain vocations in the past had ceilings in terms of appointment and rank. These included non-pilots in the RSAF before pathways were created for air defence and weapon systems officers to make BG. For example, Tang Kok Fai (SAFOS 1977) left as a LTC because his career path "reached a plateau" after tours as head of the air plans and intelligence departments.[15] An invisible ceiling was once seen to cap Commandos at the rank of LTC but four of them have since made BG. At present, the terminal rank for naval engineers and submariners seems to be COL/ME7 and congruent with the highest appointments attainable.

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[13] See for example "A career that commands respect," *Singapore Monitor*, 13 December 1982, p. 5; "The Army. A career that commands respect," *The Straits Times*, 4 March 1990, p. 13; "A Warning from the SAF," *The Straits Times*, 11 April 1998, p. 38; Glen Choo, "Ready, Decisive, Respected: What does it mean to you?" *Army News*, Issue No. 196 (January 2012), pp. 2-3; and "Our Army: Ready, Decisive, Respected," *Army News*, Issue No. 198 (March 2012), pp. 6-7.
[14] Bjorn Teo, "Project 300: Updating Commanders on Key Events and Developments," *Army News*, Issue No. 206 (December 2012), p. 4.
[15] "A High-Flying Career," *Special Life! Soldier, Scholar and Leader (The Straits Times)*, 18 March 1991, p. 2.

The other manifestation of this problem came from *individual perceptions* of a career ceiling. It was common to hear education level and scholarship status cited as factors and *with decreasing frequency* the sensitive issues of race, religion, and 'cliques' (factions). This flowed on to the belief that the 'organization is unfair' in terms of performance appraisals and career potential which impacted promotions and postings. Some regulars harboured parochial and anachronistic expectations of time-based promotions even though performance and potential replaced seniority as key factors over three decades ago. Another gripe came from individuals who believed that they were better than 'the system' – the structure, processes, and the people who ran it – had recognized. They faulted the system for allowing them to fall behind peers within the same cohort or get leapfrogged by those junior in rank and/or appointment. Resignation became the only face-saving measure.

Individual perception also extended to postings which were a source of excitement but also created tension and disappointment for which officers left service. Some questioned the need to serve an (usually junior) appointment twice when the first was deemed 'unofficial'. Others had their romantic ideals of officership shattered by seemingly mundane 'desk-bound' staff appointments. Then there were those who attributed broken 'promises' of a particular posting which never materialized. Such incidents were career-changing setbacks for the more ambitious officers especially when they missed out on the all-important command assignments. This situation is worsened when a 'lesser' candidate in terms of experiences or 'abilities' is given the prized appointment that one was eying. In unique circumstances individuals have resigned because they did not receive command of a specific unit or sought to avoid serving under a particular superior officer. On extremely rare occasions resignations were attributed to 'unfairness' for being made a scapegoat for incidences beyond their control.

The fifth category contained individuals overwhelmed by disillusionment and cynicism. The intense pressure to recruit proliferated "brochures and advertisements [which] can sugar-coat many aspects" of the military career.[16] Those in the targeted age bracket were overwhelmingly young and impressionable. Their parents could have been none the wiser. Some became disillusioned when realities set in and the romanticism and heroism portrayed in recruitment campaigns faded while seeds of 'this is not what I signed-up for' germinated. This has occurred as early as their undergraduate studies, especially when a strong economy presented a gamut of career opportunities present themselves. One general related:

[16] "Nothing Less Than The Best For Our Nation," *Scholarship Guide website*, 17 February 2009, scholarshipguide.wordpress.com/2009/02/17/nothing-less-than-the-best-for-our-nation (accessed 28 May 2014).

> "If I ever considered leaving it was in university when you see the opportunities classmates had to pursue other occupations. There were fleeting moments where I wondered if I had made the right decision. But once I graduated and got back to the air force it did not matter. [For seven years] it was pretty much a care free career. I was just following a timetable consisting of Flight School and then university. <smiles>"[17]

Others were trapped in what they perceived as a 'stifling bureaucracy' despite their early inclination for a military career. Moving a 'ground' unit to a large formation HQ or MINDEF can lead to culture shock. At times this is made more unbearable by the ubiquitous 'office politics' and the occasional condescending attitudes and *prima donna* antics of more senior officers. Even scholar-officers have been caught in this bind as 'scholar-on-scholar' incidents have accounted for, or at very least hastened, some leaving service from undue 'mental stress'. At other times in the past one general even remembered that: "Scholars were given bad reports by their formation chiefs so that they could be kept within the formation."[18]

Disillusionment and cynicism also surfaced after poor performance(s) and failure to meet expected standards. Doubts over the future of one's military career became inevitable. The most glaring examples came from commanders who failed unit evaluation(s) or incidences which highlighted their failure of command responsibility. Disciplinary issues ranging from lapses in following procedure (e.g. tenders from suppliers) to questions of 'integrity' to civil offences such as alcohol and traffic violations also proved detrimental. The 'slap on the wrist' or 'blotch' on the disciplinary record may not have warranted discharge from service but obviously proved too much for certain individuals. Next, there were cases of burn-out prevalent in units with hectic and sustained training tempos or from 'stand-by fatigue' in various high-readiness units. Such stressors on repeated tours were a sure recipe for resignations. The greatest concern, however, came from those who left because of changes in culture or training standards which they deemed unacceptable and were encapsulated in the notion 'this is not the SAF I joined'. Whether this is a matter of individual perception and expectation or a reflection of greater malaise that plagued the defence establishment is unknown. Hearsay is rife but details have remained sketchy.

Finally, there were miscellaneous reasons for leaving. Some incidences are *sui generis* as this admiral opined:

> "Exodus of personnel comes from various sources. Policies. From scholars. There was an incident when scholars from the army were parachuted in who did not understand navy culture which created massive morale problems. Even simple things such as food. Food is a basic morale booster on the ship. There

[17] Interview No. 16.
[18] Interview No. 28.

> was a three-month trial of pre-packed food by SATS (a catering company), the same type as the catered meals served on SIA (airline) flights but it could not replace the taste of fresh rations and skill of our navy chefs. It was not surprising the trial 'failed'."[19]

Other incidences included physical injuries suffered early in their career before mandatory ground tours could be cleared for them to continue service as staff officers. There are those who left once 'the adventure is over' – usually after battalion, ship, or squadron command – the apex of directly leading and influencing soldiers, sailors, and airmen under their charge. There were also those who by very nature of the military career resigned when they emigrated because of marriage and/or in search of a 'better' future overseas.

5.2.2 Why the Military Elites considered leaving

This sub-section contains the circumstances and reasons where approximately half of the interview participants *considered* leaving the SAF before the age of retirement. The emergent categories included the negative side of people, career progression, bond completion, overstaying, and personal ambitions. One category is excluded as it has already been alluded to in the previous chapter namely that the more highly educated (and then-junior) officers were enticed by more appropriate compensation expectations outside the military prior to the salary revision of 1982. The other half of the interview participants never considered leaving active duty before retirement. This was best encapsulated by one general who said: "I never considered leaving. I never saw the reason to once I saw the larger purpose and saw the part of my role in the SAF."[20]

The importance of people in any organization is undeniable. This is even more so for the military in light of its sacred and possibly violent mission. It is people who gave the SAF strength and motivated others to join its ranks as regulars; but it is also people who contributed to manpower woes and almost accounted for these generals and admirals. One officer was a self-claimed 'maverick' and emphatically concluded his interview saying: "You cannot fault me for doing my job but you can fault me for being an arsehole."[21] Perhaps it was not surprising that he considered leaving because his character and style often did not sit well with others. Towards the end of his career fatigue had also set in. When asked if he ever considered leaving service prematurely he mused:

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[19] Interview No. 04.
[20] Interview No. 21.
[21] Interview No. 26.

> "When I was an instructor at SAFTI my company 2IC and I had <pause> let us say we had 'differences'. Maybe he did not like my style of doing things. So I got charged and my Lieutenant-to-Captain promotion was delayed. I was one of the last in my batch to get promoted and some of them came to show-off their Captain rank and asked me to salute them. Bastards. I told them to fuck themselves … When I was finally promoted to Captain, I tell you when it was time to collect promotion certificate from the brigade commander at a parade I was playing billiard in the Officers' Mess. The guy (he was playing against) was trying to get my money (wager) and I was not going to let him. The brigade commander was Colonel [X], a real terror. He walked into the mess and asked: 'Where were you?' Then he gave me the (promotion) cert[ificate] and 14 extra duties. <laughs> I didn't care because I was prepared to leave anytime. [Then] when I was commander (of a unit) I wanted to resign. I went to see [the commandant] (his superior). It was all [Officer Y's] fault, the bastard. He was deputy commandant and came to my office to say the windows are dirty. I was always in the field with the training troops. Where do I find time to do area cleaning? He said the office must be spick and span at all times. So I hijacked a platoon of officer cadets to clean the office. Anyway [the commandant] refused my resignation. I said OK but tell [Officer Y] to layoff. When I got promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, [the commandant] said: 'You don't go and *hum tum* (Malay for 'hit') [Officer Y]!' <laughs> … [Finally], [t]hey also gave me the appointment of (formation commander). Must deal with reservists. Headache. <slaps forehead> I wanted to quit. I was tired and very stressed out … I wanted to quit and I had reached the end of the road. I submitted my resignation and [the CDF] suddenly became very nice to me. He rejected the resignation. He said take three weeks leave. When I came back I told him the same thing so he said take three months more. <laughs> [The service chief] complained that I spoke directly to CDF. I told him to stay out of it if not he'd get hurt. I didn't care. I was leaving anyway. [A politician] invited me and my wife to dinner … He asked me why I wanted to leave. I told him very frankly … I am a non-scholar … I [also] told him to keep the army young. Don't ever end up looking like (country Z) where you have a 70-year old general looking like Mickey Mouse. And people like me were jamming up the system for the scholars coming up."[22]

For a second officer, his initiative was not taken too lightly and his career almost ended prematurely at a time when pagers (not to mention mobile phones) were yet to appear on the scene:

> "I was charged and fined $200 (around two week's wages). I was fed-up and decided to leave. In those days we have the Hokkien platoon (segregation of soldiers based on language of communication). One of my soldiers got married but the battalion was in confinement. I was looking for the CO but he could not be found so I released the platoon mates for the wedding. CO found out later and decided to charge me. On Friday that week I was charged by the brigade commander who never asked [for my] reason. The whole situation was stupid and I did not want to be part of the organization. On Saturday I demanded to see CO OPC. On Monday I was posted out to the training department under

[22] Interview No. 26.

> Colonel [T]. He told me that I should not leave. <grins> I subsequently became part of the first batch of Wranglers and was soon promoted to Captain."[23]

A third officer considered leaving mid-career within three different contexts, two of which illustrated some dark encounters of military life:

> "I thought of leaving the SAF three times. The first was at age 32 or 34 to do a Ph.D in Operations Research (OR). As you know Singaporeans often look at the name of the university more than the actual course. I was asked to consider (an American university known for OR) but it was a 'no name' university so I stayed. The next was when my mum had a stroke. I am very close to her. The [formation chief] did not allow me to go and see her so I told him that he could keep the job. He wanted to charge me but never got round to it. I think my godfather and fairy godmother looked after me. <grins> This incident made me ensure that it would never happen to another soldier in the SAF. When I was a battalion CO one of the (subordinate) commanders did not allow his soldier to go and see his dying father. I made sure it did not happen. <shakes head> The last was when I was a weapon staff officer I also wanted to leave. It was over the production of [a weapon] … [due to certain technical details] I said you (manufacturers) can be at the arms show but you will not have the export license. The [manufacturers] wanted to market the weapon and sell it so some people tried to implicate me and put me out of the picture. I was investigated for allegedly 'cosying up' to defence contractors. You know you do your best and yet people want to screw you and get you out of the equation."[24]

The final example is from an officer who contemplated leaving the SAF most frequently among all the interviewees. He cited three of his more negative experiences:

> "I had serious thoughts of leaving twice a year on average. There were some incidences that pushed me to the very edge of leaving and it always revolved around people. The first incident took place when I was 2LT. There was a toxic culture where I was subjected to mental abuse and the treatment I received was disparaging, totally demeaning as an officer. The conduct of certain officers who were more senior was questionable. The second was in (year X) nearing the end of my initial (Y)-year contract. The HR policy offered pensionable service to Captains but 'someone at the top' deemed promotions were taking place too fast so some of us Lieutenants were delayed in promotion to Captain. So instead of pension we were offered a three-year contract. Anyhow I stayed on, got promoted to Captain in (year X+1) and got pensionable service. The third was [a superior] who I think was bi-polar and had serious issues. He made me think of leaving service twice a day! I thought then I would not climb any further and my career was probably over."[25]

This officer related how a new posting and subsequent superiors – all who became military elites in due course – 'resurrected' his career through trust in his judgement

[23] Interview No. 13.
[24] Interview No. 28.
[25] Interview No. 04.

and abilities. A career he thought was over instead moved from strength to strength and culminated in a star.

The experiences of some officers at the hands of others proved instrumental in their considerations of resigning but this is not always the case. The SAF is not littered with madmen among its ranks. A career that was not moving as planned was at times a good enough reason to question one's role in the military especially when realistic peer comparisons were made. For one non-scholar-officer, a new posting indicated a halt in career progression when he was tasked with the same job but in a different setting. He explained:

> "I was then shoved to (Y) Division as [an Assistant Principal Staff Officer (PSO)]. I was taking over my ex-OC (company commander, his ex-superior) when I was a PC. By then I was age 29 and I saw my career not going anywhere. You needed to attend SCSC to be promoted and if you miss it, at that time by age 33, then that's it. I already did [Battalion PSO] tour for 3 years. There was no progression and so I asked if that was the life I wanted. Perhaps it was time to leave and learn something else. So I prepared my resignation letter for the [branch head] who was (Officer L). Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I did not do this and simply continued as an [Assistant PSO]. <smiles> (Officer L) asked me: 'What will make you not leave?' Being young I wanted to do what I liked to do so I said I wanted to be S3 (operations officer) because I like ops. They must have thought I was stupid since I already completed a [comparable] staff tour, and for three years, why would I want to do another one? I was willing to move laterally but that did not happen."[26]

This officer eventually received another posting because of his proven abilities, the branch head's recognition of his potential, and the willingness of the division HQ to release him without citing the omnipresent 'manpower shortage' or 'unit requirements' clichés. As for scholar-officers the case in point is provided by former CDF (2003-7) LG (RET) Ng Yat Chung (SAFOS 1980) who felt hard done-by as a CPT when peers received seemingly more prestigious appointments. Yet the episode proved a blessing in disguise:

> "Logistics in those days was considered the backwater of the Army. It was such a blow – that was the only time I considered quitting the SAF … It turned out to be one of the best postings and learning experiences I had. Because you get into the innards of the Army and learn what it really takes to keep the Army going."[27]

The third area where some military elites considered leaving was at the completion of the bond or Minimum Term of Engagement (MTE). None of them counted-down to this juncture of their respective careers but it allowed individuals to take stock of career progression, the fit and satisfaction with military life, and future opportunities within and beyond the SAF. There were certainly options for most if they

[26] Interview No. 05.
[27] Ng et al., *Called to Lead*, p. 94.

seriously contemplated leaving early to mid-career. One officer made contingency plans to address future options rather than in preparation to leave:

> "It was clear that I wanted to do well while serving my bond in my work for the nation. I made a decision in (year X) to start [a post-graduate degree] because in three year's time I have to decide whether to stay or leave (the SAF). I had the options of staying in uniform, the civil service, or going to the private sector. I needed to plan with alternatives."[28]

It was interesting that among the flag-officers interviewed, besides those who considered leaving because of financial considerations before 1982, it was those with the most transferrable skills who considered leaving at the completion of their bonds. The most notable were pilots and doctors. One considered leaving to continue his love of flying, a point not lost on other pilots:

> "At some point after the 12-year bond was up I thought of moving to SIA because I wanted to fly. I could not see any other way up except out. The air force was pretty much a fighter pilot's world. I stayed-on because a good friend counselled me. Then post-graduate opportunity came and with it a five-year bond. <laughs>"[29]

Such a consideration arose because the flying hours clocked by air force pilots invariably tapered off – *usually* after squadron command – and gradually decreased as one climbed the hierarchy from LTC onward. Another RSAF general explained:

> "Flying has its limits as you climb. There are other responsibilities to handle and other skills to develop. The desire to only want to fly has to be moderated. For those who only want to fly as a career the space and opportunity has to be created. That's the only way to continue to fly late into the career."[30]

Flying at general-ranks became a matter of maintaining currency and keeping in touch with flying squadrons at the air bases. For example, former CAF (1980-2, 1984-92) BG (RET) Michael Teo tried to "fly twice a week, or at least 10 hours a month."[31] Another CAF (1992-5) LG (RET) then-BG Bey Soo Khiang flew "once a week" and visited the squadrons "to get a feel of the ground."[32]

While some of the CMCs were set on a full career in the SAF others, like their non-medical counterparts, used the bond as markers to weigh alternatives. One MO explained his goals as such:

> "When I signed-on it was pensionable. I thought after the bond, when the training is over, I thought I would leave and go back to private practice, traditional medicine. There was a five-year bond for post-graduate studies. I thought it was a point to consider after bond but I was given better and better

[28] Interview No. 14.
[29] Interview No. 25.
[30] Interview No. 16.
[31] "Yes sir, it's a dream and love that got 2 to the top," *The Straits Times*, 1 November 1985, p. 11.
[32] "Meet SAF's four new generals," *The Straits Times*, 27 June 1992, p. 26.

> challenges. I would say I was one of the pioneers in (a specialized field of military medicine). I was able to practice (specialized military) medicine for a good ten years after graduation in (year X) to set up (a specialized medical centre in the SAF)."[33]

For another:

> "I intended to serve for six or 12 years to live out the career goal to be a surgeon. But being a military surgeon you had the challenges to maintain currency. Being qualified is no issue but maintaining currency in skills is difficult. (Another medical specialization) was also an important area. The SAF saw a need in the area of (the said specialization) and I could do both. There was an opportunity to grow something. If I apportioned my career into three parts it would look like this. <draws a diagram> After first six, I was offered a job in MOH but CMC offered me an important job. After second six, I had options in NUH (National University Hospital) and NUS but CMC asked me to help him establish certain things. After these 12 years I was quite sure I was going to stay-on until the end (retirement)."[34]

A third echoed:

> "In hospital I had no regrets (of signing-on), it was just to cross the milestone. My life was structured by events. I had to complete my training in three years so the pre-occupation was to pass exams. No thoughts of regret or wrong choice. I was under the impression of being able to do both military and (medical specialization). I intended to finish six years first then decide if I should stay-on. I was offered the pension in the sixth year."[35]

The fourth category of flag-officers who considered leaving questioned if they had overstayed their welcome in the armed forces. One officer was concerned with the maturing pipeline of scholar-officers who appeared in increasing numbers among the senior ranks and appointments. He was prepared to make way for others but like an obedient soldier continued as long as his services were required:

> "In (year X) before I went [overseas for a SAF-sponsored course] I thought that upon my return to Singapore it would be a good time to leave the SAF. I went to see [the defence minister] about it and he said 'I just became defence minister, how can you leave?' <smiles> So I remained but mentally I was prepared to leave anytime after [the course]. You have all the young scholars moving up. They are more restless and ambitious. I didn't want to come to the office one day and see a bucket in front of my door waiting for me to kick it."[36]

Another general weighed options beyond the SAF and in light of opportunities to continue value-adding to the organization:

> "I considered leaving but this was the pull from the outside and not a push from the inside (the SAF). I did ask myself if I was overstaying my welcome. I felt that

[33] Interview No. 20.
[34] Interview No. 18.
[35] Interview No. 23.
[36] Interview No. 19.

> there were interesting prospects out of uniform and I might even be doing better. But I also felt that I was still needed and I could contribute, and this contribution was enough to offset the pull. In fact if I wanted to leave my family would be concerned and ask: 'Are you sure?' <laughs>"[37]

The fifth category included officers who considered leaving because of personal ambitions which could only be fulfilled beyond the confines of military service. One harboured the longstanding ambition to experience living overseas but circumstances dictated otherwise:

> "I was thinking of migrating to gain wider experience of living overseas and thought (an English-speaking country) looked quite good. A week after submitting my resignation I went for medical check-up and MSD also reminded me of the OSA. It was around this time that the (said country's) economy took a downturn and so I withdrew my resignation. I thought my career *liao* (Hokkien for 'finished') already so I commenced applying for jobs. I applied to a shipping company but they told me 'you have a career in the army so you better stay-on'. <smiles> Eventually my career continued and I went to (Staff College) where I graduated as one of the top students and received my desire for command. Yes, I was also surprised my career was not impacted in any adverse manner. <grins>"[38]

For a second officer it was to continue a life-long dedication in leadership and learning but without the confines of rank and hierarchy. In some ways this was an extension of his motivation for a military career which was to make a difference in the lives of conscripts who did not want to be in uniform. Policy changes also intervened in a career that would have otherwise ended short of a star:

> "I considered leaving because my belief is in leading beyond [the association with one's] rank and not because I did not like the SAF. If I stayed on in the SAF anything I did had rank attached to it. I had the desire to lead without rank, to lead by who I am, to be among equals. [Accepting] the postgraduate study award carried with it a five-year bond which meant more of rank. But I thought 'stay-on and see' [what unfolds]. Besides there were still NSFs around so my work was not done. The next time I considered leaving was when I was 44. The retirement age then was 45 so I thought: 'Why wait until then?' I informed [CDF] but he told me the policy was changing to 47 and asked if I could stay because there was a gap (in the succession of senior officers). There were no promises made to me of future appointments. I stayed-on and it became 'NS' for once. <smiles>"[39]

All the flag-officers invariably did not leave the SAF before reaching retirement despite the various thoughts to do so. A few were undoubtedly prevented by human or

[37] Interview No. 22.
[38] Interview No. 11.
[39] Interview No. 07.

economic intervention. Often it was temporary disillusionment but nothing that pushed them to take the step of actually starting work in another organization.

5.3 Transactional Commitment

If the interview participants considered leaving the SAF but stopped short, or if they never considered leaving, there must be reasons why this was so. This next section places the spotlight on transactional commitment which is grounded in egoism where the individual is the ultimate beneficiary of his goals and actions.[40] Sensitising concepts indicated that transactional commitment occurred for various reasons. An officer remained on active duty because he had contextual obligations (normative commitment) to fulfil in return for the SAF's investment in his professional development through training, education, and experiences at various stages in the career. Then there are other transactional reasons such as remuneration, career progression, and the opportunity costs associated with leaving the military such as lower salary, fewer benefits, and barriers to entry (e.g. esoteric industrial knowledge and experience). It must be stressed that outstanding bond or MTE, salary, and career progression are not automatic indicators of transactional commitment because they could be correlated with, and was not necessarily the cause, for an officer to stay-on. The next few subsections illustrate these complexities.

5.3.1 Obligation

Every regular officer has a normative commitment to the SAF through bonded service for scholarships (SAF or PSC transferred to the SAF) and/or a MTE. These periods vary according to specifics such as scholarship, training award, course(s) attended, and vocation.[41] The lengths of contractual service are invariably extended (unless served concurrently) depending on the additional military course(s) attended, post-graduate studies, specific postings, and receipt of a meritorious promotion.[42]

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[40] C. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward a social-psychological answer* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1991), pp. 8-9; Bruce J. Avolioa and Edwin E. Locke, "Contrasting different philosophies of leader motivation: Altruism versus egoism," *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 13, Iss. 2 (2002), p. 171; Julian Le Grand, *Motivation, Agency, and Public Policy: Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 27; and C. Daniel Batson, Nadia Ahmad, and E. L. Stocks, "Four Forms of Prosocial Motivation: Egoism, Altruism, Collectivism, and Principlism," in David Dunning (ed.), *Social Motivation* (New York, NY and Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 2011), p. 106.

[41] Scholarship recipients who are not qualified pilots serve a six-year bond while qualified pilots (rotary or fixed-wing) served theirs within a MTE of 12 years.

[42] A non-graduate is commissioned a 2LT and forwarded to LTA a year later after which promotions are merit-based. A non-medical (medicine, dentistry) graduate (with a university degree recognized by MINDEF) is commissioned a LTA and forwarded to CPT 18 months later followed by merit-based promotions. A combat MO is commissioned a CPT and forwarded to MAJ upon completion of post-

While details differ these practices are not unique to the SAF and are found in other militaries.[43]

The interview participants took their initial obligations in one of two ways. The first came from the broad view that it was non-negotiable and must be fulfilled, and a period to find the necessary fit for a career in the military. Some explanations were straight forward. One general quipped: "No matter what I would have served out my bond because I could not afford to break it."[44] Another simply said: "At signing-on an eight-year bond was attached so just try it (military life)."[45] For others, a combination of factors shaped their circumstances. Recall that most of these officers signed-on at a time when Singapore was in transition from a colonial port into an industrialized city-state. The possibility of breaking the attached bond or incurring financial penalties for not meeting associated MTE was negated by their lower-middle class socio-economic background. They could ill-afford to 'buy-out' the bond and salaries received frequently financed household expenses.

The reflection of one general reiterated the scholarship benefits which enticed him to join the SAF in the first place and underlined the bond as a 'trial' period:

> "The bond was for eight years. For me breaking bond was never an issue or a possibility. My allowance went to subsidizing the family so I could not afford to do so even if I wanted to. <grins> My elder brother could have probably received university education but my father suggested that he work to help support the family. This initial eight years was bonded but it also gave me a sense of military life and what the career entails. I wanted to do a good job in any case. Some liked it (military life) and some did not."[46]

Another general, who was also primarily attracted by the scholarship, viewed the bond as an opportunity to fulfil the ambition to fly:

> "In my second year I joined the university air squadron but as a foreigner you have lower priority (compared to the locals) and so [I] ended up sitting around and doing nothing much. But I started flying during the [university] vacation. Every summer I was at Changi Air Base flying. I was actually offered a [doctoral] research scholarship at [the same university] but I knew I had to come back. I could not fight the government. <laughs> I also could not afford to ['break

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graduate/specialized medical studies followed by merit-based promotion. A service (non-combat) MO is commissioned a LTA and is usually a national serviceman.

[43] For example the Initial Minimum Period of Service (IMPS) of some vocations in the Australia Defence Force: Pilots in the Royal Australian Air Force (11.5 years); Joint Battlefield Airspace Controller (Air Traffic Controller) (7); Maritime Warfare Officer (also for Submariner) (6); Maritime Aviation Warfare Officer (12); Navy Pilot (10); Army Aviation Corps Pilot (GSO) (13); Army Aviation Corps Pilot (SSO) (9); General Service Officer (9 if Australian Defence Force Academy and RMC Duntroon Graduate, 6 if RMC Duntroon graduate).

[44] Interview No. 11.

[45] Interview No. 12.

[46] Interview No. 10.

> bond'] because my salary went into supporting the family. I was also looking forward to fly. <laughs>"[47]

For a third general it was a simple case of fulfilling the bond before taking stock of whether to remain in service:

> "The initial contract was for 12 years with a bond of eight. I wanted to complete the bond first and then see (progress and options). In fact while I was still at university my undergraduate supervisor enticed me to take up [doctoral] studies in medical engineering. The area of research was related to the heart. But as you know the SAF then had a very strict policy on postgraduate studies."[48]

Offers for post-graduate research opportunities upon completion of their undergraduate studies at reputable universities bore testament to their high academic standards but were invariably turned down. In fact, this precedent was set by Lee Hsien Loong who completed his mathematics degree in two years and then studied computing to fulfil the university's three-year residency requirement. Lee declined the offer and told Cambridge: "No, thank you, I've got to go back. This is my country and my obligation and I do not want to be elsewhere where my contribution doesn't make much of a difference."[49]

The initial obligation was a non-issue from a second vantage point. While there were contractual reasons and moral obligations to be met it was merely peripheral because officers wanted to serve and not because they were obliged or needed to be in service. This does not imply that they never *considered* leaving the SAF short of retirement, but simply put, they started off quite set on staying beyond the bonded period, possibly to the point of retirement. One admiral explicated simply:

> "The terms and conditions were an eight-year bond for the scholarship and emplacement on pensionable service. I was prepared for a full career, to serve until retirement. You could say the bond was of no consequence and that the eight years were irrelevant to me."[50]

Another interview participant was not placed on the pension initially but firmly acknowledged: "The contract at that time was for seven years but I was mentally prepared for life."[51] Former CAF (2006-9) MG (NS) Ng Chee Khern, who saw himself as an accountant if not a fighter pilot, framed his commitment in moral terms: "If I had

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[47] Interview No. 25.
[48] Interview No. 02.
[49] This trend was set by Lee Hsien Loong, the first of the inaugural batch (1971) of five SAFOS recipients to complete his undergraduate degree (1973), who had to turn down any further research in mathematics despite being the top student of his year at Cambridge. See interview with his supervisor Béla Bollobás at Y.K. Leong, "Béla Bollobás: Graphs Extremal and Random," *Imprints* (Institute for Mathematical Sciences, NUS), Iss. 11 (September 2007), p. 21; and Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths*, pp. 76-7.
[50] Interview No. 17.
[51] Interview No. 04.

gone out to be a private citizen after my bond was up, I would have felt guilty. In truth, I would have deprived someone else of the opportunities I got."[52]

Bonds and MTEs did not exist only in the initial stages of a career because others invariably followed as an officer developed professionally and ascended the ranks. Take this individual's experience:

> "I had an eight-year bond to January (year X). When I took the [master's degree at a prestigious foreign university] there was an additional three years. It should have been an additional five but there was a rule then which stated an individual cannot be bonded to the civil service for more than eleven years. Therefore the bond was an additional three and not five. <laughs>"[53]

Extended bonds and MTEs were quite the norm for military elites whose careers progressed more rapidly that their peers in order for them to make one-star and above by their late-30s and mid-40s. This meant checking off on merit-based promotions, attendance at significant courses (Staff College), command and senior staff appointments, post-graduate studies, or perhaps attendance at a War College. Each milestone signalled an officer was progressing and his services appreciated in return an extended mandatory period of service. This was how the defence establishment retained talented officers independent of their individual convictions. Most importantly bonds and MTEs proved effective in keeping certain individuals on active service until retirement. One officer recalled his decision as such:

> "… my bond was extended after attendance at various courses and later we were offered pensionable service. Finally we switched to the SAVER scheme and that was when I decided to stay until retirement."[54]

Another bore testament to the system's effectiveness in retaining his services:

> "The lifestyle worked with me but you don't think [you would stay] 25 years. <laughs> Four, five years maybe but after the post-graduate studies I was sure I would stay until retirement. The upgrading opportunities at university were very important for staying in the SAF. The bonds were also reasonable so I had no issue."[55]

The bond was also not always a clearly delineated matter of staying-on in uniform. Proven abilities attracted attention in much the same way as brilliant undergrads. As one CMC recalled:

> "I received offers to return to the public health service; even a proposal to buy-out the bond. I did well (for post-graduate studies) and was advised that I should pursue a career as [a civilian medical specialist]. It was put to me before

[52] Lynn Lee, "All the President's men and women," *The Straits Times*, 17 August 2007, p. 30.
[53] Interview No. 14.
[54] Interview No. 02.
[55] Interview No. 22.

the end of the day but I rejected such offers because I wanted to fulfil the bond and did not want to be a bond-breaker."[56]

In the literature review Cohen dismissed Meyer and Allen's concept of normative commitment – an individual's obligation to remain with an organization – because of research gaps supporting "the relationship between early socialization tactics and normative commitment … therefore, it seems that normative commitment is affected very little by specific organizational experiences and does not depend on any exchange process with the organization"[57] It could be reasoned that normative commitment in the SAF is manifested through the contractual practice and extension of bonds and MTEs. Yet, there were instances of normative commitment grounded in moral conviction where an officer felt obligated to remain because of the SAF's investments in his professional development. Finally, there were cases where normative commitment proved superfluous because those officers remained in service for neither contractual nor moral reasons as the proceeding sections illustrate.

5.3.2 Remuneration

In the previous chapter it was revealed that salary was a secondary motivation for the military elite to join the SAF. The reasons cited varied and included the need to contribute to household expenditures, the desire for a salary instead of subsistence allowance during two to three years of NS, the intention to save for planned expenditure such as education and housing, and starting SAF salaries which bettered the private sector especially for those with lower formal education. In this subsection, remuneration was not frequently cited as a reason to stay. In fact salary was a point of consternation for graduate officers who were paid less handsomely than their scholar-officer counterparts. The 1982 salary revision and subsequent periodic reviews smoothed remuneration concerns yet it was also not a reason for commitment to the SAF. It simply eliminated monetary considerations for leaving. This is not to say remuneration is unimportant. It is more a reflection of salaries having met daily needs (and more) and officers could freely focus on their role as military professionals.

This is not simply a matter of paying lip service that 'money did not matter'. Consider the fact that a commercial pilot made twice as much as an air force pilot in the days before the pay revision of 1982.[58] One pilot general overcame this challenge and focused instead on the 'rich' reward of commanding a fighter squadron:

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[56] Interview No. 23.
[57] Cohen, "Commitment before and after," p. 342.
[58] Lim Suan Kooi, "The most exciting … most exacting …" *The Straits Times*, 9 August 1971, p. 15.

> "As CO all the [squadron] personnel were on base. Married personnel had their quarters and singles lived in the mess. At the squadron functions everyone and their family members joined in so it was truly 'family' in the sense of the word. When there was a recall we just moved from quarters to the flight line and we were fully functional, operational very quickly. Nobody complained and it was a good atmosphere. There was the sense of belonging and a sense of concern among squadron members. The sense of camaraderie. But the pay was still not attractive. <laughs> For me, if the present factor (current state) plus the 'taste' factor (intangible rewards) is greater than the future pay I could get from outside the air force then I should stay. The bottom line is that pay must meet needs, first as a single then for the family. A positive organisational structure draws commitment from you to stay and do well. You could look forward to promotion, recognition such as medals, and of course a pay rise. <laughs>"[59]

An admiral also weathered similar concerns:

> "There was a possibility of leaving in (year X) but in 1982 there was a salary revision which helped a lot. After 1982 pay was no longer an issue and my thoughts of leaving dissipated. It was a matter of 'see what happens'. Before that the navy was underpaid and overworked. No annual promotions and you had to take a promotion exam before you could be shortlisted for the promotion interview. [In fact] I was actually told by HR admin[istration] that the combat graduate scheme was no longer in force. I went to MINDEF general orders to prove my case and saw that it was still in force! So I went for a promotion interview chaired by (then-CDF) Winston Choo. I received my Captain which meant less disparity of pay and there were also not so many Captains in those days."[60]

While these officers tolerated low wages they were perhaps the exception rather than the norm. The increasing attrition rates among regular officers before 1982 were exacerbated by low recruitment numbers. Appealing to values and professionalism is one thing. Pragmatism kicked in as Singapore developed economically and the standard of living increased. It was not surprising that the 1982 revision ensured SAF salaries were competitive against private sector offerings.[61] This was especially notable for officers with the most transferrable and specialized skills yet low in supply such as pilots and MOs. One general continued:

> "The 1982 pay revision came about in the air force because we were expanding very rapidly adding aircraft, helicopters and were training more pilots. But it was insufficient because people leave for SIA so we needed to see how we could retain them. The pay revision allowed us to retain experienced guys and we looked to match SIA if possible. Besides the increase in rank pay there were also command allowances, and some specialised allowances depending on the aircraft you flew."[62]

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[59] Interview No. 24.
[60] Interview No. 15.
[61] "Air Force pilots get more pay," *Pioneer* (December 1992), p. 15.
[62] Interview No. 24.

Salary revision was not the panacea to competition from SIA. External consultants also raised uneasy questions and the 'HAYS Job Evaluation Method' in particular established the relative importance of jobs within an organisation.[63] In one instance it was "asked how can the squadron CO only be a major when he was in charge of assets worth millions?"[64] Officer ranks were soon commensurate with appointments and salaries better matched responsibilities.

As for doctors they needed to be compensated well enough to forgo more lucrative opportunities but not at a level where money became the reason to remain on active service. One CMC explained how salaries for MOs were formulated:

> "Technically MOs are paid two ranks up. Although you are not promoted in rank you are also not slowed in salary. There is corporate cohort comparison with your peers in medical school. But you could not compare with some of the surgeons so there is some sacrifice there. And while you cannot get surgeon's pay SAF also makes sure you won't be the last among peers if not it will be hard or impossible to attract and retain doctors. The salary is still reasonably good but most importantly you must be able to say: 'Hey, you can serve your country'."[65]

Another CMC added:

> "SAF pay is comfortable. Comparable to MOH. The SAF salary attracts a 10 to 20 percent premium so for a $3,000 start (in the 1990s) you are looking at least $300 more. Doctors at hospitals also receive allowances so the pay is comparable. Of course, depending on speciality and grade the hospitals can be higher. The SAF pays you well enough to let you focus on the job, to set up a family. Let me say the pay is comfortable but not an avenue where you will be rich."[66]

For the other non-MOs the prevailing view was that salary was not a reason to stay-on but it was "continuing and sufficient" which eliminated the need to leave for 'greener' financial pastures.[67] A general expressed gratitude "that MINDEF's remuneration framework recognizes the onerous nature of the military career. It was good to have but not the main concern."[68] Another echoed:

> "Salary is important but not a major consideration (of whether to stay-on). The SAF pays you very well so there is no need to think of it. There is no need to think of bread and butter issues. In fact there is enough spare cash for cohesion activities."[69]

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[63] Tan Cheong Hin and Lim Lay Ching, "Potential Appraisal: The Shell Appraisal System," *NTU School of Accountancy and Business Working Paper Series*, No. 29 (1993), p. 20.
[64] Interview No. 24.
[65] Interview No. 20.
[66] Interview No. 18.
[67] Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 15.
[68] Interview No. 14.
[69] Interview No. 05.

Yet another, after taking into account the consistent salary revisions, even considered the pay scale relatively unattractive:

> "Salary SAF-wise it is not a plus. Compared to my peers [in the private sector] I could be earning more but I do it because I love the job. There are always new changes. Furthermore, breaking the comfort zone is designed into the job."[70]

This is not to say that empirical evidence refuted the existence of a comfortable and consistently increasing income from turning into a need (Meyer and Allen's *continuance* commitment, Cohen's *instrumental* commitment) to stay. It certainly existed as one officer candidly identified: "Married with kids you think about the long-term future and also your commitment on the house."[71] With few exceptions the opportunity cost of leaving the SAF invariably resulted in a pay cut (e.g. civil service, defence industry) and perhaps even starting from scratch because a military career is unlikely to have provided the requisite experience for higher paying industries such as finance and law. It is this chain of thought which gave credence to the countervailing view to leave the SAF once service obligations were met and enter another industry (and increasingly overseas) while one is still marketable. The initial decrease in salary would be insignificant in the long term. One also avoided the disadvantage of having to 'retire' mid-life (40's) and transit for a 'second career'. This decision, however, was often made in light of one's career progression.

5.3.3 Progression

The overwhelming majority of the interview participants indicated remuneration post-1982 was secondary at best for their career commitment. The significance of this point is best viewed in relation to expectations of career progression. This is in no way unrealistic or unique to the military in light of keen societal competition and the need to keep up appearances and be seen to be progressing. As 1WO (RET) Saleh Suratee, former Sergeant Major at the School of Naval Training, observed three decades ago: "... youngsters today are an impatient lot ... They want almost instant promotions and rewards ... Most young people today dream of working only in air-conditioned comfort."[72]

The rank structures for both the officers and the warrant officers and specialists (WOSPEC) corps were expanded to address the general need for conspicuous progression. In 1992 MINDEF added five ranks to the then four-rank WOSPEC structure which afforded "greater [career] mobility and, indirectly, attract[ed] more

[70] Interview No. 07.
[71] Interview No. 10.
[72] "Wives on voyages with husbands," *Navy News* (May 1983), p. 4.

people to join" the SAF amidst decreasing births rate and increasing competition for manpower.[73] The tenth and eleventh WOSPEC ranks were added in 2009 and 2012 respectively.[74] The nine-tier officer rank structure expanded to ten in 2010 with the introduction of the Senior Lieutenant-Colonel (SLTC) rank after the retirement age was raised in 2009.[75] The Military Experts Domain Scheme (MDES) established in 2010 to operate in parallel with the officer and WOSPEC corps also had to accommodate the need for conspicuous rank progression. The MDES ranks corresponded to an eight-tier hierarchy spread over a career that could last until age 60.[76] For graduate Military Experts there are only five ranks to the apex of the MDES structure. To address the relatively long periods between promotions in rank 'enhanced name-tags' were introduced in March 2013 which indicated an individual's rank, grade, and name.[77] A promotion in grade is accompanied with a conspicuous change in name-tags. The need to be seen to progress is not unique to the SAF as 'slow' rates of promotion also had adverse effects on the retention of AOs in the AS which necessitated the implementation of faster promotions and more pay grades.[78]

The interview participants measured their career progression in a few ways. The first was through estimated time norms congruent with one's education level. This proved unreliable as progress was relative and measured differently depending on era. In the 1960s to early-1980s making MAJ was an achievement in itself, as was the case of LTC to the mid-1990s, and since then it is making COL. A second yard stick was to make relative comparisons with peers within a commissioning cohort, or batch of scholarship recipients (if applicable) as one officer revealed:

> "I stayed on in the SAF based on a relative comparison of how I was doing. Am I progressing relative to my batch of scholars? I mean, there was an expectation to move (up the ranks). Towards the end of my initial period of service I was progressing. The second fastest (in my batch)."[79]

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[73] The four ranks of sergeant (SGT), staff sergeant (SSG), warrant officer class two (WO2), and warrant officer class one (WO1) were expanded to nine ranks: third sergeant (3SG), second sergeant (2SG), first sergeant (1SG), staff sergeant (SSG), master sergeant (MSG), second warrant officer (2WO), first warrant officer (1WO), master warrant officer (MWO), and senior warrant officer (SWO). See "New professional Corps of WOs and Corps of Specialists," *Pioneer* (March 1992), pp. 21-5.
[74] The rank of third warrant officer (3WO) was introduced in 2009 and Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) in 2012. See Glen Choo, Bjorn Teo, and Shawn Tay, "Warrant Officer Corps Reaches New Heights," *Army News*, Issue No. 201 (June 2012), pp. 12-5.
[75] Ian Cheong, "The New SAF Career Schemes: Meeting Future Challenges Today," *Army News*, Issue No. 165 (April-May 2009), p. 6.
[76] The MDES rank structure runs from Military Expert 1 (ME1) to ME8 (one-star equivalent) with university graduates commencing at ME4.
[77] Lim Wei Liang, "Enhanced Name-Tag Presentation Ceremony for Army Engineers," *Army News*, Issue No. 212 (June 2013), p. 5.
[78] David Seth Jones, "Recent reforms in Singapore's administrative elite: Responding to the challenges of a rapidly changing economy and society," *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (December 2002), pp. 80-1.
[79] Interview No. 02.

Others made comparisons with peers:

> "In 1987 you look at your contemporaries outside (of the SAF) and you are not doing so badly. You were doing interesting things. In 1989 there was the Pedra Branca and the refugee issues. I had autonomy in running operations. HQ ran operations and the fleet was more focused on training. I was happy and took things one step at a time. If I was stagnant for several years then the issue of leaving would have featured. In the 1980s being a LTC was good. In the 1990s as a COL was OK."[80]

Not progressing to a respectable level on one's realistic expectations would have certainly raised the question if the military career was for them, especially scholar-officers who could serve in other government ministries or pursue a private sector career. This might seem self-serving but a majority of the military elites were not preoccupied with progress because their performances ensured their progress up the hierarchy and proved a non-issue for most.

Transactional commitment arose from egotistic considerations and manifested themselves in service obligation(s) and considerations of salary and career progression. These were often secondary considerations for the flag-officers to remain on active duty. Service obligations were explicitly known when an officer accepted a scholarship, training course, promotion, or appointment. For those who were focused on monetary compensation the military would always pale in comparison to for-profit industries. Promotions, while important, also proved secondary for career commitment because their performances kept them moving along at an acceptable pace. Such views, however, are changing as the double-edged nature of high salaries and fast promotions that has normalized overtime and transformed privileges into entitlements. A one-star who once headed a personnel department alluded:

> "One important question is to ask if the younger generation is resilient in matters such promotion and salary. The SAF pays a comparatively competitive salary to compensate the serviceman for the unique skill sets in the profession and the shorter career. But some are not contented. They want to have the cake and eat it and then eat another piece. If the organization starts to pander to such people then we must ask: 'Are we retaining the right people?'"[81]

The 'right' people who ascended into the Aristocracy of Armed Talent were not those who only proved resilient in transactional considerations but were anchored by their transformational commitment.

[80] Interview No. 15.
[81] Interview No. 06.

5.4 Transformational Commitment

The previous section covered forms of transactional commitment centred on egoism. The mix of service obligation, remuneration, and career progression proved secondary in most instances because they were insufficient on their own merits to keep the officers in service and perform at the highest levels until retirement. They needed reasons which made them want to stay in service for altruistic reasons which sought to benefit and maximise the welfare of others.[82] The first two sub-sections cover these very factors, namely the camaraderie found in people, the profession, and the mission. The third subsection then provides examples of dangers and challenges faced by some flag-officers during their respective careers.

5.4.1 The People

Fellow service personnel are double-edged when it comes to career commitment in the SAF. The people referred to by the interview participants were comrades-in-arms who started out as soldiers, sailors, airmen, fellow officers, and superiors in the battalion, ship or squadron. This circle of people enlarged as the military elites climbed the ranks but an underlying theme which surfaced, albeit under different contexts, was their genuine care and concern for those under their charge and a willingness to learn from those around them.

One general underlined the importance of people using an example from his tour as a brigade commander:

> "When I was at [a prestigious university] I asked [MINDEF] for a two-year tour. Before me, people looked at brigade command as a stepping stone. I told my superiors that two years would allow me to know the trade. To be a commander you must be on the ground. You need to learn and be able to relate to people, especially the warrant officers and specialists. During the brigade exercises, I got to relate and learn in two aspects. First, to fight combined arms you need to learn about manoeuvre. If you are humble, you get to learn a lot. Second, it also allows you to learn about people and for people to know about you. People get to believe in you. You also know who knows their stuff because you observe and not only rely on hearsay. You get to see who the *jia jua* (Hokkien slang indicating 'skiving') kings are. Being close to people on the ground is vital for those who command. It is only this that will ensure people will follow you when the button is pushed in the time of crisis."[83]

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[82] Batson, *The Altruism Question*, pp. 8-9; Avolioa and Locke, "Contrasting different philosophies of leader motivation," p. 170; Batson et al., "Four Forms of Prosocial Motivation," p. 106; and Robin Kowalski and Drew Westen, *Psychology*, 6th Edition (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011), p. 669.
[83] Interview No. 10.

Another provided his philosophical approach to people within his concept of leadership:

> "Listen, especially at exit interviews because that is when people will say everything, or they will say nothing about the tour. That is why we must always be 'Mission first, People always.' Leadership is tempered by previous experiences and extrapolated to make decisions. It is not something which can be taught. How do you make people do things themselves because they want to? [At times] I have an attitude problem because I just say it. I also trust my people because they return hundred-fold. I use people well but I don't manipulate people. Also don't be opportunistic. One measurement is when people leave, do you behave differently toward them because you were only interested in what they can give. Give opportunity to people and also provide a safety net (to avoid detrimental failure) to develop competency, compliance, and a calling [for the profession]. If they are in the wrong field you must transform their mindset but at the core they must remain an individual and keep their own identity."[84]

A third officer contextualized the role people played in service commitment after he reneged on an original plan to continue studies. He looked forward to remuneration and promotions but these proved secondary:

> "Above all, I did not leave because there was still a sense of purpose. I was doing something useful which was bigger than me. For the rest of my career there were certainly disappointments along the way but not to the point of 'throwing paper' (colloquial expression for 'resigning'). I had certain obligations to the organization and the men under me, both regulars and NSmen. They looked up to [me] for leadership. I had to be there for them when chips are down and when odds are not in our favour. So I need to be there for the men. It says a lot if you thrown in the towel for the 'not so right' reasons. If you have the right values and reasons for joining the SAF they will endear and endure. Hold true to them and you will press on. I also asked myself if the organization treated me well and the answer was 'it did'."[85]

A fourth officer grounded the urgency and seriousness of the military profession, its values, and the SAF's reason for being. He proffered the example from his CO tour and how he inculcated a sense of mission into the battalion from day one:

> "To me, military life is about buddies, friends, going through shit together. As a PC I learned the importance of caring for your men. Going back to the unit is like returning to family … I like to work with people, to develop people. I liked command not because of the authority but because I wanted to make a difference. I stayed in the SAF because it was a profession-of-arms, not just a career. I was preparing to send people into harm's way. It was really clear. It was a commitment to be mission ready. The values system is also important. It is something I live by. The core values were formulated in 1986 and [promulgated] SAF-wide in 1996 but I have been living them all these while. It was already internalized. Singing "duty, honour, country" in OCS inculcated

[84] Interview No. 28.
[85] Interview No. 06.

> these core values. As CO I gave the first day to the companies. Section commanders had the morning, platoon commanders in the afternoon, and OCs in the evening. The next morning there would be a parade and then I will gather the whole battalion. I would remind them of the Japanese occupation and my message was clear. You do not want others to defend what is ours. You do not want others to do it."[86]

The practice of senior officer cadets at OCS drilling "Duty, Honour, Country" – a line made famous by Douglas MacArthur's farewell speech at West Point – into the juniors was widely practiced by the mid-1970s.[87] It evidently proved effective in the case of the officer cited above. Mantras aside, working with people to achieve mission success while ever-challenging definitely gave great joy to commanders at all ranks:

> "I thoroughly enjoyed my career. There were tremendous challenges in meeting the military's mission. There were plans and technology to see though to initial capability and the task of developing officers and men. The camaraderie of the people you serve with and the pride and passion that comes with the job. You had to imbue pride in people and to develop and encourage passion."[88]

While people are a reason to stay in the armed forces this can at times lead to heart-wrenching circumstances. The epitome of this is no clearer than in peacetime fatalities. A general from the armour formation related this experience:

> "Tank overturned and people die. I got walloped by one mother. The toughest thing is going to the home and telling the mother and father. They are traumatized. It is a traumatic experience for everyone. The worst is when people lose life. There was this incident when [a serviceman] drowned in Area D (a designated live-fire area). (Officer Y) was the CO. People were worried about (Officer Y) and whether he would get into trouble but not about the victim. The body was not washed, still full of mud and the parents were coming. So I said: 'Come on lah this is someone's son.' <shakes head>"[89]

Another highlighted some dangers inherent in an organization entrusted to fight and win the nation's conflicts, yet this is never an excuse for fatalities:

> "We train hard and realistically and because of this the possibility of negative consequences are there. As commander [of X brigade] a tank overturned and fortunately there were no casualties. On another occasion I remember a soldier being hospitalized for pneumonia while on an overseas exercise and he almost did not make it. You don't want anything to befall your men. Their families do not look at causes. They only know [their loved one] died under your watch so whoever you bring out for training your must also bring them home safely."[90]

It is precisely such possibilities and their wide-ranging repercussions for the SAF and society's trust in its armed forces that it has been continually stressed that

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[86] Interview No. 05.
[87] "From Start – A new way of life," *Pioneer* (October 1975), pp. 22-3.
[88] Interview No. 14.
[89] Interview No. 26.
[90] Interview No. 06.

every serviceman and not just commanders must be responsible and take a vested interested in those they serve with. A former service chief highlighted the need to:

> "Mitigate risk. My personal observation is that accident rates are very low during exercises but it occurs more frequently in day-to-day situations. During exercises, people are focused and 'on the ball' but once 'end-ex' (end of exercise), yes, once *pang kang* (Hokkien for 'finish work') is declared all hell breaks loose. <frowns>"[91]

This does not mean making training safer by making it less realistic in any way. This after all does not mitigate but simply transfers risks as a former division commander opined:

> "We lose heart when we say 'exercise play' only. If standards decrease, it is a slippery road. There must be no compromise on standards. We must always take the view that we are training people to save their lives. Do it well and do it once."[92]

For the military elites this translated into taking on personal responsibility for those under their charge. Another former formation chief explained this in detail within the context of military professionalism. His unwavering stance on training peppered his thoughts on the matter:

> "I was lucky not to have suffered fatalities during training. But I made myself lucky. I prepared the training safety officers to make sure they knew their roles. They had to sit for tests. It was my responsibility to ensure the safety team knew what they were to do. Check the risks and minimize it. They must know the rationale behind what we do. This takes time and commitment. There is a need to institutionalize it. People do it well because of seriousness and not because their heads are on the chopping block. Training must never be made safer by making it easier. Good training simulates a war-time environment and also increases the confidence level of those involved. Training is the main duty of a peacetime army. And you train for war. That is the driving force. You must always ask: 'What is sacrosanct? What is fundamental? Are you preparing the army and is this followed by enforcement?' There must always be clear expectations and enforcement. As a leader you must always take responsibility by being there."[93]

This focus on safe yet realistic training was once implicitly subsumed under the SAF Core Values of 'Leadership', 'Professionalism', and 'Care for Soldier'. The continuation and increasing socio-political costs of service-related deaths, however, prompted the SAF to strengthen the message of commitment to people through the explicit institution of 'Safety' as the eighth core value in 2013.[94]

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[91] Interview No. 25.
[92] Interview No. 28.
[93] Interview No. 09.
[94] The SAF Core Values are Loyalty to Country, Leadership, Discipline, Professionalism, Fighting Spirit, Ethics, Care for Soldiers, Safety. See Charles Eu, "Giving Safety Top Priority in Our Army," *Army News*,

While flag-officers lead at the very highest levels of the SAF they were also once followers and beneficiaries of people-centred officers of an earlier generation. At times, as it was noted in the previous chapter, their superiors proved instrumental in motivating subordinates to sign-on. More often than not, they set examples through action and not grandiose lip service that were remembered fondly and worthy of emulation. The reasons and circumstances varied but invariably converged on the theme of genuine care and concern for those under their charge, and a dedication to the military profession indirectly inspired officers' commitment to stay-on in the SAF. One air force general recalled the impression created when he met the DGS as a young 2LT:

> "I was inspired by [LG (RET)] Winston Choo. He was one of the three on the (scholarship) interview panel. The other was COL (later BG) Tan Chin Tiong and one other person. They asked why I wanted to take up the [scholarship]. I looked up to Winston for his professionalism as an officer. He was firm but had a heart for people. He knew people by name regardless of rank. He has a genuine interest in them. He was also leading and moulding a professional armed forces."[95]

In the early years of the SAF it was not only Singaporean officers who made a difference as the organization benefitted from the experiences of foreign consultants. It depended on the consultants' willingness to teach and share and whether locals were willing to learn from them. A one-star related his time at Staff College:

> "Singapore [had] no experience so advisers came depending on [country of origin to work with the various services]. I was fortunate to meet some real battle-hardened officers. You speak with them, question them, [and] ask them for the logic behind why they do things. Their experiences rubbed off on me. I was also lucky this German General [Siegfried] Schulz was around. He came to help and was also at SCSC. Every day he would come and talk so I learned the German way of thinking. I got along well with Schulz. I found him more passionate about working in the military than Singaporeans. He had a 'Singapore is me' passion and not merely acting like a paid consultant."[96]

As time passed local officers replaced the retired military elite from the early years and as foreign consultants concluded their tenures. The key was the continuity in people-orientation and consistency in seeking to improve various facets of the SAF. A former head of training cited a COA who paid attention to detail and went out of his way to match word and deed:

> "[MG (RET)] Lim Neo Chian is a man of principles. He once said 'Ghandi is my idol'. <smiles> He changed the two-sided division exercises from once every two to once every three years. This was because holding a two-sided division exercise literally paralysed the army (before the computerization of wargames).

Issue No. 207 (January 2013), pp. 18-9; and "Safety: An Army Core Value," *Army News*, Issue No. 211 (May 2013), pp. 6-7.
[95] Interview No. 14.
[96] Interview No. 27.

> He is a true leader by example. He cared for soldiers in practical ways. One was through the upgrading of camps. In the 1960s the camps were an upgrade for many soldiers. You had a bed with a pillow. But by the 1990s it was actually a downgrade. He upgraded the camps and improved camp life. He always led by example."[97]

Others remembered a former CDF for his willingness to right the wrongs he perceived to have plagued and prevented the uniformed services from moving in the right direction. One army general with firsthand experience shared: "The moral fabric of the SAF is very important. It was [LG (RET)] Bey Soo Khiang who took a stand to ensure there were no camps (factionalism) and favours (cronyism)."[98] A RSAF general benefitted from the improvements in the training, education, and experiences instituted:

> "[LG (RET)] Bey Soo Khiang wanted a more rounded development of pilots and not just flying. This was because people only stayed in the base and flew. How can an OC or CO [not possess experience in] staff work? No staff writing, no exposure to people across the other vocations and services. You cannot wait until [Staff College] to get to know people and to be exposed to staff work. Staff work provides exposure to other people. It is about a well-rounded development. But it can also be stifling and it should not be taken to extreme to force people into it especially those who are cut out differently. What is essential is a balance to keep people happy and motivated."[99]

Beyond raising morale and making tough and unpopular decisions those who inspired commitment were often teachers willing to invest in the next generation of officers by imparting skills, experiences, and knowledge. The crux was not merely a question of being well-liked but a matter of substance over style. One general known for his humble demeanour explained:

> "It is important to be able to work with people. Along the way you do the best you can and always learn so that you can get wiser. Learn about the systems in place and be aware of how the organization operates. I learned a great deal from [BG (RET)] Law Chwee Kiat. He had a good planning system that was rational. He also liked to test and teach his subordinates and I learned a lot from him. I also learned from peers, different individuals who also made general. On the whole the environment in the SAF fosters learning but this also depends on who you work with. Under some bosses you are more 'fearful' because they are temperamental."[100]

In the SAF, however, just like any other organization, the bad is interspersed with the good. While there were those who inspired, there were also those with questionable

[97] Interview No. 09.
[98] Interview No. 13.
[99] Interview No. 16.
[100] Interview No. 11.

intentions. One officer lamented that: "Some people you work for are 'bad' people who betray you after you work your butt off."[101] Another griped:

> "You meet 'bad' commanders. I felt weary dealing with them but you cannot influence that. Just be professional and focus on the job. Along the way you also meet others who stand in the way. There was a controller on exercise who created a lot of problems. Logical criticism is one thing but childish behaviour is just not acceptable. But I also learned not to take things personally."[102]

As the SAF seeks to consolidate its much hyped 'transformation' into a 3G SAF, one former CDF cautioned emphatically: "I always remember one G: the man with the gun. Train him well. You will not win with technology alone but only if the man with the gun is holding ground."[103] While some might criticize this chain of thought as parochial and anachronistic in terms of modern warfare, it is best seen as highlighting the importance of people in defence and how people elicit commitment from those who lead them.

5.4.2 Profession and Mission

The importance of people in securing the commitment of the military elite and indeed the wider SAF cannot be overstated. This factor was also present in other occupations but took on added significance in light of the military profession and the mission of the armed forces. The commitment to the profession-of-arms is not merely the personal mastery of technical skills and maintaining competence. In the eyes of the flag-officers it was about having found purpose and meaning in the military's mission and taking personal responsibility for it. The mission of national defence is sacred and unique to the armed forces even while other organs of state contribute to the overall scheme of national security. This sub-section covers the factors which led to the realization of professionalism and what made the mission important.

The first factor is that becoming a professional and seeing oneself as such takes time. It is not merely clocking time in appointments but contributing both as a follower and a leader to effect change for the better. One general started out as an artillery officer who simply sought to change the 'small' things:

> "Initially it was not about 'duty, honour, country'. But things started to pick up. I developed an interest in the organization. I also felt strongly about the stupid things done in the SAF at the time. For example, the battery prof[iciency] test was more about procedure than substance. When delivering orders the test was concerned with 'whether the people were seated?' and 'did the commander speak loud enough?' It was nuts! You could pass (the test) but cannot deliver fire on target and on time … Because there was no doctrinal manual instructing

[101] Interview No. 28.
[102] Interview No. 09.
[103] Interview No. 19.

> us what to do there was opportunity for improvement and change. As a battery commander the template was small and so there could only be incremental change. As formation head GS (general staff) there would be better opportunities to make changes. But why bother? Who the hell knows? It is surely not to impress the [SAF] General Staff. It boils down to ownership and professionalism. The only way was to speak the truth to the senior commanders. They needed to know. We needed truthful reflection if we really wanted to be a first class artillery force. Professionalism calls and demands that you have the knowledge and experience to recognize problems and be willing to do something about it. But the question is: 'are officers willing to do this and risk not getting promoted?' I did this because I saw that a part of the SAF's capabilities were in my hands. It is also about interest in the next level (subordinates). To be a role model and inculcate in the next echelon the values and standards. Once there is a break in this cycle there is a problem. It is hard to measure but you can see it occurring. I always asked myself: 'can I be party to making the organization worse off?'"[104]

The second officer, a military engineer, highlighted his gradual transformation from being a professional in the military into a military professional:

> "It was not clear to me I would be there (in the SAF) for life. I had no plans beyond the fact I was an engineer and it was an interesting job. I did not think of the six years (bond). I would do it as long as it is meaningful and fulfilling. I had an idea what it would be like and it would not be a mistake. I did not see it as long term or six years. I will cross the bridge when I get to it. After five years I was placed on pensionable scheme but I did not have any goals of where I would be in the organization … It started off as an engineer doing looking for something to do. Somewhere along the way you are part of a larger enterprise with implications for the country. I joined because it looked like fun. I thought of myself as an engineer first, (service) officer second. Later it was (service) officer first and then engineer. In the mid-90s I started to get involved in (service) exercises, doctrine, and the big picture. How does the (service) defend Singapore and execute a war? I came to understand what my role was. Beyond branch head it is a different job and once you reach the Colonel-level you operate at an international level."[105]

Another officer also echoed how the initial adventure gave way to a larger contribution:

> "Earlier in my career it was a mixture of interest, fun, fulfilment and also making a contribution. In those years I could feel I was making a contribution. Consistently I could make a difference. I had something to offer and could always have ideas that were better than those around me. I felt needed and I contributed. There was a lot to be done. Can things improve, can I lead, can I help to make changes? Yes. Things can be done better and the organization is open to change. Can I contribute to the change movement? Yes I can and I can do so leading. At all times I felt I had a role."[106]

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[104] Interview No. 09.
[105] Interview No. 21.
[106] Interview No. 22.

The second factor is the importance of the armed forces' mission which is both challenging and unique. Within the Singaporean context, this encompassed a range of activities from maintaining its technological-edge in the region, to reviewing force structure, plans, and doctrine to ensure relevancy, implementing new initiatives, to overcoming geographical and increasingly demographic constraints. This has been the preoccupation since the early years:

> "There were many things to do. Overseas training in Brunei, Taiwan, Australia. We reorganized the SAF Headquarters. Dr Goh was fascinated with how the Japanese High Command and German General Staff system operated. We had General Siegfried Schulz who advised us on combined arms training. These were the new challenges while I was in [MINDEF] such as implementing the General Staff system and also combined arms and even joint capabilities. We had to make sure the given resources translated into capabilities. Dr Goh was always on the look out to maximize resources. For example, national day parade organization was an opportunity to train combined arms coordination. We also used SIA to fly us [overseas] to test the ability to project troops. He also made great use of *Pioneer* magazine. There were lots of photos to attract readers. As a NS army it was also important to have soldiers in a happy mood for the parents to see. There was also a lot of coverage on the superior weapon capabilities we possessed; an indirect form of deterrence."[107]

Overtime this has continued. One officer who served during the nascent manifestations of the Joint Staff (JS) emphasized:

> "I believe it was a profession and not just a job. Today this belief, this value might not be there. The structure was not very close in those days in the sense when we signed-up it was a lifelong commitment until retirement. Today you have a two-career system so you plan and need to migrate to a second career. But when I signed-up the thinking was 'I am a professional soldier' and that the career will look after me when I retire. I enjoyed army life. It was good for me in the sense it drew out my full potential. It offered me an opportunity to think. I built a lot of things for the SAF but I cannot talk about them, I cannot say. Designed some of the exercises. One day (Director Joint Operations and Planning Directorate) asked me to build this war-gaming capacity for the SAF. So I think, analyse, then present to HQ. I also had to change uniform for the SAF. It was challenging because we were going to reflect a citizen's army with no class distinction, no brass, but some of the older officers who were used to such things got my blood. <grins> In some ways I got a little bit more (out of the career) than my comrades."[108]

The seemingly simple task of changing uniforms might seem trivial to some but another general, then a staff officer, showed much gusto and epitomised giving one's best no matter how mundane the task might seem to:

[107] Interview No. 03.
[108] Interview No. 27.

> "Change the uniform to reflect the citizen's army. We got rid of the belt for generals, the gold trim belt which costs £2,000, yes, £2,000 because of the gold thread. The spurs worn by armour also had to go. I told them we had no horses nor tradition of that (in the SAF) so what for you need spurs? <laughs>"[109]

An admiral reiterated the importance of people in the navy and added the professional, operational, and future planning dimensions for his commitment:

> "You find that you can achieve certain things [while serving in the SAF]. Some things you cannot do outside. The people in the navy are a good bunch. It is a close-knit community where there is mutual support. The work is also meaningful and fulfilling. There is also the aspect of professional interest. It was not merely a job, it was a career. In the latter you strive to master the domain you are in. At an early age I received exposure to higher headquarters and this helped in developing domain expertise not just at the tactical level but also higher levels. There were also real operations which you could describe as a 'Mexican standoff'. <nods> As a branch head and subsequently as head of naval plans I had to argue and justify for the missile corvette. It was an exciting time. The navy was also in a build up phase and expanding from being a coastal navy. At the later part of my career it was with the frigate and LST (Landing Ship Tank) programs. My career coincided with exciting times. <smiles>"[110]

Similarly, an air force general explained:

> "There were exit points and options along the way. But I stayed on for some reasons. I was involved in challenging tasks which were interesting and kept me occupied. I was lucky in time and place. There were enough things to do. From [year X] onwards the air force embarked on a series of cutting edge and secretive programs. We were operating under budget constraints so we focused on urgent areas. It was something new. Building a new air base. Then there was setting up of [formation Y] with conceptual inputs and involvement from joint, the three services, and intelligence. This was followed with work on the ideas and concepts for [formation Y], the structural and operational aspects. In all these projects you had to ensure the air force was not only no worse off but better than before. We envisaged how we would fight in war and then engineered backward. It was a major transition. I was fortunate enough to be in the right time and right place which kept me going. Implementing new, interesting concepts. They were paradigm shifts in what we were doing. There was no time to do other things <smile>."[111]

Across the medical field:

> "It is the mission. I was fortunate to be in the SAF when it was growing; to be part of a transformation. You cannot take it from me. It is something that is my luck or good fortune few have the honour and opportunity to experience. It also showed that my work and my life mattered … I was fortunate to start new things that I would not be able to do outside (of the SAF). Outside it would be four

[109] Interview No. 28. The Indian Army supposedly sold Singapore 80 or more "cavalry horses for the proposed Singapore presidential bodyguard" in 1967. See Malaysia, "S'pore briefed on Indian offer of aid," *The Straits Times*, 25 June 1967, p. 7.
[110] Interview No. 15.
[111] Interview No. 16.

> walls and one-to-one with the patient but I would not get the helicopter view and be able to influence bigger things and implement initiatives such as research in the SAF, sports medicine with PT and Sports branch covering IPPT (the annual Individual Physical Proficiency Test), obese platoon, myopia, electronic medical reports, paramedic course with the Justice Institute in British Columbia for our Emergency Medical Technicians. I was a prime mover. I thought I'd take leadership to build a career in sports medicine. If I had done so, I would build medical groups and leverage on the fitness movement and medical screening. But then the chance to put the SAF medical corps on an operational footing came. It was prophetic because we had to deploy. My aim was to make sure the MO could stand tall among the military profession. In those days infantry officers thought we were 'half-past-six' soldiers. Doctors were not part of the planning and subordinate to the logistics officer. My personal mission was to put the SAF Medical Corps on an operational footing which included trauma medicine, paramedic course, and for everyone to take a serious approach towards medical exercises. I ensured Division Medical Officers became active in planning independent of the logistics plan. The Division Commander must know it is his lifeline and must make full use of his medical officer."[112]

The importance of the military mission is often lost on society-at-large because of the peace enjoyed since independence. This can also hold true for officers who are at times shielded from the 'larger picture'. It is not questionable that the impetus to take training seriously suffered all-round especially since conflict(s) have always seemed so far from Singapore. That is unless one experienced it firsthand like former COA (2011-4) MG (RET) Ravinder Singh – one of the first scholar-officers deployed on an overseas mission – who recalled:

> "In 1991, as a young captain, I was deployed to Kuwait as a UN (United Nations) Military Observer. When we flew into Kuwait city, it had just been liberated from Iraq. I vividly remember landing at the airport which had been destroyed by the war. The city was destroyed, homes were pillaged and many lives lost. Even though they wanted to protect their families and friends, young Kuwaiti men could do nothing because they were not trained, not equipped and not organized. That was a poignant reminder for me. If I don't do my part for Singapore now, there would be no second chance. I realized then, that serving in the Army was not just a job but it was a sacred duty, to protect our country and our way of life."[113]

The third factor is that the interview participants felt valued and recognized by the SAF as corporate members of the profession which in turn deepened and amplified their commitment to the military's mission. Value and recognition was most evident by the responsibilities entrusted to them by superiors. Their performances and established

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[112] Interview No. 20. See also "Audit of Paramedic Training," *MEDLink* (July 2005), pp. 6-7.
[113] "Service with Distinction," *Public Service Commission Scholarships Website*, www.pscscholarships.gov.sg/content/pscsch/default/ourscholars/eminent_scholars/servicewithdistinction.html (accessed 28 May 2014).

reputations led to greater appointments and opportunities. For one officer this was instrumental in his service commitment which offset the days of poorer salary conditions:

> "Did I consider leaving? No because, I would say, due to the responsibility. The career was not just about reward but also recognition and responsibility. My contributions were valued and I could feel it. I did not want to leave but the pay outside was very attractive. <laughs> I was rewarded in other ways."[114]

Another recollected finding meaning in his role, an epiphany enhanced by recognition from his superior, during the junior years of his career:

> "During my stint in (a unit), my CO then (name of officer) appreciated what I did. Towards the end of my (X)-year contract he told me that he'd get me promoted to Captain if I signed another contract. For a non-graduate to reach Captain within four years after Lieutenant was fast. Most importantly, I liked what I was doing. I found a purpose in what I was doing. The years in (said unit) had an influence on me. I was looking at assigning resources to units, career planning for regulars. It was something meaningful."[115]

A third officer continued this line of thought with examples from later in his career, an accumulation of mutual investment between him and the SAF:

> "I think I became more restless but never to the point of looking for jobs outside. Partly because the SAF was kind to me. They found value in me and I was given challenging jobs. As [head of] plans I had to a budget to look after and decide on what to spend, to procure, the structure of the SAF and how to introduce new equipment. It was a very respectable job. Those were good years as [head of] plans. There were of course trying times but this is part and parcel of the appointment. On the whole [it was] very satisfying. [Head of] Ops (operations) was more complex but also enjoyable. Such appointments and the SAF's willingness to invest in you makes you stay-on. They also sent me to [a prestigious university overseas for postgraduate studies]. The desire to go to the private sector was also not strong enough to get me to leave. In [year X] I decided to stay for the long term until I had to return to the Admin Service. I had invested so much time, (Y) years, and if I leave the SAF I would be giving up on this investment. For me to do so I would need to start another career and this would not be maximizing the (Y)-year investment in the SAF where I spent time and energy, having learned about it, networked and also gained credibility. It would be wasteful to do so. At this mark I was also near the top of the echelon where I could really contribute. Every year that I go on I could contribute more. The thought of leaving never came."[116]

The factors of patience, challenges, and recognition cited by the preceding officer are not mutually exclusive. In fact it would be an exception rather than the norm for the military elites not to cite a combination of the three. Explicit expressions of

[114] Interview No. 24.
[115] Interview No. 06.
[116] Interview No. 10.

patriotism – which in local parlance is referred to using Douglas MacArthur's famous "duty, honour, country" – seemed conspicuously absent."[117] Only a handful attributed their motivation to sign-on and commitment to stay-on to patriotism. The reasons given included the fact that Singapore was forced into nationhood and national identity had to be painstakingly forged over time, and that Singapore – as of them put it – is not a "rah rah, flag waving society" (i.e. not known for explicitly expressing patriotism).[118] Peace has given Singapore the luxury of deploying the SAF on operations of choice and not of necessity. Furthermore, almost any occupation can be for 'duty, honour, country' in view Singapore's 'Total Defence' concept based on Civil, Economic, Military, Psychological, and Social pillars.[119]

For most of the military elites the overriding reasons were simply a commitment to the profession and the mission entrusted to the armed forces. One general enthused:

> "I stayed; I was committed to the profession. I was also trying out new things, seeing personally how we could solve problems. Coming up with new systems, making it work, improving things. Being with people, looking after them. It was fun. I loved the outdoors. I enjoyed my life in the field. To be truthful I never thought it was for 'duty, honour, country'. Perhaps I should have but I did not. I loved the outdoors, I could shoot, I was physically fit. I also happened to have the same interests as my bosses. Some people saw this as 'carrying balls' or being in 'their camp' but this was not the case. (A 'senior' general) liked to swim and jog but I hated swimming and jogging so I told him I would be his safety officer. <grins>"[120]

Another general said:

> "To me I did not see it as a job because flying was like a hobby. I always felt this pre-match tension to do well on every flight and so the intensity and competitive streak came naturally. Through the [SAF scholarship] I received a good education in the [a western country] where I also won other prizes and scholarships. Further on I had the opportunity to attend the prestigious [foreign Staff College] at [a western country] and also SAF sponsorship for postgraduate education at [a western university]. Each course carried a bond but to me it never mattered because I did not intend to leave. I never thought of leaving once. My motivation and commitment to the RSAF are one in the same. I love the military, I love flying and in fact today I still work with the air force as the [senior civilian] in [a defence-affiliated institute]. I got to BG based on hard work, good opportunities, and love for the profession."[121]

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[117] General of the Armies Douglas MacArthur famous speech to the Corps of Cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (New York, 12 May 1962).
[118] Interview No. 11.
[119] Ron Matthews and Nellie Zhang Yan, "Small Country 'Total Defence': A Case Study of Singapore," *Defence Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (September 2007), pp. 376-95.
[120] Interview No. 26.
[121] Interview No. 08.

Even when patriotism was cited as a factor for commitment it was centred on the people and the mission as an admiral reasoned:

> "First was the type of work. This is not to say the quality of lifestyle is bad. The work is about the mission, the people, and 'duty, honour, country'. Second the lifestyle at work but this is separate from family life. My brother was a regular and so was my brother-in-law but we don't talk about work. Does it (military service) run in the family? Yes you can say it does but not much from conversing with them. Does the uniform matter? You look smart but I did not get married in my number one (ceremonial) uniform. <laughs> I am proud of the uniform but I did not don the uniform … It was a response to organizational needs and I could also match my strength and abilities. The result was a good match and alignment which led to an environment which was fun and where I could contribute positively. It was a respond to a calling but there is always a need to assess (whether it is a good match) … I cannot comment on the current generation but mine had a call of mission and purpose."[122]

While commitment is a matter of remaining on active duty until retirement for most of the military elites, a number had to show their resolve under testing circumstances.

5.4.3 Close calls

The nature of military service in preparing individuals for war meant that those who wore the uniform were exposed to the concomitant hazards of the profession. Within the SAF, such incidents usually occurred in times of peace and frequently as a result of man and/or machine. This section serves not to highlight incidences of equipment failure and accidents. The reason is to elucidate the fact that the officers involved remained committed to active service even after some harrowing incidents with the possibility of death and disability.

The 'old-guard' of 1 SIR certainly encountered such possibilities as they deployed to Sabah during *Konfrontasi* (1963-6 Indonesian Confrontation) and were employed in traditional infantry roles. Within the battalion "[t]here was a tremendous spirit of camaraderie and sense of purpose in the unit at that time, in the face of great odds and danger."[123] Like many of the early pioneers the expectation of seeing combat was high and for both LG (RET) Winston Choo and BG (RET) Patrick Sim this came true during this tour. Life on the line started with excitement but soon gave way to monotony. That was until the first contact:

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[122] Interview No. 18.
[123] Surinder Kaur, "A soldier-diplomat – LT GEN Choo leaves the SAF," *Pioneer* (June 1992), pp. 1-3.

> "We were prepared and the tension was real. <pause> Fear was to be expected … We are all human. During the first contact, when enemy bullets fly all around you. Wow boy, it brings a new meaning to life."[124]

A fine line separated life and death in this game of 'cat and mouse' in the jungle and the two veterans remembered close calls:

> "It was a challenging time. We were there for real. The battalion organized patrols into Indonesian territory to find out exactly where the enemy was. The KKO or *Korps Komando Operasi* (Indonesian Marines). It was an interesting time and 1 SIR lived a charmed life. Six months on Sebatik and one month on Sabah before we were rotated. A Malaysian regiment took over on Sebatik and the patrol boat I used before got shot up. That is why I say we lived a charmed life. When we got back to Singapore we were deployed to Kota Tinggi where a platoon from 2 SIR was ambushed suffering fatalities."[125]

In another incident:

> "While we were with COL (then-CPT) John Morrice in this protection game …, I think the enemy must have spotted my platoon base … because later when we moved to another hill … the place where I was came under heavy mortar fire from the Indonesian side. I remember while we were on the OP hill (where the observation post was sited), when the bombs started falling, my feeling was 'Gosh! How lucky we were!'"[126]

Life on the line was what soldiers were trained for but there was also great relief for troops returning to Singapore. Since then, the only other general-grade officer who came closest to engaging an adversary is BG (RET) Lam Shiu Tong, who was a member of the operation to free hostages from the hijacked Singapore Airlines flight SQ 117 on 26 and 27 March 1991.[127]

In times of peace the hazards of the profession arose mainly from accidents as a result of equipment failure; carelessness due to fatigue, ignorance, even apathy; unfamiliar or challenging terrain; and inclement weather. This lethal mix can prove deadly in any vocation but perhaps none more so than flying until the late 1980s when the RSAF commenced its relatively impressive safety record.[128] On 2 August 1971, BG (RET) then-CPT Gary Yeo, a QFI, and his trainee pilot OCT Ng Kwang Ngen ejected safely when their BAC-167 Strikemaster developed engine trouble and crashed in South Johore, Malaysia.[129] On 3 January 1973 former CAF (1995-8) MG (RET) then-LTA Goh

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[124] Interview No. 01.
[125] Interview No. 19.
[126] "The Story of One," *Pioneer* (January 1978), p. 21.
[127] See "SAF Commandos storm hijacked plane," *Pioneer* (April 1991), p. 3; and *Defining Moments: Our Army Experience: Shaping Lives and Beliefs* (Singapore: Ministry of Defence, 2004), pp. 32-6.
[128] For a glimpse into RSAF safety see *FOCUS: Republic of Singapore Air Force Safety Magazine*, www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/atozlistings/air_force/news_events.html (accessed 28 May 2014).
[129] "Two SADC pilots saved after jet crash," *The Straits Times*, 3 August 1971, p. 1. One of the Martin Baker MK PB4 ejection seat was subsequently placed in the air force museum marking the first pilot ejection in RSAF history. The other seat was allegedly kept by the Malaysian Armed Forces. See Kalpana Rae Naidu,

Yong Siang experienced engine troubles on his Hunter aircraft during a naval exercise. The loss of engine thrust provided him with a flying altitude of only 3,500 feet as he made for Changi Air Base where he "carried out a successful flame-out approach and landed without further damage to the aircraft."[130] Other generals also experienced close calls. Another former QFI revealed:

> "I was also involved in an accident. I was with a trainee and took over the aircraft quite late so the nose wheel hit the ground and the propeller got whacked. If you take over too soon the trainee does not get the flight experience. Too late and this could happen."[131]

The dangers inherent in flying were ever present and could strike independent of experience and rank as another testified:

> "I experienced a flame-out over the South China Sea just as my CO tour was concluding. I managed to relight the engine and returned to base. There was inclement weather condition just as I was coming in to land. It was a thunderstorm and raining very heavily. The controller changed the runway but did not lower the landing net on this rerouted runway. Visibility was poor so the controller must have missed it and I only saw it when I was landing so I did a 'grass hopper' over the net. When I got out of the aircraft my legs were trembling. <laughs>"[132]

While these officers survived others fell in the course of duty. Most notably, two SAFOS officers lost their lives under tragic circumstances. On 25 July 1985, 25 year-old dual SAFOS and President Scholar (1979) CPT Seah Boon Thong drowned after a 'misadventure' over the Straits of Johor.[133] His single-engine A-4 Skyhawk aircraft lost power after "a snapped hydraulic pressure line" started a fire and crashed three seconds after take-off. Seah ejected from the cockpit but the traumatic experience sent him into shock and he subsequently drowned in "murky waters."[134] This occurred in a July-August period when the RSAF lost three A-4s to crashes in quick succession leading to a temporary grounding of the aircraft.[135] A total of five Skyhawks were eventually lost

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"Journey to the past," *Pioneer* (October 1991), pp. 19-21; and Oral History Centre interview with COL (RET) Ramachandran Menon for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003250, Reel 10 of 17, p. 211.

[130] "Good Show," *Pioneer* (April 1973), p. 12.

[131] Interview No. 25.

[132] Interview No. 24.

[133] "Search goes on for missing pilot," *The Straits Times*, 27 July 1985, p. 9; "Skyhawks grounded for thorough checks," *The Straits Times*, 31 August 1985, p. 14; Charmaine Chan, "Pilot seen struggling in sea after mishap," *The Straits Times*, 20 May 1986, p. 9; "Drowned pilot in shock after ejecting from plane," *The Straits Times*, 27 May 1986, p. 10; and "In Memoriam," *The Straits Times*, 25 July 1988, p. 26.

[134] "Search goes on for missing pilot," *The Straits Times*, 27 July 1985, p. 9; Charmaine Chan, "Pilot seen struggling in sea after mishap," *The Straits Times*, 20 May 1986, p. 9; "Pilot seen struggling in sea after mishap," *The Straits Times*, 20 May 1986, p. 9; "Drowned pilot in shock after ejecting from plane," *The Straits Times*, 27 May 1986, p. 10; and "In Memoriam," *The Straits Times*, 25 July 1988, p. 26.

[135] "Skyhawks grounded for thorough checks," *The Straits Times*, 31 August 1985, p. 14; and "RSAF Skyhawks flying again," *The Straits Times*, 12 September 1985, p. 10. The other two crashes occurred on 24 July 1985 over the Straits of Malacca and 26 August 1985 in The Philippines. In both cases the pilots safely ejected.

during the "A-4 Crisis" of 1985 due to the "severe degradation of airworthiness."[136] Six years later on 16 August 1991 CPT Edmund Ying Jat Mum (SAFOS 1986), 24, drowned and CPT James Poon Kok Seng, 28, succumbed to head injuries during a 'misadventure' over Poyan Reservoir in the Lim Chu Kang area of north-western Singapore. The AS332M Super Puma helicopter piloted by Ying crashed and flipped as it was "negotiating a turn over the reservoir … during a routine low-terrain tactical flight exercise."[137] Only trainee crewman Panneerselvam Thangarju survived.

Over in the army, accidents manifested themselves in various ways, from the hazards of driving in unfamiliar locations or over vast distances overseas, to tanks and jeeps flipping over, to mortar base plates sinking after heavy rain so that rounds landed outside the safety template during live-fire exercises and the list goes on. Merely travelling in vehicles can prove hazardous as these generals experienced. For one of them:

> "In ROC (Republic of China, Taiwan) there was a landslide and the rovers (jeeps) could not get across. We also could not reverse all the way out so we had to go forward. We were in a convoy of six vehicles. With the vehicle scraping the other side there was only about 30cm between the vehicle and a steep drop. So I drove all six across with one person guiding me. It was close but I was the commander so lead by example. <grins>"[138]

Another cited familiarity of training in Singapore but experienced a freak incident:

> "I was also lucky because during one exercise in Lentor the land rover we (CO, OC, two signallers, and a diver) were travelling in overturned and rolled into water. Fortunately the rover ended upright if not there would have been five fatalities because we were in chest high water. We got out, checked equipment, another vehicle came over and we continued with the exercise."[139]

While those officers avoided injury others were not so fortunate. In the late 1980s one general, then a major, suffered injuries with lingering physical effects while attending a foreign Command and Staff Course (CSC). In 1994 BG (NS) Yeo See Peng, then a 28 year-old MAJ with the 1st commando battalion, "suffered head injuries and a fractured left wrist" when a vehicle he was in overturned during a training exercise in Thailand.[140]

Then there are cases involving live ammunition that ended at times with the loss of life. BG (RET) then-CPT Lee Hsien Loong (SAFOS 1971) was training in Taiwan

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[136] See Head Air Plans, "Towards The 3rd Generation RSAF," RSAF 17th NSMen Seminar; and Adrian Chan, *Leading in the Third Generation SAF* (Singapore: Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces, 2012), p. 34.
[137] "Obituaries," *The Straits Times*, 19 August 1991, p. 32; and "Misadventure verdict on deaths of two pilots," *The Straits Times*, 25 June 1993, p. 26.
[138] Interview No. 26.
[139] Interview No. 05.
[140] "Two SAF men hurt in Thailand accident," *The Straits Times*, 23 November 1994, p. 22. 1SG Lim Ah Han who was travelling with Yeo suffered head and lung injuries and was aero-evacuated to Singapore where he died three days after the accident (22 November 1993).

when a stray artillery round fell into a village.[141] BG (RET) then-CPT Lee Hsien Yang (SAFOS 1976) was on exercise in Taiwan when a sentry to the bunker he was in succumbed to wounds from a bullet ricochet.[142] In 1986, BG (RET) then-CPT Pang Hee Hon (SAFOS 1979) was a battery commander when a gunner came into possession of a rifle grenade during training. For unknown reasons the grenade was taken into an armoured personnel carrier where it detonated killing the gunner and injured four others.[143]

Two other generals interviewed also suffered threatening injuries which sheds light on their commitment but yet raises the question of when officers must say 'no' without apologies. The first questioned the risks he took while in service and in context of seemingly fit and healthy men – both military and civilian – who succumbed to sudden cardiac arrest while exercising:

> "In retrospect I ask if commanders in the SAF are over-committed in leading their men. After suffering a heart attack in March (year X) I reflected on two incidences. The first was as [battalion CO] and completing the 40km march with piles. The second was as [brigade commander] and running the Army Half Marathon when I was feverish. I ask myself: 'Was I foolish?' Perhaps. But I reasoned that I was building a team. This is the predicament. Did I overdo it? If something really happens to you; 'how'? So I always say consider your family aspects. The organization cannot do more than, or replace, your family. So as commanders, we must have the moral courage to say we cannot do it when we are physically under the weather. We always ask the men if anyone is not feeling well. This must extend to leaders at all levels including our own self."[144]

The second officer suffered a physical injury mid-career and stopped short of exacerbating the ailment even if it would have adversely affected his progression prospects. He carefully deliberated his options as such:

> "After my [postgraduate studies] I was designated the next Commander [of unit X]. Then COA [officer Y] told the doctors they better ensure that I could continue in the SAF. The medical examination was all clear. On Friday I received a call informing me that COA wanted a review so the Change of Command was delayed. I immediately rang CARMO (Chief Army MO) and queried why there was a change of heart after I cleared the medical. COA had asked if the [said appointment at unit X] will lead to a deterioration of my condition and the medical opinion was that it could. On that Saturday I told myself I can do it so why should there be any doubt? But on Sunday after some reflection I asked what I wanted to do in life. I wanted the ability to walk when I am 50 and for the rest of my life. If anything will impede that then it will not be on my list [of things] to do. On Monday I told COA I would not like to be Commander [of unit X]. His reply was that he could not guarantee me a

[141] Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with COL (RET) Goh Lye Choon for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003275, Reel 12 of 17 (2008), p. 262.
[142] Ibid.
[143] "Court told of trip into grenade launching area," *The Straits Times*, 20 September 1987, p. 13.
[144] Interview No. 06.

> Colonel-grade appointment anymore. I was medically downgraded to [a lower medical classification] and no longer required to take IPPT. I was mentally prepared to remain at Lieutenant-Colonel for the remainder of my career."[145]

While the majority of challenges faced by the military elite were hazards inherent to the profession-of-arms, there were those who overcame obstacles that would forced others to resign. Some gripes such as 'unreasonable' superiors, 'office politics', and 'micromanagement' are not necessarily unique to the military. In fact the military has the advantage of periodic posting rotations which (hopefully) negate such 'negative' traits. Two other flag-officers remained committed despite circumstances which bore testament to their strength of character. The first officer, in perhaps the only incident of its kind, had his commitment challenged in a way that would question anyone's definition of 'fairness':

> "I was initially administered as a SAFOS but this was eventually revised. Someone in the administration department must have just 'copy and paste' the terms and condition of the SAFOS. The name of the scholarship also sounded very similar. I mean I went through (initial officer training and university), and in the initial years MINDEF was probably confused and thought I was SAFOS. <laughs> But I did not get the monthly meetings with minister and someone probably checked the record and noticed my name was not on the SAFOS list. The apologies came later and there was a salary claw-back. After the clarification and revision there was also a revised career trajectory. That being said I was given an administrative backdate for my promotion to Captain which offset, compensated the amount of money I had to pay back. To a lesser officer it would be a bone of contention but for me it did not generate any ill will. I accepted the explanation. We all make mistakes and steps were taken to make the best of the situation. It was only fair that it be sorted out. Whether the backdating of my Captain helped in my subsequent promotions I do not know but logically it could have had a flow-on effect. <smiles>"[146]

For BG Ishak bin Ismail, the first ethnically Malay officer to ascend into Singapore's military elite, self-doubt surfaced over whether accolades received in his early career were based on merit or affirmative action. It was the former but as he recalled this was not always apparent:

> "I only questioned the SAF once and this was at the end of Company Tactics Course (CTC). The Chief Instructor (CI) told me I was the top student and I remembered the conversation we had. I said: 'Can I ask you a question? Did the SAF have to stoop so low as to put a Malay officer as the top student to prove something?' The CI riposted saying: 'Don't you dare question my system. You are who you are. Race is not a consideration. But I understand. People will tell you it is because you are Malay. It will not stop. But ask yourself, can the people around you agree you are there (the top student)?' I wondered about this and I

[145] Interview No. 07.
[146] Interview No. 17. For other examples of administrative frustrations experienced by regular officers see Yip, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 49.

> got confirmation less than two hours later. In the course souvenir magazine I was given the course nickname 'ideal top student' by my peers. They agreed even though they did not know I was top. Those around have a sense of who you are. My quiet confidence was firm again. As a battalion S3 (operations officer) I topped BTC (Battalion Tactics Course). I saw the same CI from CTC and he said: 'Don't you dare ask me the same question.' <laughs> I was the third army officer to top both CTC and BTC. My confidence continued to develop as did my desire to contribute and give back to the SAF. It did not matter where my career ended. I became the first Malay officer to command an active infantry battalion in modern times and to attend an overseas command and staff course. I knew it was not because I was Malay."[147]

5.5 Summary

There are many reasons to leave the military service. Some of the officers with higher levels of education cited uncompetitive salaries which prompted the drastic 1982 revision. Yet other themes have endured such as seizing opportunities beyond the SAF, exhausting front-loaded benefits, societal lack of respect for the profession-of-arms, discontentment with meritocracy, falling into disillusionment and cynicism, and other varied and personal reasons. Flag-officers considered leaving on similar lines but did not do so and their reasons for remaining on active service fell into two categories. The first consisted of transactional commitment in the form of obligations, remuneration, and progression. The bond or MTE was to be fulfilled and they were contractually obligated to stay. Yet for others this was not the case as they were set on a long-term commitment to the military career. In the same way, remuneration and progression were also important but secondary reasons for the interview participants to stay-on. While the importance of transactional commitment differed among the military elites, there was a convergence towards transformational commitment based on the importance attached to the people they served with, their dedication to the profession-of-arms, and the sacred mission apportioned to the armed forces. Although the SAF has been a military at peace, its undertaking to prepare for war has invariably involved risks with the unintended consequences of disability and even death.

[147] Interview with BG Ishak bin Ismail. Permission for open attribution received 28 May 2014.

CHAPTER 6
THE ASCENSION PROCESS

"The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards."[1]

– Lieutenant-General Sir William Francis Butler (1838-1910)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters covered why a segment of the military elite signed-on as regular officers and why they remained beyond contractual obligations to the point of retirement. With rare exceptions in the early days of independence, no officer has risen to general- or admiral-ranks without regular service in the SAF. This chapter addresses facets of officer ascension toward their first star. Sensitising concepts presented in chapter two indicated that one climbed the rank hierarchy through one, or a mix, of four plausible ascension processes including cronyism and patronage, merit using various measures, visibility to superiors who determine postings and promotions, and luck. All four are applicable to the military organization. Empirical evidence indicated ascension comes from 'cookie-cutter' careers performed well but at the higher levels includes innovation, discretion, political skills above and beyond technical competency, and being in the right place when opportunities arise. This chapter contains four sections. The first is on processes initiated in the early SAF and its evolution to contemporary practices. The second and third cover processes which governed the 4Ps namely performance, potential, promotions, and postings which are all crucial for entry into the Aristocracy of Armed Talent. The final section looks at intangibles which gave the military elites a slight edge from the rest of the officer corps.

6.1.1 The star and some parameters

The SAF has long been thrifty in its promotion of general- and admiral-grade officers for various reasons.[2] In the beginning it was the tandem factors of the dearth in

[1] Volker Franke, *Preparing for Peace: Military Identity, Value Orientations, and Professional Military Education* (Westport, CT and London, UK: Praeger, 1999), p. 39; and Jacob Shuford, "Re-Education for the 21st-Century Warrior," *Proceedings* (April 2009), p. 16.
[2] From 1965 to 1985 only six officers made one-star. The defence chief (know at varying junctures as the DGS, CGS, and presently the CDF) and highest ranking SAF officer received a second star in 1978 and a third in 1988. A COA was only appointed in 1990 and first received a second-star in 1991. The Chief of Air Force (CAF) first made one-star in 1987 and two-star in 1994. The Chief of Navy (CNV) first made one-star in 1988 and two-star in 1995.

qualified professional officers and the conscious initiative to ensure the primacy of civilian oversight and control. While Singaporeans scoff at the possibility of a coup today the 1960s were quite different with constant reminders from the immediate region and further afield in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. The Defence Council (DEFCO) is the chief military body chaired by the PM "which monitors what's happening" in the SAF and clarified any doubt about who was in charge.[3] It is DEFCO which made political decisions, approved recommendations by senior uniformed officers, and set key policies. In fact, the civilian leaders held such supremacy that they effectively ran the SAF for a good number of years. One general who was summoned to DEFCO recalled the key members were:

> "The PM, the Defence Minister, the Foreign Minister, and others when they are needed. The Secretary of DEFCO is the Permanent Secretary (Defence). The CDF comes to DEFCO as and when uniform representation is required. MINDEF did not have very strong representation. I was very conscious of civilian supremacy over the military. Lots of decisions were made by Dr Goh. It was a one-man show. The SAF did not have to fight for money. The SAF and its officer corps had not reached a stage of maturity. The Permanent Secretary was above the CDF (in seniority) for a long time. But there exists the danger of decisions being taken without professional inputs."[4]

Indeed, this was seen to be the case as a declassified memo from the British High Commission in Singapore to London in 1974 read:

> "A great deal of the credit belongs to Dr Goh who characteristically read voluminously on military subject and on occasions has confounded his expatriate advisers and visiting officers with his knowledge of a particular subject. However, he is fascinated by technology and many of the short comings of the SAF are also due to Dr Goh's lack of military experience and understanding of the complex support organisation necessary to turn men and equipment into an effective fighting machine. Dominated as they are by Dr Goh and civilian officials, the SAF have been afforded little chance to develop an officer cadre or truly professional expertize (sic)."[5]

An attached report by the British defence adviser further noted:

> "The Director General Staff (a one-star officer) is the senior uniformed Singaporean who exercises some command and operational control functions direct from the Ministry of Defence. However, he has no operational HQ nor is he wholly responsible for the work of his staff officers."[6]

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[3] Chia Poteik, "Lee to MPs: Keep Your Hands Clean," *The Straits Times*, 24 February 1977, p. 7.
[4] Interview No. 19.
[5] Memo from S. Falle at the British High Commission, Tanglin Circus, Singapore 10, dated 18 March 1974, reference 10/41A, and originally classified Confidential (Covering Secret: UK Eyes: Bravo), declassified 2005, to C. W. Squire Esq MVO, South-East Asian Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London SW1, pp. 2-3.
[6] "Singapore Armed Forces Military Capability," report by Defence Adviser, British High Commission Singapore Part I, originally classified Secret (UK Eyes Bravo), declassified 2005, p. 8. Report was attached to the abovementioned memo from S. Falle at the British High Commission in Singapore.

In took until the late 1970s and early 1980s for this deficiency to be redressed with the creation of the General Staff and subsequently the JS. Even then, a retired foreign military officer and consultant still noted that the "SAF, in terms of generals is understaffed. It was under-promoting officers. He also recommended that the SAF increase salaries by 25% and that the [army's] divisions should be mixed in terms of active and NS [personnel]."[7] Such actions eventuated in a slow and cautious manner. Those who wore one or more stars had to carry the rank which reflected the responsibilities of leadership over the subordinate team. It was never a mere administrative function or arithmetic where three or more subordinate COLs equalled a BG or RADM1.[8] It was more a reflection that a combat formation had achieved requisite operational capabilities, that a staff department fulfilled a critical role, and that a diplomatic mission held great relevance and importance to Singapore. Defence ministers also consciously avoided a 'top heavy' structure and many have approved the bestowment of a star out of necessity and not luxury.

Counting Stars

The regular SAF Officer Corps is a small community and not all who sit in general- or admiral-rank appointments received the established rank. Legislation which governs the rank structure allowed for a four-star rank of general (GEN) or admiral (ADM) but the current structure has a three-star (LG/VADM) CDF with three two-star (MG/RADM2) service chiefs. Even this has been cautiously pegged to reflect the SAF's capabilities and avoid it being laughing stock. As defence minister Yeo Ning Hong explained in 1994: "The SAF has reached the stage of its full capabilities such that it is possible for us to have the chief of services attain the established ranks of Major-Generals."[9] The other 'senior' generals are the four Chief of Staff (COS) billets at the respective joint and service levels, and the Director Military Intelligence. At present there are up to 42 one-star and above billets but the actual numbers of active military elites are lower (Annex I). There are four reasons for this. First, a handful of appointments are hybrid in nature in the sense they are held by either military officers or senior civil servants. Second, certain appointments are often dual-hatted, others are held concurrently on an ad-hoc basis, and some even go unfilled. These are the fairly straight forward reasons.

[7] Interview No. 03.
[8] A cursory count of COL-billets numbered *at least* 156 with 44 on the Joint Staff/MINDEF/SAF HQ billets, 51 in the army, 42 from the air force, and 19 from the navy.
[9] "How officers move up the ranks," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 3.

The third reason is the deliberate attempt to place a cap on the number of stars at any time. One interviewee reasoned simply: "The one-star reflects privilege and opportunity. It is capped to prevent brass creep."[10] This follows on to the fourth reason that an officer frequently, but not always, entered a one-star and above billet while holding one rank lower. For example, an incoming division commander is usually a COL who is promoted to BG in the course of the tour and subject to satisfactory performance. That said, there is never a guarantee for any individual sitting in a one-star appointment will actually receive the rank. This has attracted differing opinions. One former member of the elite nucleus mentioned:

> "I am an advocate that once you sit in the appointment, you should get the rank. I mean, if you put a Colonel to do a one-star job what are you saying to the world? That you are not confident in the individual you put there? It speaks of the system. If there is a steep trajectory like in the early days it is OK. But as the organization matures it should be OK to give the rank. [That being said] [t]he general rank should be given to a person who needs it to command, and not a staffer (staff officer). If he is a staffer on the way to a command appointment then that is different."[11]

Similarly, a fellow member of the elite nucleus explained that:

> "There is a line of reasoning that if you are not a commander then there is no need for a star because brass 'creep' dilutes the value of the rank. This view arises from the need to distinguish those who have the capability as a commander and did not get the chance to earn the star versus those who are not seen as good commanders and still get a star (from non-command appointment)."[12]

These views, while valid, have remained personal opinions as realities indicate officers ascend into the military elite though command, staff, or mix of both. Both routes are equally valid as it was once reasoned that: "The leaders in the field at all levels are the hearts of the SAF, while the staff officers are the minds of the SAF."[13] Then there is the added impetus to ensure the possibility of earning the star through the staff route to retain scholar-officers not suitable for command but who could contribute their 'brain power' in staff appointments. "The SAF is what it is today because of its ability to bring in the best and the brightest minds amongst our young people into service," reflected LG (RET) Winston Choo in 2000. "You have some scholars who make very good soldiers, you get some scholars who make very good staff officers, the most important thing is to look at the man and try to fit him into what he does best."[14] Similarly, LG (RET) then-COL Lim Chuan Poh observed:

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[10] Interview No. 18.
[11] Interview No. 25.
[12] Interview No. 15.
[13] "Let us find hearts and minds of SAF: Chok Tong," *The Straits Times*, 4 July 1982, p. 10.
[14] "Celebrating 30 years of SAF overseas scholarships," *Army News*, Issue No. 62 (May 2000), p. 4.

> "Most scholars are naturally inclined towards staff work but you require additional qualities to command men. You need to be comfortable dealing with people of diverse backgrounds, to work under extreme pressure and to be exemplary in the way you conduct yourself."[15]

Local Ranks

Counted among the military elite are eight officers who at one time were authorized to wear temporary ranks – or 'local' ranks in SAF parlance and denoted with an 'L/' before the rank abbreviation – while serving on assignments overseas. Two officers deployed on year-long UN tours in 1994 and 2002 respectively and reverted to their 'actual' ranks post-deployment.[16] To the untrained eye and the uninformed – such as the entire UN Assembly – these incidents were undoubtedly indicative of 'demotions' rather than 'reversions'. From 2010 onward the SAF's utilization of 'local' general- and admiral-ranks within the international arena was still practiced but rank reversions have been mixed. One officer was authorized to wear the 'local' one-star until retirement.[17] The next two received their first 'local' star and were later promoted without reverting to COL.[18] The sixth officer reverted to COL after command of a multinational flotilla as L/RADM1 but now sits in a one-star appointment.[19] Finally, the incumbent Director Defence Policy Office and the Defence Attaché in Washington are COLs who wore L/BG.[20] Whether these are 'face saving' measures to prevent talk of 'demotions' from coalition partners or a matter of deploying only officers earmarked for flag-ranks is unknown.

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[15] "Ready for any mission," *The Straits Times (Scholarship Special)*, 7 March 1997, p. 15.
[16] COL (RET) Yeo Cheng Ann was made a L/BG when serving as Deputy Force Commander and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM) from 3 October 1994 to 4 October 1995. BG (RET) Tan Huck Gim, Eric, was a L/MG while Force Commander of the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET) from 31 August 2002 to 29 August 2003. See Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (for the period 1 October 1993-31 March 1994), S/1994/388, 4 April 1994, www.un.org/Docs/s1994388.htm (accessed 28 May 2014); "Keeping peace in the Middle East," *Pioneer* (January 1995), pp. 16-7; *Year Book of the United Nations 2003* (New York, NY: United Nations Publications, 2005), p. 1561; and David Boey, "Retired S'pore army officer picked for UN post in Timor Leste," *The Straits Times*, 21 November 2006, p. 5.
[17] L/RADM1 (RET) Bernard Miranda was forwarded to L/RADM1 prior to his appointment as Commander of CTF-151 from 20 January to 20 April 2010. He subsequently retired in that rank 17 months later on 23 September 2011. See Ben Chester Cheong, "The RSN at the Helm of CTF 151 – A Job Very Well Done," *Navy News*, Issue No. 2 (2010), p. 9; and Casey Tan, "Spend more time with your people," *Navy News*, Issue No. 5 (2011), pp. 22-5.
[18] BG Cheng Siak Kian wore L/BG while Defence Attaché (DA) at the Singapore Embassy in Washington (2008-11) and kept the rank permanently when promoted in 2010. RADM1 Harris Chan (SAFOS 1990) wore L/RADM1 as commander CTF-151 (31 March to 30 June 2011) and kept it going into the appointment as commander of the Military Security Task Force (MSTF) on 5 August 2011. He made RADM1 in 2012.
[19] In contrast to the officers in the footnote above, Giam Hock Koon, the third Singaporean naval officer to lead CTF-151 (7 March to 6 June 2013) wore L/RADM1 but reverted to COL after the tour. Giam assumed command of MSTF from Chan on 11 July 2013. It is unclear if Chan's status as a SAFOS recipient averted any reversion in rank when compared to Giam; especially when the periods between CTF-151 and MSTF are virtually identical.
[20] Tan Chee Wee (SAFOS 1993) replaced BG Cheng Siak Kian as DA Washington in 2011 and made L/BG in 2012. He relinquished the appointment to L/BG Leong Kum Wah in 2013 and assumed the post of Director (Policy) Defence Policy Office.

6.2 Dr Goh and the early SAF

The early growth of the SAF was made possible through the hard work of trailblazing pioneers and the numerous collective discussions which undoubtedly peppered the political echelon. Dr Goh was the key architect who played a part in almost every facet including promotions. His frequent interactions and visits to camps and bases allowed him to know a good proportion of regular officers on a personal basis. Mr Dhoraisingam Samuel worked with Goh in the defence and education ministries and provided this firsthand account on promotions:

> "Dr [Goh's] direct contact with individual officers had another advantage. On one promotion exercise when the interviewing board submitted their recommendations to Dr [Goh] for his approval, the file was sent to me after Dr [Goh] had gone through the promotion list. Dr [Goh] had deleted some of the names of officers as he had personally known them and not fit for promotion. If Dr [Goh] through his personal contact found a capable officer, he would assign additional responsibilities to him and even promote him."[21]

Such additional responsibilities gave an officer visibility but could also prove double-edged as one general recalled:

> "One day I received a call and was told to report to Dr Goh's office. I was a Lieutenant-Colonel then. Dr Goh wanted to showcase the SAF to the people of Singapore … it was an opportunity but my head was also on the chopping block. I came up with detailed suggestions and Dr Goh critiqued them. He asked questions and could tell if you put thought and effort into it … one had to be confident … In the end the displays turned out well and Dr Goh was happy."[22]

Beyond meeting Goh's standards and expectations it was also essential to decipher his actions. He frequently bypassed the chain of command and went straight to the officer in charge or straight to the source of any issue that caught his attention.[23] A staff paper submitted for Goh's approval passed muster if it returned marked with a 'G' but one with 'two circles' or his full name indicated failure.[24]

Despite such eccentricities Dr Goh always kept a lookout for good people to build and lead the SAF. Besides professional military men he cast his net wide and counted AOs such as Kirpa Ram Vij and Tan Chin Tiong who were seconded to the SAF as uniformed officers, or capable civilian administrators such as Philip Yeo.[25] Goh also handpicked LG (RET) Winston Choo who recalled how the news was broken to him:

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[21] Samuel, *Working for Dr Goh Keng Swee*, p. 57.
[22] Interview No. 01.
[23] Desker and Kwa, *Goh Keng Swee*, pp. 92, 97, 100, 107; and Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with COL (RET) John Morrice for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003306, Reel 10 of 13 (2008) pp. 270-1.
[24] Desker and Kwa, *Goh Keng Swee*, pp. 93, 98, 104.
[25] In an official publication Philip Yeo was depicted as "Dr Goh Keng Swee's protégé, technology buff and Permanent Secretary of MINDEF." See Chew and Tan, *Creating the Technology Edge*, p. 8.

> "One day I was at the Command and Staff College at Fort Canning, Dr Goh called me up and mapped out my entire military career for me. He said I was going to be given command of 4 SIR. I was to go to the Command and General Staff College in the US because I was going to be Director of General Staff. I was only about 30 years old then. I pointed out that if I became DGS so soon, my career would be very short because I wondered for how long I could remain as DGS. He told me not to worry, to just go and do it. As it turned out, I survived for 18 years as Chief."[26]

It must also be highlighted that talent on its own merits was insufficient for Goh who took a no-nonsense approach. He held high expectations of senior officers for the stakes were clear. Another general opined:

> "Dr Goh was a mentor to anyone he felt had talent. He nurtured those who did well. He was also merciless when it came to the question of upholding character and integrity. For example, COL [X] was demoted to LTC for not being completely truthful to Dr Goh. Dr Goh was sharp and saw through it. <pause> Dr Goh was preparing the SAF to be ready for war in those early days. Confrontation, riots, the Malaysian years, all made it clear to us that we would have to manage Malaysia and Indonesia one day. We were in danger. It was more vivid to us then. In later years, this has not become so but you must never belief it won't happen. The moment you do it will happen."[27]

While the SAF was fortunate to have leaders like Dr Goh in its formative years there were no guarantees that others who followed were equally selfless. Furthermore, no matter how objective Goh approached personnel issues it was still personal. A retired colonel quipped: "The thing about Goh Keng Swee, when he likes you, he likes you. That's the trouble."[28] A more objective system was required to guard against possible favouritism and curtail the role of personality cults in personnel promotions.[29] The SAF Officer Corps also grew too large for any one individual to know its members personally and manage concomitant issues of promotion and succession planning. Such concerns were also prevalent across the civil service.[30] Promotion systems across the armed forces and civil service had to be transparent as then-Second Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean reasoned:

> "… if you don't have rules and systems in place, but a very personalised system for promoting, moving and promoting people, you may well demoralise good people in the public service, who may feel that their opportunities for advancement are determined by factors other than merit."[31]

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[26] Desker and Kwa, *Goh Keng Swee*, p. 92.
[27] Interview No. 03.
[28] Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with COL (RET) Goh Lye Choon for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003275, Reel 17 of 17 (2008) p. 382.
[29] For anecdotal evidence of perceived favouritism, see Yip, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 34.
[30] Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," p. 8.
[31] Fernandez, *Without Fear or Favour*, p. 19.

6.2.1 Project Wrangler

Despite Dr Goh's centrality in the promotion of senior officers in the early days it was certainly not done on a whim. Project Wrangler was initiated under his watch in February 1974 as a pipeline to identify, test, and groom officers deemed to have senior leadership potential. The rationale behind the project was rather simple:

> "The SAF needed brain power to make a difference. This is an expensive initiative because it takes away brain power from other institutions, ministries. The Wrangler scheme was established to shortlist and narrow down the list of individual officers to be monitored. Dr Goh himself chaired the Wrangler project. Those on the scheme were given exposure to special projects and mentors. The scheme was designed to get bright people into the system and advance them quicker than others. Some Wranglers are more inclined toward staff-work, others command, some both staff and command."[32]

Those who made the cut as Wranglers ascended the SAF's hierarchy along command and/or staff appointments and received promotions "regardless of age or seniority."[33] The term Wrangler was allegedly adopted from Cambridge University and it was coincidental that Lee Hsien Loong was literally the only Wrangler in the sense of the name from the inception of SAFOS in 1971 until the Project was revealed in 1981.[34] The critical nature of identifying and grooming those with potential to lead at the highest echelons was taken seriously. The Minister for Defence chaired the Wrangler Committee which included senior civilians in MINDEF and the military's elite nucleus.[35] Initially, individuals with tertiary education were automatically included in Project Wrangler and to ensure equitable opportunity so were officers in the top 15% of advanced combat training courses, graduates of foreign military academies, and on recommendations made through their superior's 'Merit List'.[36]

While the initiatives of Project Wrangler seemed sound in terms of objectives its practice fell-short on a number of accounts which also plagued the practice of

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[32] Interview No. 19.
[33] Paul Jensen, "Getting the Best Brains into SAF," *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 1; Paul Jacob and Ronnie Wai, "PROJECT WRANGLER: What it's all about ..." *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 1; and *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 10.
[34] The name Wrangler was bestowed on Cambridge undergraduate students who read mathematical tripos and graduated with a standard eventually equivalent to first-class honours. The 'senior wrangler' is the *primus inter pares* (first in the mathematical tripos class). See John Gascoigne, "Mathematics and Meritocracy: The Emergence of the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos," *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (November 1984), pp. 547-84; and "Hsien Loong gets his honours degree," *The Straits Times*, 22 June 1974, p. 7. 23 of the 76 SAFOS recipients between 1971 and 1981 studied at Cambridge when Project Wrangler was revealed. Twenty took engineering and one read economics. The only two who studied mathematics were Lee Hsien Loong (SAFOS 1971), a Wrangler in 1974 and Lim Chuan Poh (SAFOS 1980) who in 1981 was in his second year of studies.
[35] Senior civilian representation included the Minister for Defence, Second Minister for Defence, Minister of State (Defence), Permanent Secretaries of Defence, Deputy Secretaries of Defence, and Director Manpower. The military was represented by the Chief of General Staff and Deputy Chief of General Staff.
[36] Paul Jacob and Ronnie Wai, "PROJECT WRANGLER: What it's all about ..." *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 1; and Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer, p. 14.

promotions in the wider-SAF.[37] First, Wranglers were often judged solely on performance in current positions and in tandem with their potential to hold higher appointments. Second, recommendations by superiors were 'subjective' and varied according to individuals. This impacted the final point which was the selection, development, and continual assessment of Wranglers. A former CO OPC candidly admitted that: "Some officers who entered the Wrangler list on the basis of their scholastic achievements did not subsequently prove themselves in performance."[38] The changes to manpower policies in 1982 also led to several revisions of the Wrangler Scheme. University and foreign military academy graduates continued their automatic inclusion as 'provisional Wranglers', the top graduates of advanced courses were included on a case-by-case basis, while superior's 'Merit Lists' were replaced by a Promotion Recommendation Board (PRB) at different levels.[39] Psychological testing was introduced to weed out those with "psychopathological problems."[40] Specific details invariably changed as the SAF evolved over the last three decades but Project Wrangler has remained true to its core focus of identifying and grooming the top 10 to 15 per cent of the SAF Officer Corps; essentially officers with the potential to make COL and above by retirement.[41] It is not entirely surprising that the SAF subscribes to the Pareto principle where "80% of the effort involved must be concentrated on the top 20% of staff members."[42]

Finally, this initiative had a divisive effect on the officer corps between those who had a bright future and those who felt a ceiling was placed on their careers because they were not Wranglers. Edwin Lee, author of *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, reasoned:

> "Many of their brother officers who were not chosen, would have been disappointed by the scholarship schemes, and Project Wrangler, and felt that the future belonged, not to them, but to the scholar-officers and the 'Wranglers' … Meritocracy in the SAF had its less happy side. The search and grooming of scholar-officers inevitably led to a class distinction between them and the others. These others, many of who were capable and experienced, could not accept the fact that academic qualifications should count for so much in the profession-of-arms … Their discontent, which NSMen knew of, with varying degrees of empathy, could be detrimental to nation-building as a by-product of NS."[43]

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[37] "New look Wrangler to better spot talent in SAF," *The Straits Times*, 5 April 1982, p. 11.
[38] Ibid.
[39] *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 14.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., pp. 14-5.
[42] Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," p. 18.
[43] Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, pp. 289, 292-3.

The career progressions of Wranglers were once directly managed by a committee chaired by the defence minister. At present day-to-day running of the project and the career management of COLs and above is currently delegated to OPC which is headed by an officer with the rank of LTC/SLTC. Civilian oversight of this crucial manpower pool is maintained with OPC placed under the purview of Director Manpower who is subordinate to the Deputy Secretary (Administration); both senior civilian appointments within MINDEF's Defence Management Group (DMG).[44] This is not surprising as Morris Janowitz identified oversight of manpower issues, specifically promotions, as "a crucial lever of civilian control."[45] In addition, approvals for decisions and actions beyond the norm lie solely with senior civilian bureaucrats and the political appointees on the recommendation of senior military officers.[46] Non-Wranglers – officers likely to retire in the ranks of SLTC and below – have their careers managed by personnel management branches or centres within the respective services such as the Army Officers Management Centre (AOMC) under G1 Army (the army's personnel department).

6.2.2 Officer Appraisal until 1982

From the early days of the SAF until the manpower revisions of 1982 an officer's promotion was based on meeting two to four requirements.[47] The first was the specified 'time in rank' (shorter for Wranglers) before one was considered 'eligible' for promotion. The second requirement, applicable only to junior officers (LTA/CPT), was to pass the respective LTA-to-CPT and CPT-to-MAJ exams. These promotion exams were implemented to confirm junior officers possessed baseline competencies but disadvantaged officers in more hectic appointments.[48] Such practices predated

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[44] OPC was first established to manage the careers of all regular SAF officers but manpower growth obliged it to focus solely on the crème of the officer corps. OPC works closely with the SAF Recruitment Centre to recruit future SAFOS and SMS recipients through various publicity events. Among DMG's various responsibilities is formulating the terms and conditions of top-tier MINDEF scholarships. To ensure synergy in the management of the 'top talent' in the country, the selection of SAFOS and SMS recipients fall under the Public Service Commission (PSC) which also administers other top-tier government scholarships. See PSC Scholarships website at www.pscscholarships.gov.sg; Ivan Heng, "SAF Training Awards," *Pioneer* (October 1985), pp. 4-5; and Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with COL (RET) Ramachandran Menon for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003250, Reel 11 of 17 (2007), p. 236.
[45] Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, p. 353.
[46] This group included Director Manpower Policy Division under MINDEF's Defence Management Group, Deputy Secretary (Administration) in-charge of the Defence Management Group, the Permanent Secretaries in MINDEF, and the different political appointments such as Minister of State (Defence), Senior Minister of State (Defence), Second Minister for Defence, and the Minister for Defence. Advice can be sourced from the CDF, the service chiefs, and the Director Military Security Department.
[47] *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 6; "Finer points and aim of scheme explained," *The Straits Times*, 5 April 1982, p. 11; and "Promotion Exercise '83," *Navy News* (August 1983), p. 3.
[48] For example the LTA-to-CPT promotion exams for army officers were administered by SATO and covered tactics and map reading. The CPT-to-MAJ promotion exam was administered by the Military

Singapore's independence as one general who served during *Konfrontasi* remembered: "I took the promotion exam while in Sabah on operations. We would fly to Kuching for our exams on civilian aircraft with our weapons. It was quite normal then. <laughs>"[49] Third, junior officers required the interview panel's approval for promotion while senior officers (MAJ and above) were considered for promotion in absentia. Promotion interviews proved subjective and at times perfunctory but performance and the ability to impress proved all-important. A one-star recounted:

> "In the earlier days it (the promotion system) was a lot more subjective. The promotion interview was chaired by Perm Sec and CDF. I remember entering the room and the panel were seated up there, literally, on an elevated stage. It was for junior officers eligible for Lieutenant and Captain promotion. I thought it was awkward. Did they know me or what I did based on a few minutes of interaction or from the piece of paper in front of them?"[50]

The final requirement was a rather 'vague' assessment made by an officer's immediate superior and whether the unit recommended for the said officer for promotion. This annual Staff Confidential Report (SCR) was subsequently forwarded to the Formation Commander for endorsement and, where applicable, a promotion recommendation made. The SCR also proved subjective because immediate superiors differed in expectations and standards so that strictness or leniency and not necessarily an officer's performance often determined assessment grades.[51] COL (RET) Ramachandran Menon, a former Assistant Chief of General Staff (ACGS) for Personnel in the late 1970s recollected the practice as such:

> "The annual performance ranking up till then (the revisions of 1982) had been 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 individual deserving of promotion, depending as much on the assessor as the assessed."[52]

Additionally, superiors were at times too lax in their assessments with detrimental effects. Dr Goh openly rebuked senior officers at the 1973 promotion ceremony saying:

> "... when your subordinate officer is found inadequate, you should not hesitate to give him an unfavourable assessment in your annual confidence report ... As matters stand, virtually all commanders in the SAF are reluctant to give a frank report on weak officers under their command. The result is that the annual confidential reporting system is virtually useless."[53]

History Branch at the Command and Staff College. "SATO – More than just a School for Captains," *Pioneer* (January 1977), pp. 20-2; and "Where history isn't bunk," *Pioneer* (February 1977), pp. 8-9.
[49] Interview No. 19.
[50] Interview No. 17.
[51] *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 6.
[52] Menon, *One of A Kind*, pp. 340-1.
[53] Goh Keng Swee, *The Practice of Economic Growth* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1977), p. 323.

Other superiors also made promotion recommendations without accounting for an officer's potential to meet the demands and responsibilities of the next higher rank.[54] This placed the SAF at risk of fulfilling the Peter Principle whereby officers climbed the hierarchy until they reached a level of incompetence. This is definitely not what the SAF wanted or needed.

6.2.3 The Shell System

Such problems were not confined solely to the SAF as the civil service was also growing in size. Moreover, there was discomfort with a system where "promotions and appraisals were decided subjectively by bosses based solely on their own perception and understanding of the employees", and the pressing need for succession planning meaning those with potential had to be identified early.[55] The best solution, so it seemed, came from the cutthroat world of business as Lee Kuan Yew explained:

> "Shell Oil, the multinational, once gave me the idea for the term 'helicopter quality'. In other words, you can see a problem in total and you can zero in on the detail, which you have to see to solve, and zoom on it. That's called helicopter quality. Now, if you are too low, your helicopter quality is too low, you do not see the whole picture nor can your zoom be powerful."[56]

So impressed was the then-PM that he dispatched a six-member delegation of civil servants in 1982 to study the appraisal system firsthand at the company's registered office in London.[57] Royal Dutch Shell plc (hereafter 'Shell') ranked the performances of executives within the same seniority and estimated an executive's Current Estimated Potential (CEP) – the highest job which could be held comfortably in the organization by age 45 – on an annual basis.[58] Some others defined CEP as the highest rank (and concomitant appointment) that an officer can "hold comfortably" and "handle competently" before retirement assuming unlimited opportunities.[59] While performances specifics varied across different roles, CEP was matched against four common qualities encapsulated in the acronym HAIR. 'Helicopter vision' was the

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[54] *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 6.
[55] Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," pp. 8-9.
[56] Thomas Plate, *Conversations with Lee Kuan Yew: Citizen Singapore: How to build a nation* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), p. 68.
[57] Fernandez, *Without Fear or Favour*, pp. 43, 120. The six-member team which visited Shell's head office in London from 1 to 18 February 1982 was led by Joseph Yuvaraj Manuel Pillay and comprised Lee Ek Tieng, Wong Hung Khim, Koh Cher Siang, Lim Siong Guan, and Er Kwong Wah. Shell would also provide "pointers on the art of scenario planning" for MINDEF later in 1991.
[58] Menon, *One of A Kind*, pp. 340-1.
[59] "How officers move up the ranks," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2; Presentation on "Human Capital Development in the Singapore Civil Service" by Ms Lim Soo Hoon, Permanent Secretary (Public Service Division), at the Eleventh Malaysian Civil Service Conference (21-2 August 2006), unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan028179.pdf (accessed 28 May 2014); and Jon S. T. Quah, *Public Administration Singapore Style* (Singapore: Talisman Publishing Pte. Ltd., 2010), p. 80.

ability to see both details and contextualize within the 'big picture'. 'Analytical power' framed how well one turned complicated problems into workable and thoroughly examined segments. 'Imagination' was an individual's perception in uncovering possible alternative and non-obvious solutions. 'Reality' came with the interpretation of information grounded in reality and intuition leading to feasible solutions.[60] CEP based on these HAIR qualities was adopted as a tool to identify and nurture talented individuals (i.e. those with high CEP) across the civil service and in government-linked companies.[61] This was also the case for the SAF with slight modifications. Such qualities were openly championed for those who aspired to important postings in the then-newly created (1983) Joint Operations and Planning Directorate (JOPD).[62] Revisions over time ensured that the CEP yardsticks remained current and presently include 'helicopter' and 'whole person' dimensions namely Intellectual Qualities, Results Orientation, and Leadership Qualities.[63]

6.2.4 Officer Appraisal after 1982

The SAF instituted new manpower policies in 1982 predicated on Shell's practices which were modified and reflected the SAF's unique circumstances and practices as a military organization. The salary changes were made to attract and retain officers and the promotion system also underwent key changes to make it more robust. 'Time in rank' requirements were eradicated and obviously benefitted the 'high-flying' SAFOS officers. Three from the inaugural batch in 1971 made LTC by 1981 and COL a year later.[64] Flexibility was built into the promotion exams which were renamed the General Military Knowledge Exams (GMKE). Officers with hectic schedules were no

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[60] *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, pp. 10-4; Ronnie Wai, "No quotas when promoting officers," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1983, p. 14; Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," pp. 4-5; and "How officers move up the ranks," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2.
[61] Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with Mr Lim Siong Guan for "The Civil Service – A Retrospection" project, Accession No: 003060, Reel 5 of 14, pp. 73-5; Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," p. 1; Lian Tian Tse, *Application of Logistic Regression and Survival Analysis to the study of CEP, Manpower Performance and Attrition* (Monterey, CA: M.Sc thesis completed at the Naval Postgraduate School, 1993); Jones, "Recent reforms in Singapore's administrative elite, pp. 70-93; and Pak Tee Ng, "Mentoring and coaching educators in the Singapore education system," *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 (2012), pp. 24-35.
[62] "Joint armed forces team will be set up," *The Straits Times*, 16 April 1983, p. 1; and "SAF should be the concern of every Singaporean," *The Straits Times*, 16 April 1983, p. 14.
[63] See presentation on "Human Capital Development in the Singapore Civil Service" by Ms Lim Soo Hoon; and "The truth about performance management," *Challenge: Public Service for the 21st Century* (October 2006), www.challenge.gov.sg/magazines/archive/2006_10/staff/staff.html (no longer available). Shell's revised attributes are: Capacity, Achievement, and Relationships (CAR). See Kim E. Ferrarie, "Processes to assess Leadership Potential keep Shell's Talent Pipeline Full," *Journal of Organizational Excellence*, Vol. 24, Iss. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 17-22.
[64] The 1982 promotion list to COL included Boey Tak Hap (army), Chin Chow Yoon (army), Chin Siat Yoon (army), Patrick Choy (army), Lee Hsien Loong (army), Lee Seng Kong (navy), James Leo (navy), Sin Boon Wah (army), Michael Teo (air force), Colin Theseira (army), Gary Yeo (air force). See "Promotion: Ranks and Responsibilities," *Pioneer* (August 1982), p. 6. All except COL (RET) Lee Seng Kong subsequently received further promotions in rank.

longer penalized from receiving the next promotion but passing was still mandatory for further promotions. In due course the GKME were superseded by a formal tri-service course prior to attendance at Staff College.[65]

The greatest emphasis and change came with the appraisal and promotion assessment system predicated on an individual's officer performance and potential.[66] The SCR – since superseded by the Annual Feedback Report (AFR) and Performance Management Report (PMR) – went beyond the immediate superior and travelled up the relevant hierarchy for collective assessment. CEP assessments also replaced the commander's recommendation list.[67] Since 1982 the SAF's appraisal system is manifested as the 'Annual Ranking Exercise' which generated merit lists of *all* officers the same rank and based on the twin yardsticks of *performance* ('realised past success or failure') and *potential* ('anticipated future success or failure').[68] An officer's first CEP is made two years after enlistment and is revised annually. It is adjustable if required and determined the path and pace of an officer's rank ascension assuming realized performances met projections.[69]

6.3 Performance and Potential

Performance is not merely checking-off on key performance indicators but a holistic assessment of an officer. In 1983 it was underlined that the hallmarks of "a good officer are commitment and leadership: Character, discipline, compassion and guts built on brains."[70] A decade on it was highlighted that Singapore and the SAF demanded "qualities such as organization ability, reaction under stress, team work, responsibility and discipline" from its officers.[71] In 2011 Lee Kuan Yew reiterated: "Talent, therefore takes in not only raw academic or professional success, but also the fuzzier concept of having the 'right' personality and outlook. Integrity and honesty are vital."[72] The late President Devan Nair once explained "brains alone are not enough, for

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[65] The five-week Joint Junior Staff Course (JJSC) was first held on 7 June 1989 for cross-service learning and networking, and in preparation for appointments in MINDEF. The Tri-Service Course (TSC) superseded the GMKE and JJSC in 1998 with 43 courses conducted until its reestablishment in 2006 as a week-long SAF Staff Officers' Course covering non-operational staff work plus a four-week Tri-Service Warfighter Course (TSWC) covering SAF joint operations. See *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, p. 8; "First Joint Junior Staff Course," *Pioneer* (July 1989), p. 42; "SAFTI MI Scores another world first for Tri-Service Training," *Army News* (October 1998), p. 2; and "Tri-Service Warfighter Course (TSWC)," *SAFTI Link* (2006), p. 7.
[66] Paul Jensen, "Getting the Best Brains into SAF," *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1981, p. 1.
[67] "New look Wrangler to better spot talent in SAF," *The Straits Times*, 5 April 1982, p. 11.
[68] "Towards A Dynamic, Thinking Man's Army," *The Straits Times*, 27 May 1982, p. 10; "Teamwork among rank and file a success: Chok Tong," *The Straits Times*, 28 June 1985, p. 15; and Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," pp. 2-3.
[69] "How officers move up the ranks," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2.
[70] Ronnie Wai, "No quotas when promoting officers," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1983, p. 14.
[71] "How officers move up the ranks," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2.
[72] Han et al., *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths*, p. 100.

crooks also have good brains. Which is why qualities of character and motivation are equally important."[73]

While the qualities of sound character are necessary they are insufficient on their own merits. BG (RET) then-MAJ Chin Phei Chen, a former CO OPC, noted: "Some officers may have the impression that promotion is based solely on potential. In reality, both potential and performance are equally important."[74] Another general officer with specialized experiences in personnel issues further explained:

> "Ranking takes place within all officers of the same rank and is based on performance and CEP. If an officer is outside the formation a formation ranking is also made for checking purposes. Performance determines an officer's promotion prospects and CEP the speed of promotion. To be promoted you need both."[75]

An officer who has a high CEP but does not perform is considered "deadwood" and will remain at the present rank.[76] It was also highlighted that "whether a serviceman is actually promoted is his ability to perform and excel in his work."[77] This is certainly true early in the military career but CEP became increasingly ossified later on. It is the officer who performed, who possessed a high CEP, and is deemed to be of irreproachable character that has the highest likelihood of entering the military elite.

The performance and CEP of every regular SAF officer is reviewed annually. Superiors appraised subordinates on key indicators stipulated at the start of an assessment period with a grade between 'A' (superior performances) to 'E' (failure).[78] While character may not improve grades any flaws are definitely detrimental. An individual's CEP is stipulated in the form of a specified rank. Performance reports are revealed to officers with avenues for grievances and recourse over disagreements. CEP, however, remained the purview of assessment panels only because it is subjective and could affect morale.[79] This had to be handled very carefully as it was observed:

> "CEP is not an exact science. It is subjective and dependent on who (superior) fights for who (subordinate). The ranking committee must 'pen it down' (document the decisions and reasons). I had to make sure that you don't have to be an SAF scholar to advance but you have to be a Wrangler to be seen to be better than the others."[80]

This issue is further compounded as it was easily forgotten that CEP is only a *current* estimation. Appraisals from subsequent postings checked for accuracy in CEP

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[73] "What price our high-achievers?" *The Straits Times*, 2 July 1982, p. 16.
[74] "How officers move up the ranks," *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2.
[75] Interview No. 11.
[76] Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," p. 16.
[77] "Promotion Exercise '83," *Navy News* (August 1983), p. 3.
[78] "Who gets promoted and how?" *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2.
[79] Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," p. 16; and Interview No. 19.
[80] Interview No. 19.

projections and consistency provided confirmation. Furthermore, as one service chief explained: "CEP has both staff and command tracks. At the junior level if your CEP is two to three grades above current rank it is a good sign that you are promotable."[81] Each appraisee had a reporting officer (usually the direct superior) and a countersigning officer with knowledge of the appraised individual. For example, in an air force squadron "[f]or an engineering officer, the CO writes a report and the base S4 (logistics officer) countersigns. For the pilot officer, the OC writes the report and the CO countersigns."[82] In the pre-1982 appraisal system this would be the end of it with the SCR submitted to the formation HQ for 'processing' and a promotions list generated after the necessary interviews and exams were checked-off.

Post-1982, however, the AFR and PMR is forwarded up the chain of command for panel deliberation over performance grade and CEP, the merger of subordinate ranking lists, and consensus reached before collective approval is made. The first panel took place at the unit (battalion, ship, or squadron) level with the CO as chairman. This panel reached consensus on the appraisal after deliberations before it is forwarded to the next higher HQ where applicable. An admiral illustrated the practice in the navy:

> "The first level of ranking is at the ship and then merged at the squadron level. Here the squadron commander and CO's will decide. Then it moves on to the flotilla and fleet. It is all subjective but new postings will check for consistency. Different vocations will be ranked separately up until LTC where it is merged across formations."[83]

The basis for this is simple as other flag-officers reasoned:

> "There is structure in the ranking appraisal in that it aims to forge consensus on whether people are good. It is not something that is privately decided and is as elaborate a process and as fair as you can get. The Majors ranked the Captains; Lieutenant-Colonels ranked the Majors; the Colonels the Lieutenant-Colonels and so on. In terms of appointments the OCs provide feedback to the COs and the CO-level is the first level of consensus. You start this process at different levels in September-October each year. By January-February the next year all ranking is consolidated at (service HQ) and then submitted to the CDF Board."[84]

A second reiterated that:

> "Both performance ranking and CEP are decided by a panel of people. For example, Captains are judged by a panel of COs and brigade commanders who have exposure to other Captains not in their direct chain of command. If changes are made to the ranking and CEP list there must always be an explanation why it was so. The panel acts as the check and balance and must be

[81] Interview No. 15.
[82] Interview No. 24.
[83] Interview No. 15.
[84] Interview No. 16.

> satisfied with the explanations given. The system fails if this is not the case and it is a case of collective failure."[85]

While a third officer surmised:

> "Problems arise when individuals change ranking without explanation, or if the argument put forward is not convincing it is also a problem. Changes can occur if processes fail or if you think you have 'higher wisdom' than others. But there must always be an explanation of the basis for making changes. It must be stated and convincing. If you are powerful and the ranking committee members are part of your clique, then you can do what you want. The SAF has a system and the institution remembers. Therefore stories and myths exist."[86]

It is difficult to ascertain if collective failure has taken place at ranking exercises. Disconcerting whispers circulated occasionally citing widespread disillusionment after changes are made to performance ranking with a formation. The resignation of service personnel *en-masse* is supposedly tangible evidence but this remained speculative at best. It is unknown whether causality or mere correlation existed between changes made in ranking and mass resignations, if either indeed occurred.

The annual ranking exercise is made more tedious because the assessed officers are not privy to these closed-door panels and the conversations or initiatives through which consensus is forged. The SAF, however, is not alone in this challenge. Observers of civilian firms have noted "performance appraisal has aroused more controversy than most human resource management practices … The Singaporean civil service is openly meritocratic, and boasts no pretence towards representativeness."[87] The armed services also operated on a non-profit basis such that "[t]he measures of performance are not so clear and objective. In for profit organizations there is a bottom line to meet."[88] These issues are compounded by individual perceptions. One interview participant reasoned bluntly that: "The politics of envy happens in all organizations. People get upset over it."[89] "Ranking is difficult to compare because it is not so black and white," explained another. "Was the individual a marginal candidate? Is the CEP for a given appointment higher? What are the circumstances of the specific case? The problem is that people will see what they want to see."[90] A third added:

> "[In] ranking there must be a common understanding that you are not just fighting for officers, to place them in positions for reward. It is never about carrying the flag. You fight for your people by beginning with their well-being in mind by training them and holding them to high standards. You mentor, push and develop them. Then ask, do the people around agree with the ranking? And

[85] Interview No. 12.
[86] Interview No. 15.
[87] Sarah Vallance, "Performance Appraisal in Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines: A Cultural Perspective," *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (December 1999), pp. 78, 83.
[88] Interview No. 15.
[89] Interview No. 26.
[90] Interview No. 15.

> remember the starting point of ranking is from the first to the last day of the ranking period. The whole period and not just when it comes to submitting the ranking report. But one human flaw is that people always think they are better than what they are."[91]

Finally, a fourth opined: "Those who lag behind in promotions and postings tend to feel the system is unfair. Not all will agree and a meritocratic system does not seek to please everyone. If it does, then the system is not meritocratic anymore."[92]

The notion of 'fairness' is debatable and it is essential to view the system for 'what it is' and not what one thinks 'it should be'. Several common practices were built into the appraisal system for it to remain credible. The SAF apportioned performance grades according to a standardized 'bell-curve' which accounted for relatively lenient and stringent assessors.[93] This smoothed the number of officers promoted annually but adequate discretionary flexibility was built-in to ensure well-performing officers are not penalized by statistics. As for CEP, logic dictated that officers on Project Wrangler have been assessed to be of 'COL and above' calibre. Non-Wranglers could expect CEPs in the range of CPT to SLTC. In the early stages of the uniformed career there is room for variation. However, CEP converged with reality once the career 'event horizon' is crossed and became increasingly ossified once an officer reached the age of 34 to 36, the rank of 'senior' MAJ, and has completed CSC. Finally, 'fairness' came with the soft skills of superiors who showed care and concern for their subordinates' careers. Very simply, "[i]f you want family values you must show concern to invest in a guy, and be a father figure."[94] The key is communication. A division commander explained that:

> "To prevent the perception of 'unfairness', there must be rapport and communication with your subordinates at all levels. You must stay connected and really know your people. Know how they are beyond the confines of the camp, get to know their family. Care and concern is for all ranks including the officers and not just the men. It must be genuine and there from the start. If you only start communicating when people write resignation letters then it is too late."[95]

Another air force general reiterated this point and emphasized the role of setting clear expectations:

> "I want to identify potential as early as I can. Ranking starts at the start of the year and not at the end. Yardsticks must be made know so that you can justify the ranking. It is easier to give higher grades to those who are more 'senior' but I give projects to test and make the yardsticks known. These are above the normal job scope. Everyone does their job but where is the premium?

[91] Interview No. 09.
[92] Interview No. 23.
[93] On average the top 10% will receive A's, the next 20% B's, the middle 40% C's, the lowest 30% comprised of D's and E's.
[94] Interview No. 24.
[95] Interview No. 06.

> Performance bonus is given for performances exceeding expectations. Because everyone works hard you get 13th month (salary bonus) but now we are talking not just about working hard. Communication with your people is very important. They need to know that if they don't work hard they can expect a 'C'. So the key is to communicate early and also truthfully. They need to earn their performance grade and it will never come on a silver platter. You also need to remind people where they stand along the way. There is no right or wrong but it is useless to tell people only at the end. I place a premium on exceeding tasks, leadership, initiative, and drive to meet objectives. As a CO for example you want to judge your flight commanders on leadership, ability to translate your intent and guidance into tangible actions. I look out for these attributes. If I need to step in and sort things out then you know your performance can start with a 'D'. I compare the 'A' grade against a set of attributes for growth, efficiency and effectiveness. I mean our people are all qualified and have brains so I look for independent and fearless decision making. Think, rationalise, and go with it! Further up, you want your COs to decide, stand by their decisions, and be responsible for all consequences. Regardless of vocation including engineers. But officers like that are not in abundance therefore ranking is quite easy for me <laughs>."[96]

Equity in appraisals and concomitant promotions were subjected to checks and balances essential to maintaining a robust system. These are never 'easy' exercises as various interview participants attested. One highlighted the perennial challenge to find a good fit for officers to serve in a capacity commensurate with their abilities and personal ambitions:

> "Potential can be judged by a person's (reporting officer) experience. The aim of the ranking exercise is to distinguish between the top, middle, and bottom. Limited potential does not mean an officer is no good. It is about finding the correct fit. If an officer is given a job beyond his abilities all will suffer. The organization, the officer, and the people around him. Once potential is reached the officer can still contribute. But this is a tough issue and leaders at all levels are responsible for challenging their people and exposing them to demanding jobs."[97]

Others underlined the twin-responsibilities of representation on a ranking panel in championing the justified interests of subordinates and possessing sound reasons for performance grades:

> "How do you apportion the performance grade? There is a ratio. The pain of ranking is in the pressure. A ratio is needed if you want system discipline because there are lenient and strict leaders. A ratio is used to normalize across the different leaders. Some argue it is too rigid but the SAF works on the philosophy that if there is a good candidate then the superior will have to carry

[96] Interview No. 16.
[97] Interview No. 25.

> the staff though. At the ranking committee discussions the members must also agree or disagree with stated reasons."[98]

Another reasoned:

> "Any responsible commander will push people up but there exists quotas for performance rankings. There will be give and take as there is a need to balance the cohort within a bell-curve. There are checks in the system to ensure quotas for promotion. It is a rigid structure but there is spare 'bandwidth' at ranking boards for arbitration. There is also a need to justify A's as well as D's."[99]

One common challenge of performance grading and CEP assessments is that both are rather subjective. Such an inherent characteristic could also be exploited by unscrupulous individuals to show favouritism and cronyism. The reason why such stringent and tedious measures are taken is that individuals have attempted such seemingly entrenched practices. One general highlighted these realities and enthused at the need for awareness and inclusiveness for the system to work:

> "You cannot prevent cronyism and cliques. It happens and will happen. I maintained an open door policy so that a private soldier could come in and see me. If you're good, you're good. It is those you do not get along with where I consciously work at so as not to unconsciously penalize him … I also look out that in the ranking process you break up the cliques. You know people are fighting for some people. If something is amiss it is up to you to step in. You must also declare your interest. You cannot eradicate this from occurring but you need to be conscious that is exists. You must not be guilty of doing all this. You must break it up because it affects morale. A clique is a sign of insecurity … Bickering among officers exist based on individual personality. This is a nature of military relationships. Professional jealousy exists and will always exist. If two generals cannot get along can you afford to remove them both?"[100]

Another openly explained the need to tread carefully in such matters:

> "Bickering among the top brass and cultivation of cliques are unhealthy. When I was [a member of the elite nucleus] I broke the cliques. While we must plan for succession I advocated the view we do not have the depth nor are we fortunate enough to select one and remove the others. The challenge is how to manage and not let it become adversarial. That's where you hear out views of [subordinate commanders] and use channels to hear ground sentiment. People are always looking [at the actions of senior leaders]. The important thing is to be inclusive. Include people from cliques and respect them for who they are."[101]

Two Singaporean academics cited four further possible shortcomings of the system. First, the 'Halo Effect' where appraisers "allow[ed] one overwhelming characteristic of the appraisee to affect their assessment" and overshadow other

[98] Interview No. 18.
[99] Interview No. 23.
[100] Interview No. 19.
[101] Interview No. 25.

attributes.[102] Second, the 'Leniency or strictness effect' occurred when an appraisal panel is "excessively lenient" and at other times "excessively strict" which benefitted or penalised the appraisees.[103] Third, the 'Central Tendency Effect' "is the reluctance of the appraisers to rate people at the extreme ends of the scale" because they did not know the appraised officer adequately.[104] Finally, 'Interpersonal Bias' occurred "where appraisers have great personal preference or dislike for the appraisee which will have tremendous effect on the appraisee's ratings."[105]

Perhaps there is no greater influence on CEP than an individual officer's level of education attained. Education started off as a proxy for potential in the first two to three years of an officer's career before realized performances and superior's assessments allegedly took precedence.[106] In 1981, Goh Chok Tong rationalized that:

> "A graduate is not synonymous with a good officer and a non-graduate an average officer. Given the social and economic conditions today, a university degree is a fair first indication of brain, but that is about all. There are other qualities required of a good officer besides a good academic record – character, commitment and leadership. Leadership is the most problematical. It is more inborn than nurtured."[107]

A year later First PS of Defence Lim Siong Guan reiterated:

> "… we don't see ourselves constrained by whether the officer is a graduate or not, because by the time you come to this (senior) level, either you have proved it in your performance or you have not. And it's potential you must be able to see, not from your degree but from performance and the kind of thinking you put into various issues and so forth."[108]

This was exactly how Project Wrangler was envisaged but realities proved otherwise. COL (RET) Menon observed:

> "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 a very large organization, 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."[109]

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[102] Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," p. 22.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., p. 23.
[105] Ibid., p. 22.
[106] Interview No. 25.
[107] "Let us find hearts and minds of SAF: Chok Tong," *The Straits Times*, 4 July 1982, p. 10.
[108] Leslie Fong and Ronnie Wai, "Top officers given exposure," *The Straits Times*, 17 September 1982, p. 1.
[109] Menon, *One of A Kind*, pp. 340-1.

Several interview participants proffered similar views and elucidated the undue influence that education exuded over an officer's career trajectory. One general from the earlier years noted:

> "Dr Goh was not just for brains but also fighters, as long as the latter could command. Over the years the focus has been on brains. The SAFOS was to entice the best brains with the benefits of tertiary education overseas and full pay. To accommodate the scholars OCS was shortened. It was eventually cut from 14 to 10 months. People soon saw the SAF scholarship as a stepping stone for something greater. Eventually certain elements crept in. COs might be hesitant to take action against scholars because of their 'halo' where they are predestined to rise to high positions. That being said, many who get there do deserve it."[110]

This view is reinforced by another who opined:

> "I feel that today it is largely academic qualifications that are used to base your CEP. There is a need to look at the overall picture. Are academic credentials the only criteria? When we first started off maybe it is OK."[111]

Even grades within degrees have at times proven significant:

> "Whether an officer is scheme B (pass or merit degree) or C (good honours degree) should not determine CEP but it has happened. CEP is very subjective and is usually capped at two grades up."[112]

The primacy of education was also stated in a 1993 study completed by a MINDEF civilian official at the US Naval Postgraduate School which concluded that higher education levels predicted higher CEP.[113] On the whole, an officer's education is not sufficient on its own to affect performance assessments but those with lower education levels were disadvantaged as it affected CEP and capped promotion prospects.[114]

It is such possibilities that appraisals are confirmed through consensus by different panels further up the hierarchy to remove "prejudice, bias, human error and allow more room for fair and honest analysis."[115] Several practices were strictly adhered to. First, at least two members of the panel must possess firsthand knowledge of the appraised officer to prevent assessments grounded on 'hearsay'. Second, the appraisal panel must be large enough to avoid positive and negative biases. Finally, panel members had an equal say as they worked toward consensus and the final decision rested with the chairman. While these practices might seem simplistic on paper, realities proffered a different story especially in the early 1980s during their nascent implementation. It boiled down to making sure the appraised officer's performance and

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[110] Interview No. 03.
[111] Interview No. 24.
[112] Interview No. 11.
[113] Tse, *Application of Logistic Regression and Survival*, p. 47.
[114] Nathan with Auger, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 195.
[115] "Promotion Exercise '83," *Navy News* (August 1983), p. 3; "Who gets promoted and how?" *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2; and Tan and Lim, "Potential Appraisal," p. 9.

not the specific vocation mattered most. An air force general recalled one particularly heated discussion:

> "Within [formation K] there was individual unit ranking and this is followed by a cross unit ranking for comparison. The Shell CEP system was implemented in 1984. It was not easy to assess CEP. It took time for people to accept it. At the ranking board you try to hear everybody's views. I believe that in every organization there exists a spread of talent which follows a bell-curve. Who is better relative to each other. So ranking is not a given conclusion. As [the formation commander] I approved rankings for LTC downward. Of course the unit COs always provided inputs. For Colonels it was collectively done by Head Air Manpower, CAF and [the formation commander]. Then in a ranking forum, we need to do cross-ranking. Once I represented [formation K] when I was a major and the rest were LTC and colonel. I was quite vocal. My officers (from a specific vocation) had to be ranked higher. The chairman thought I was overly vocal. He did not agree and asked me to leave the room. But this is a fair process so he eventually asked me to come back. <laughs>"[116]

Another admiral experienced similar teething-problems where competing superiors vied for their subordinates to be recognized:

> "Post-1982 it (the appraisal system) was a big improvement. In the early days of implementation it would take a long time. We would start at eight in the morning and chief said we're not leaving until the list is done. We often went past 2359 (midnight). This revision was painful initially because we spent hours arguing especially when two commanders would 'fight for' (i.e. rank) one candidate. How could we merge different vocations? The system forces judgement in that all officers of a particular rank were on one single ranking list but forcing different vocations into a list is quite artificial. Therefore there are separate lists for different vocations. This matches reality and the ranking order made better sense. After the ranking list is completed the Ranking Authority decides on the quota of promotions. The initial implementation was quite painful but it was a learning process."[117]

Even as the practice entered its third decade another air force general saw that it was unavoidable to find:

> "… conflicting opinions during ranking. You must say 'why' you have a particular view of an individual but eventually there must be a degree of consensus. If you're too predictable it might not be a good thing. As one chairing a ranking exercise you learn to accommodate the various views but at the end you must have consensus. This expectation is high and sometimes you give benefit of doubt to an individual. At other times you assess the individual for another year. At the ranking board the more support there is for you (the appraisee) the better. But what does the ranking board chairman, or the service chief see? You (the appraisee) must be visible. For the commander he must also know a spectrum of people. By nature I mix around people of different

[116] Interview No. 14.
[117] Interview No. 17.

> vocations, different hierarchies. The more you (the appraiser) mix around the better for them (the appraisees)."[118]

In time officers were not only ranked within the unit or formation in which they were assessed. Officers also had their performance ranked with others of the same rank and vocation under the purview of a Senior Specialist Staff Officer (SSSO) who ensured the said vocation is not unfairly penalised or favoured. This is applicable across the three services. For example in the navy:

> "The first level of ranking is at the ship and then merged at the squadron level. Here the squadron commander and COs will decide. Then it moves on to the flotilla and fleet. It is all subjective but new postings will check for consistency. Different vocations will also be ranked separately up until LTC where it is merged across formations."[119]

Such practices were especially important for vocations such as doctors and engineers who were sometimes treated more as professionals in the military rather than specialized military professions. Interview participants who served as SSSO for such vocations indicated vocation-specific disadvantages had been rooted out and ranking boards were not annual perfunctory exercises. An engineering officer explained:

> "I always come away with condition that the boards and board chairman must agree on the ranking. I never felt engineers were disadvantaged because the organization recognizes context-based contributions. I was never swayed by backgrounds and allegiances. This is a non-issue because the strength of the SAF system is that it is able to see beyond identity cliques. For the SAF to be successful there must be something for everybody in any vocation to contribute. The question is always whether we are putting good people into places with the budget and opportunities. If we cannot find good candidates, then you must look at the talent distribution. If you still continue to fail in finding good people then it is a failure of people management."[120]

One CMC acknowledged that:

> "Only recently MOs are classified as combat officers. In my time we were called service officers. There was an issue with ranking all the time. The fighting generals get ranking but do they have the ops experience? In terms of ranking the MOs are not at the top but also not at the bottom. Commanders make a fair assessment because once doctors can understand the operational imperative they can contribute. You might never be COA but you are also not disadvantaged."[121]

Another CMC reiterated that:

> "In medical corps there is less protégé grooming because it is more homogeneous. All MOs have a common educational background. Promotions

[118] Interview No. 16.
[119] Interview No. 15.
[120] Interview No. 22.
[121] Interview No. 20.

> are based purely on performance as well as whether an individual has the intention to stay. For those more inclined towards medical work rather than military operations, it will show up. MOs have been graded at the top of formations outside the medical corps, better than officers in their own parent formation. So there is no disadvantage for MOs."[122]

One general confidently concluded that today:

> "In the ranking board no vocations lose out. As a commander the more people you know the better so that you can contribute by making recommendations. There are many points for contact and observations such as exercises and meetings."[123]

To minimise a fluke assessment, or one which blind-sided collective panels 'higher-up', officers who are promoted also required *consistent* annual performance grades (usually two consecutive grades at 'B' or higher), a CEP higher than the current rank held, and at times even holding an appointment commensurate with the next rank. Furthermore, as a former service chief exclaimed:

> "Peer and subordinate perceptions are really important. Can he carry the ground when making decisions? Are people willing to go to war with them? Some manage up by 'carrying balls' but appointments are usually a choice between two or three candidates and not just one. There are also important questions to be answered. Are people willing to work for them? In times of conflict can they make difficult decisions objectively? Do they possess the strong 'X-factor' to be strong operationally?"[124]

Despite a relatively robust assessment system, there are officers who have attempted to game performance and potentials evaluations with the sole focus on climbing the rank hierarchy. This is not a new development but a perennial challenge for the SAF as a retired service chief lamented:

> "Careerism or career creep is the result of competing social forces at work. That is why values inculcation is very important. It gives you a value compass to navigate without which you have individuals arguing over performance bonus, asking why they don't receive medals etc."[125]

At times this has turned adversarial as MAJ then-CPT Choy Yong Cong (SAFOS 2004) observed:

> "Currently, the SAF's performance evaluation process is strongly top-down with superiors ranking their subordinates annually based on their perceived performance. This process prompts the subordinates' behaviour to align themselves strongly with their superiors, sometimes at the cost of their adjacent units and their own people. Also, the expectations the superior has can be prescriptive – to get what he wants done – with no regard for feedback from the

[122] Interview No. 23.
[123] Interview No. 16.
[124] Interview No. 15.
[125] Interview No. 25.

> ground. The incentive model is inconsistent with the desired behaviours in an adaptive organization."[126]

To address such issues the annual ranking exercise has expanded somewhat for regular officers. In 2006 the SAF initiated '360-degree' Multisource Leadership Feedback (from the superiors, peers, and subordinates of senior officers (MAJ and above).[127] In 2011 this was extended to officers after company command and served to highlight their positive and negative behavioural traits.[128] However, it might still be early days yet to the gauge actual benefits, outcomes, and efficacy of initiatives.

6.4 Promotions and Postings

At the completion of the appraisal and ranking boards officers deemed deserving of promotions in rank and/or grade are shortlisted and approved through a three-tier structure. The first is the PRB which ranked officers from subordinate units and determined if an individual is 'strongly recommended', 'recommended', or 'not recommended' for promotion. The Promotion Council (PC), which formed the second tier, is a checking mechanism which investigated the veracity of PRB recommendations where required (e.g. by conducting random interviews). The PC-approved list is then submitted to the final tier, the Promotion Authority (PA), who signed-off on the final ranking of officers.[129]

The PA varied according to the rank of promotion. In 1981 they were the First Permanent Secretary (Defence) for promotions to CPT; Minister of State (Defence) to MAJ; and Minister for Defence for LTC and above.[130] As the officer corps grew and the ranks corresponding to certain appointments increased (e.g. a unit CO from MAJ to LTC, a brigade commander from LTC to COL) such roles were devolved to lower echelons. For example, in 1994 the PA were the respective service chiefs or MINDEF deputy secretary for promotions to CPT; CDF or Permanent Secretary (Defence Development) to MAJ; Permanent Secretary (Defence) to LTC, and; Minister for Defence for COL and above.[131] These tiered approvals are not mere exercises where necessary signatures are simply added and forwarded annually. The seriousness is

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[126] Choy Yong Kong, "Forcing Strategic Evolution: The SAF as an Adaptive Organization," *Pointer*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2012), p. 38.
[127] Kim-Yin Chan, Ping-Tzeun Chua, Kok-Yee Ng, Jeffrey C. Kennedy, Soon Ang, Christine Koh, Regena Ramaya, and Sukhmohinder Singh, "Development of a Multisource Leadership Feedback Instrument for the SAF," presentation at the *49th International Military Testing Association Conference* (Gold Coast, QLD, Australia: 8-12 October 2007). See also Peter Ward, *360-Degree Feedback* (London, UK: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2003).
[128] Tan Wee Meng, "Ready, Relevant and Decisive," *Army News*, Issue No. 187 (April 2011), p. 7.
[129] "Finer points and aim of scheme explained," *The Straits Times*, 5 April 1982, p. 11.
[130] *Manpower Policies affecting the SAF Officer*, pp. 7-8.
[131] "Who gets promoted and how?" *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1994, p. 2.

relayed by the fact that some officers recommended for promotion have been rejected since the days of Dr Goh. A member of the elite nucleus cited that:

> "The reason why an officer blocked (from promotion) is based on feedback and inconsistency. This eliminates those who are 'gaming' the system. You look at performance consistency. For example if all along an individual gets 'C' and then suddenly 'B' it could be a ploy to push for promotion. You need to be consistent if not wait for another year's assessment."[132]

Another officer similarly admitted that:

> "Yes, I have had recommendations for appointments and promotions blocked. The impression that the senior civilians and senior officers have of an individual can be a real barrier, an obstruction to promoting the individual. I had to explain it to the minister who understood why [officer L] should be promoted. You can say this is fighting for your people."[133]

Yet one must be careful to view such incidences as exceptions rather than the norm. Decisions to correct perceived 'mistakes' must be explained and documented. The system in place is otherwise allowed to run its course. Moreover, the small community of regulars meant that capable officers are known to superiors, peers, and subordinates. A reputation forged on consistent past performances served as a prelude for future promotions and postings. A former ACGS explained that:

> "There is a talent base so there are no sudden appearances. You know who is and who is not making it. When a name is mentioned consistently it floats up and gets noticed. It is never a single point of decision. There is also the question 'is a guy due yet' (for promotion or postings)?"[134]

Another former SSSO concurred in a similar manner that:

> "In any organization you deal with people you need to motivate and reward the right people. There must be a right fit through succession planning by placing a square peg in a square hole. Who to go for courses overseas? Posting, planning. The current system is good but subjective in the sense of how you apply and manage it. The top 10% of officers are visible to the superiors and their counterparts (of the superior)."[135]

At present, promotions to colonel and above are recommended by the elite nucleus, seconded by senior defence bureaucrats, and approved at the political echelon. This is not only a reflection of the administrative structure. A former service chief reasoned: "At that level you must be seen to carry the rank. Military ability and intelligence are all necessary. Character is also scrutinized because they don't want an ex-general or admiral getting into problems."[136] This is hardly surprising since

[132] Interview No. 25.
[133] Interview No. 24.
[134] Interview No. 22.
[135] Interview No. 09.
[136] Interview No. 15.

Singapore as a whole does not take too kindly nor tolerate any opprobrium from its public officials much less those at the apex of the military apparatus.

Promotions were inextricably linked to postings and vice versa. One feature of the SAF career, like many other first-class militaries, is the constant rotation of appointments among command, staff, and instruction. Postings are also subjected to collective panel decisions to minimise subjectivity and safeguard against unsavoury practices. An army general explained:

> "OPC is under MINDEF, AOMC by the Army. There is power to recommend (officers to appointments) but OPC will sit down with the COA. The Committee System is chaired by the Perm[anent] Sec[retary]. There are checks and balances to ensure the 'old boys' network' does not pre-dominate. Collective inputs are given to make a collective decision. The recommendation is not based on a cliquish decision."[137]

Another general revealed:

> "I heard of the existence of factionalism but I never encountered it in any personal capacity. I would say it is a minor part of the SAF. Favouritism is natural. It is not a conscious thing but it is a fact. Therefore there must be a collective assessment. You can never run away from it. Higher ups have a different view of people."[138]

A third officer explicated likewise and highlighted the fact that cronyism died out rather quickly from non-performance:

> "Postings and promotions are a collective decision. Therefore it is difficult to have cronies. At the same time the system is as objective as it can be. Commanders can have their 'blue-eyed boy' whom they groom and prepare well so that they will be given a particular posting. But he still needs to prove himself. The importance of ranking and posting is that there must be communication and consistency in its implementation. If this is not the case people will get disillusioned. The system must be followed and any deviation explained. Postings are not always neat."[139]

In practice, nominees for an appointment are shortlisted through meeting pre-requisites in terms of experience, past performances, and completion of necessary preparatory course(s) where applicable. In the early days this was not necessarily the case due to the shortage of qualified officers. Such were the responses when some older members of the military elite were asked how they received key and visible postings. "Frankly speaking, there were only two of us of that vintage," admitted one officer. "There was no one else to compare with. So you see I ended up serving at every level of

[137] Interview No. 10.
[138] Interview No. 12.
[139] Interview No. 11.

leadership. There was no one else around. The rest were junior."[140] Similarly, another air force general humbly acknowledged:

> "There was nobody else in [the service] HQ so I got recommended by the [foreign military advisers]. Although I would rather be in the squadron the timing was right (to move). Lots of the expat officers were going home so we needed locals to be there to take over."[141]

Such reasons became increasingly anachronistic as the SAF grew and panel consensus became the norm. Command appointments were particularly subjected to the most intense scrutiny. One army general cited the appointment of battalion and brigade commanders as an example:

> "The SAF system shortlists and identifies potential candidates based on criteria such as experience of relevant tours and grades on courses and assessments. When you meet the criteria for battalion CO, OPC and AOMC will line up the list. COA will deliberate with the division commanders and ACGS Pers[onnel]. For brigade commanders AOMC is not involved. For the selection of division commanders, COA, CDF, and MINDEF are involved. The strength of the SAF is also one that there are more potential candidates than available appointments so not all will get it. Those who do are selected based on the system and a collective decision and not based on any one individual. This is also the same for the annual appraisal and ranking board. It is always a collective decision."[142]

Another general explained much the same but also highlighted the use of command interviews in the appointment process and the fact that commanders are often restricted in choice of subordinates:

> "An appointment is based on whether an officer is course qualified, and prior experiences and performances. There are also command interviews. At one stage the PS, CDF, and Director JOPD (DJOPD) sat on the interview panel. There are proper processes and authorities in place. Formation always gets to suggest but higher authority determines the final outcome."[143]

As with promotions, it is also never a simple case of signing-off on posting orders. Recommendations have been turned back. Take this officer's example:

> "When I have somebody who works for me, I want to know this person well. How he thinks, his motivation. If I am comfortable, carry on. For not so important appointments I am flexible. But I have rejected one or two individuals who were pushed up for CO that I did not agree with. They were, how can you say, 'not quite there'. They had to show they could do it. Yes, you need to empower your people but in a critical job, you are responsible. If you don't accept, I will explain to you. I have a system to listen (to grievances) but not keep on listening and not move on."[144]

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[140] Interview No. 20.
[141] Interview No. 24.
[142] Interview No. 06.
[143] Interview No. 11.
[144] Interview No. 27.

The importance of placing only the most able officers in command billets was also emphasized by an admiral as such:

> "In the navy going out (to sea) it is always on ops, exercises, and there are plenty of opportunities for evaluation by the squadron commander, and higher up by the task group, flotilla, and fleet commanders. The foreign exercise commanders are also able to ascertain the quality of our leaders and if we're short we won't get invited to, let alone command, large-scale multilateral exercises."[145]

Although processes are in place for promotions and postings various facets of the system have remained subjective. Not all officers shortlisted for the more prestigious (usually command) appointments have an equal probability of selection. This is especially pressing for all-important CO appointments of active warfighting units which have often served to separate the best from the rest. Officers from three categories seemed most favoured. First, the scholar-officers as it was "noted that SAF scholars – by virtue of being 'better officers' – are given the 'pick of the better positions available' among the many 'interesting and challenging' SAF jobs."[146] Those who performed ascended on an accelerated pace and the fastest among them received double-promotions.[147] This perceived advantage unsurprisingly made non-scholars "unhappy with the number of rapid shifts and promotions."[148] Such sentiments were misplaced at times because a second category, the Wranglers, was also favoured when it came to postings. With a CEP of COL and above it was the SAF's best interest to test and retain those who had what it took to lead the SAF of tomorrow. Finally, non-scholar and non-Wrangler officers could even the 'odds' by being visible to those sitting on posting panels. This can come through consistent performances which are recognised and the willingness of a superior to 'fight' for a subordinate's career progression and recognition.

6.5 Intangibles

In the larger scheme of things, is an officer's ascension merely a product of the processes involved in performance and potential appraisals which in turn decided promotions and postings? This is certainly not the case as there were several specific categories which could be considered 'Intangibles'. This is not a matter of 'luck' for luck connoted that behaviour and outcome are mutually exclusive.

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[145] Interview No. 15.
[146] Loh Chee Kong, "3 released in 9 years," *TODAY*, 14 April 2009, p. 6.
[147] "Chief of Navy promoted to Rear Admiral (Two-Star)," *Pioneer* (August 1995), p. 24; "Three generals promoted," *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1999, p. 1; and "Factsheet – Senior Officers Promoted in Rank and Grade," *MINDEF Website*, 29 June 2000, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2000/jun/29jun00_nr/29jun00_fs.html.
[148] Smith and Bowring, "The Citizen Soldier," p. 27.

6.5.1 The Scholarship

Scholarships formed an intrinsic component of the SAF's recruitment effort. The SAFOS in particular has been instrumental in grooming recipients for service at the apex of the military establishment. LTC (RET) Dominic Ng (SAFOS 1972) underlined: "The fact that you're a scholar makes you visible, always. And it is a big advantage because it gets you more projects and better appointments."[149] Two other officers highlighted the opportunities afforded by the scholarship and its role indispensible in their eventual appointment as CDF. "I don't imagine that I would get to do such jobs if I was not an SAF Scholar," reflected LG (RET) Bey Soo Khiang (SAFOS 1974).[150] LG (RET) Lim Chuan Poh (SAFOS 1980), then speaking as COA, similarly revealed: "One of the high points in his career was receiving the SAF Overseas Scholarship, without which, he said, his present career might not have been possible. He said an SAF overseas scholar will fly high in his career as long as the scholar can sustain it."[151]

A SAFOS provided three-and-a-half advantages to the holders. The three most obvious are a good tertiary education, a high starting salary, and unique opportunities not afforded to other officers in terms of challenging postings, a specially managed career, and visibility to the most senior echelon, both civilian and military. In the words and experiences of one RSAF general:

> "SAFOS has its attached advantages. You get noticed and are provided with many opportunities to prove yourself. You become very visible but you are also under constant scrutiny. We often had lunch meetings with the Perm Sec or Minister with others from cohorts within comparable seniority. But it is a double-edged sword. It becomes apparent to everyone if you do not have what it takes. So the impression of the importance of SAFOS is sometimes created and inflated. For the non-SAFOS there is less visibility but they will also climb so long as they make the most of opportunities. At the higher levels the scholarship one obtained becomes immaterial. The question is: 'can you do the job?'"[152]

BG (RET) then-COL Tay Lim Heng (SAFOS 1982) echoed that: "The route of advancement planned for SAF scholars will of course put you in challenging positions at a young age. But if you don't perform, you just won't move up."[153] LG (RET) then-COL Desmond Kuek (SAFOS 1982) reiterated that the scholarship opened the first door but "beyond this, what happens and how far you go very much depends on you."[154]

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[149] "Going Places," *Special Life! Soldier, Scholar and Leader (The Straits Times)*, 18 March 1991, p. 4.
[150] Susan Tsang, "Finding a few good men," *The Straits Times*, 15 February 1998, p. 4
[151] "SAF faces competition for talent," *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1999, p. 22.
[152] Interview No. 02.
[153] "No easy climb," *The Straits Times*, 15 February 1998, p. 4.
[154] "It's about serving the country, guarding our future," *The Straits Times*, 7 February 1999, p. 4.

A common expectation is that scholar-officers must perform to high expectations but those who 'underperformed' were not simply discarded and left derelict. Not when "disproportionate resources and investments" have been ploughed into SAFOS and SMS recipients.[155] The remaining 'half' advantage is the 'second bite' of the ascension cherry afforded to scholar-officers. "Scholars are given more opportunities and the benefit of doubt," remarked one general who once handled manpower matters. "The system is now in place to test them to see if they do well or fail. Unless there is a better system we will stick with Shell."[156] Another related that:

> "In shades of grey, scholars get a second chance and are given the benefit of doubt. The issue is whether a scholar gets command of a premier unit when a 'better' commander exists, especially if the 'better' commander may not have the CEP and so the scholar gets the appointment."[157]

These 'second chances' afforded some scholar-officers prized command billets when their prior performances flagged otherwise. Such seemingly unmerited and systematic 'favours' lie at the root of consternation and friction between officers of different educational backgrounds. This was especially noteworthy when the scholarships were first implemented. One general quipped:

> "Some scholars were pushed ahead of their time. The system pushed them because they were scholars. There were those who were good in theory but practically fucked. Some also got cocky. [Officer J] (a scholar) was playful, lazy, and not interested in the military but very smart. He spent 'half his life' on the phone watching the stock market. In one two-sided brigade exercise [officer K] (a non-graduate) won big time over [officer J]. I had to stop the exercise before it became a massacre."[158]

Another cloaked the same concerns using slightly different adjectives:

> "Some of the scholars are real 'scholarly' type – nerdy – and good planners. But when you don't have people there is a danger of pushing the wrong type of people to be implementers. You cannot have a 'staffer' (short for 'staff officer') who does not come from the ground. You need the empathy, the understanding of the people, the ability to read the ground swell. Policy can be theoretically sound but absolutely impractical."[159]

A third officer highlighted some specific problems encountered by scholar-officers on an accelerated ascension pathway:

> "I am not sure if this is a systematic or selection problem. Scholars are smart but is it merely academic smart? The question is whether they are also leaders and commanders. Some are uncomfortable in command and in planning they are less than able. If tours are short, there is inadequate exposure. You will not

[155] Glen Choo, "Attracting the Best and Brightest," *Army News*, Issue No. 192 (September 2011), p. 8.
[156] Interview No. 11.
[157] Interview No. 15.
[158] Interview No. 26.
[159] Interview No. 25.

> be able to earn respect of the men and carry command. Command is not about being a decision maker; that is a manager. A commander has to be seen. You need to have presence. You need to do it (lead by example). Listen. Make constructive suggestions."[160]

In light of such problems, one must not conclude that the SAF had fallen into the trap foreseen by William Francis Butler whose quote commenced this chapter. Three sets of empirical figures highlighted why this is so. First, despite all SAFOS officers being Wranglers and so expected to make 'COL and above' they comprised 39.4% (54 of 137) of the military elite. This figure rose slightly to 42.9% (54 of 126) if statistics were adjusted to account for 11 officers – five from the early SAF and six MOs – whose careers or vocations were not comparable with SAFOS officers. A further examination (Table 6.1) revealed that SAFOS recipients accounted for the majority of two- and three-star officers. However, almost two-thirds of the one-star officers were non-SAFOS. This indicated an officer did not need to be a SAFOS recipient to enter the military elite but the elite nucleus was dominated by presumably the best SAFOS officers.

This led to the second set of figures based on 122 SAFOS recipients between 1971 and 1986, all of whom are no longer on active duty (Annex J). The pool was adjusted to exclude five officers – three transferred to the police force and two perished on active service – which indicated almost half (58) remained on active service until retirement. Of the 58 who stayed-on, 41 (70.69%) became military elites and 17 made COL in line with their status as Wranglers. The 41 flag-officers represented a third (33.61%) of the 122 SAFOS invested by state. Although these figures are by no means indicative of later cohorts (1987-2013) they sketched the rough retention and success rates of the SAFOS scheme.[161] The third set of figures covered the distribution of SAFOS flag-officers by service and vocation (Annex K). Although they accounted for two-fifths of most vocations, they were skewed in several others. They had low representations in vocations where absolute standards were critical (e.g. fighter pilot, commando) or those where ascension pathways into the military elite were limited (e.g. signals, logistics, engineering). On the other hand, they dominated the more cerebral-intense vocations (e.g. naval combat, C3).

The three sets of empirical data in combination elucidated the advantages and limitations of the SAFOS within officer ascension. Those who stayed-on until retirement had a high probability of, but were by no means guaranteed, entry into the military elite.

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[160] Interview No. 05.
[161] There were 171 SAFOS awarded between 1987 and 2013.

While tertiary education is not sufficient on its own merits for ascension it is an indispensible feature of the Aristocracy of Armed Talent where close to 95% (129 of 137) held university degrees.

Table 6.1: Proportion of SAFOS officers within the military elite.

Rank Tier	Raw			Adjusted		
	Total	SAFOS	SAFOS as % of Total	Total	SAFOS	SAFOS as % of Total
Officers authorised to wear one star and above	137	54	39.4%	126	54	42.9%
Officers with the highest authorised rank of one star	112	39	34.8%	102	39	38.2%
Officers authorised to wear two stars and above	25	15	60.0%	24	15	62.5%
Officers with the highest authorised rank of two stars	17	10	58.8%	17	10	58.8%
Officers authorised to wear three stars	8	5	62.5%	7	5	71.4%

6.5.2 Natural talent

If one was not a scholar-officer with a specially managed career path the odds could be evened by sheer abilities associated with the profession-of-arms as several interview participants attested. For one fighter pilot: "I was fortunate that I could fly. I reached CAT-A (operations category A) status and accumulated more than [Y] thousand hours flying [various aircraft] during my career."[162] An armour officer reasoned: "I had good hands-on skill. I could drive, shoot and I like the outdoors and much of it came rather naturally to me."[163] Finally, an infantry officer confidently said:

> "I never thought I was inferior to anybody. I thought I was the best in tactics. I was also blessed with a keen sense of navigation and terrain. I could find my way around while on overseas exercises and at night with no difficulties."[164]

Beyond mastering technical skills one also had to be mentally strong and confident in one's abilities to compete with the scholars while avoiding the pitfalls of factions:

> "I never consider myself a 'farmer' (slang for a 'non-scholar' officer). I disliked the word. You are what you are. If you label yourself you will be affected. This

[162] Interview No. 08.
[163] Interview No. 26.
[164] Interview No. 13.

> classification is quite clear but unhelpful. Does this mean a scholar will be promoted if he does not rock the boat? And are a farmer's contribution any less? I never bother about promotion or increment upgrades. Don't try to control something you cannot. What can you control? Only your own behaviour and performance competency. Focus first on these and just let the system recognize it. Don't 'carry balls' and be non-aligned."[165]

The ability to focus on what was important while discarding distractions proved critical. Frequently this meant mastering the tradecraft of a vocation and the development of soft skills:

> "Three things were very important in my 20s and 30s. First, I had to be a domain expert in [my vocation] and to be the best and be on top of the trade. Second, the ability to make good decisions based on the summation of education, experience, and the ability to apply myself to a problem and get the best solution. Third, are people skills, the ability to motivate, coerce, and persuade … Fortune favours the brave and those who are prepared."[166]

Finally, it is critical to "[n]ever antagonize your boss and make him lose face," smiled this general as he delved into the past. He continued:

> "You can win the battle but lose the war. [A superior] used to make a decision in public and declare it to everyone but I had to bring him to the back room and explain why it cannot be done. To save face I told him that at the next meeting I would bring up a point. He would then scold me and ask why I never brought it up before and this will be the reason for him to reverse the decision. < grin> I was also COS (Chief of Staff) for [a general-rank scholar-officer] on exercise and did planning for him. Outside in public I gave him respect but one-on-one I gave it to him."[167]

In addition to excellent technical skills and mental toughness one required a measure of common sense in public and an uncommon measure of conviction in private.

6.5.3 Managing your career

While natural talent and abilities helped it was also essential to take proactive measures to be visible, to seize opportunities when billets become available, and ensure the appropriate boxes for ascension were ticked-off. One general reasoned simply that each officer was responsible for his own career:

> "After [a tour at a manpower department] I realized that you needed to do your own career development. You need to be proactive and not simply rely on someone else to do it for you. You must know your strengths and interests. You may not always get what you want but you must take proactive actions. Do your

[165] Interview No. 09.
[166] Interview No. 28.
[167] Interview No. 26.

> part. If what you desire does not happen you know at very least that you did your part. People are always busy therefore there is no harm asking."[168]

Asking will never guarantee a favourable outcome and one must be prepared to soldier-on in any eventualities. "I don't ask for postings frequently," replied one general as he recalled requests for posting. "On the two occasions that I did, I did not get my wishes. <laughs>"[169]

For others who were more successful in this endeavour it varied in practical terms according to individual circumstances but the commonality was being proactive in seeking billets which provided exposure to new challenges and skill sets. At times it helped that one had a supportive superior who was genuinely concerned enough to offer cogent advice:

> "During my term as CO I had a discussion with my brigade commander [colonel S] after which I opted for a posting in MINDEF. While it would be challenging as it was my first pure MINDEF staff job I knew that I had to be exposed to the wider organization and not be 'safe' within the confines of [my parent formation]. [Officer T] (who later made general) was my boss. I was appointed a branch head and got into [the specifics of the appointment]. It was great."[170]

Furthermore, while scholar-officers could expect to be 'groomed' by the military establishment for higher appointments, those without such advantages had to seize what opportunities they could. At times it was career wagering risk as one pilot reflected:

> "When I was in [an air base] in [year X] I engineered my way to a staff tour. I felt that I already achieved a CAT-B and so I should move on instead of staying put and I did not want to be stuck not really doing anything productive. It was [LG (RET)] Bey Soo Khiang who initiated the requirement of staff tours between CATs to develop a more holistic air force officer. So, I had finished achieving what was required of me and I wanted to move on. For me I needed to build something from scratch. Once I have completed a task, that's it. I get restless. I did not want to waste time. I needed new challenges. The posting orders came out and the CO was on leave. You could say I was driven by conviction and abilities. I was not afraid of getting marked and I did not toe the line. If I get a 'D' grade then so be it. In the senior ranks I recalled saying 'sack sack lah' (colloquial phrase meaning 'if I got the sack then so be it'). I don't get weighed down by what others think. Think for yourself. I have [the] courage and conviction to act. You just have to be prepared for the consequences. The worst thing that could happen is you get sacked. This is not to say you can be casual or frivolous. Think and then act. If you consider what other people think you'll get encumbered and cannot act. Focus on the big picture. An attitude like that removes shackles. It allows you to be free to act on convictions and not act based on what others think, or the ranking you might get. So it went from 'I

[168] Interview No. 11.
[169] Interview No. 23.
[170] Interview No. 06.

> want to go' to 'I am going' <laughs>. If you want opportunities you must ask for them."[171]

6.5.4 The 'godfather'

Finally, there is the influential proverbial 'godfather' (at times in the plural) who has stepped-in to correct the temporarily wayward ascension trajectories of future military elites. This is not necessarily an indicator of cronyism for the officers they aided already had the talent in terms of performance and potential. It could, however, indicate patronage if such a relationship and understanding – loyalty in exchange for favouritism – existed. However, as it was covered in previous sections, an officer required the collective agreement of three tiers worth of superiors to ascend to the apex of the rank structure.

Such checks and balances minimized patronage and for the interview participants these 'godfathers' remained unknown and at times hinted at 'luck'. From a general who preferred the mud in the field to the confines of an office:

> "I was fortunate to get promoted because I worked well on projects. I was able to show that things could be done. It is not rocket science. It is a matter of whether you want to do it or not. If you only adhere to all the rules and regulations you get caught in a box. Some did not want me to get promoted. In one year my ranking was last among all the Colonels. <grins> I was blessed with good luck. I could have been sacked a few times. Looking back I came to a realization and attribute my motivation to my dad and wife … It was my dad and wife who put me straight in life. I promised my dad that I would make something out of life. When I was promoted to [one-star] I went missing for three days. I went to my dad's grave and put flowers on it. He would have been proud. <tears>"[172]

To the general who remained intransigent by conviction and chose the harder 'right' by standing his ground over the easier 'wrong' as a 'yes man':

> "I did not think what rank I would achieve. In those days there was a sense of purpose, a sense of urgency because Singapore was just independent. The first few batches at SAFTI really contributed a lot to the SAF in terms of the systems but they were also prepared to put their life on the line. Fortunately it was never called for. I was outspoken and had strong views and rationalized how things should be done. This led to arguments with bosses who did not like me but I didn't give a damn. I am not sure how my career did not get 'killed' along the way. <grins> It must have been the foreign consultants who gave me good reports. <laughs>"[173]

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[171] Interview No. 16.
[172] Interview No. 26.
[173] Interview No. 13.

Finally, a general who 'placed the mission first and his soldiers always' admitted:

> "When I first signed-on I did not know if I would make MAJ or LTC. I never dreamt of reaching COL or BG. Today, you need to have the CEP and education plays a big part. I was fortunate as they looked at me in a different light. I was an ops guy, a ground guy who made things happen. To rise in the ranks you must have the opportunity and do a good job at it. It is when people will give you more important jobs to do. At any opportunity you must also teach and groom the next generation. Nurturing. That's why I am close to a lot of people."[174]

Who are these 'godfathers'? Processes in place pointed to individuals along the hierarchy who had a hand in promotions and postings. They included immediate superiors, representatives on panels seeking consensus, and even foreign consultants in the early SAF. Then again, while all the military elites were not scholar-officers they were certainly Wrangler officers and visible to those senior military officers and civilian officials in the upper echelon. While the exact identities of these 'godfathers' have remained a mystery their actions certainly benefitted a segment of those would one day wear one or more stars.

6.6 Summary

This chapter commenced with four vantage points from which officer ascension could be viewed: cronyism and patronage, merit (performance, seniority), visibility, and luck. Each has certainly played its part in shaping officer ascension in the SAF. The ascension process commenced with merit cloaked in terms of personalized performance appraisals and seniority. A multi-collective effort was implemented in 1982 based on the Shell system where consensus was required on the twin merit yardsticks of performance subjected to a standardized bell-curve, and estimated potential usually capped at two ranks up for junior officers. This practice in turn determined an officer's promotion and posting possibilities. It is still subjective without absolute standards and not fool-proof but an improvement on prior practices and is the best available at this point in time.

The need for collective agreements highlighted the challenges of cronyism and patronage. The former is extremely rare because non-performance, while possible at the lower ranks, is easily flagged with concomitant and detrimental impact on performance, promotions, and postings. The latter is possible subjected to the patron's 'blue-eyed boy' having both performance and potential, and then consensus from the patron's peers and superiors on promotions and postings. The challenges faced by the

[174] Interview No. 05.

military elite laid in breaking such cliques while fully utilizing and developing an officer's potential. This is not a matter of personal vendetta but recognition that factionalism threatened the ascension process and indeed the quality and integrity of the officer corps. If left unchecked, a patron could eventually have undue influence – perhaps even control – over panels charged with collective oversight over the 4Ps. Decisions could then be passed with minimal resistance. This would of course represent a complete failure of leadership, a gross travesty of moral courage, and a grave violation of integrity at the individual level.

The issue of visibility did not commence at the senior ranks but with entry into Project Wrangler. This scheme comprised scholar-officers who by the nature of their status are considered 'better than the rest' until proven otherwise and beyond the benefit of doubt. Non-scholar-officers had to prove themselves to a standard which warranted their inclusion as Wranglers. Visibility, however, is a double-edged sword. While it propelled those who performed forward the spotlight invariably proved too glaring for others. Some non-scholars considered themselves 'lucky' to enter the Aristocracy of Armed Talent but their skills and abilities relevant to the profession-of-arms foreshadowed any other shortcomings. More often than not it was decided by a consensus of seniors and perhaps it is only some scholar-officers who were less than able and still became military elites who are truly the 'lucky' ones.

CHAPTER 7
THE ASCENSION STRUCTURE

"The shaping of a general, like the making of a soldier, is a complex process involving both heredity and environment. It is a process that defies definition or consistent pattern. Like the miracle of man, it can be examined but never analyzed."[1]

— Hanson W. Baldwin

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the processes encapsulated in the 4Ps – performance, potential, promotions, and postings – which enabled an individual to ascend the SAF's rank hierarchy. A holistic approach to ascension, however, must also cover the force structure (military parlance for 'organizational structure') unique to any military organization under examination. This chapter also focuses on 'cookie-cutter' ascension pathways, if any, which enabled entry into Singapore's military elite. Such an examination is pertinent because it situates the ascension process within the structure that determines the distribution of the officer corps. There are no theories for such specifics which is unsurprising. There is, after all, no common definition for 'military elites' nor norms as to which appointments are held by flag-officers. Although modern defence establishments share structural similarities their respective force structures are also unique. Within this context the first of five sections covers SAF officer development in broad terms from commissioning to attendance at CSC. This is followed by ascension pathways through the three services and at the MINDEF-SAF echelon.

7.2 Pre-Commissioning to Command and Staff College

The first step for ascension into the upper echelons of the SAF is clearing necessary milestones. SAF officers spend their junior and formative years – from pre-commissioning until attendance at CSC – learning and sharpening their trade craft, and honing the acumen essential in the profession-of-arms. This period consisted of rotation between tours at a unit and staff and/or instructional billets interspersed with a multitude of courses. Such has been the norm for military officers for, as Dr Goh explained:

[1] Quoted in Aubrey S. Newman, *What are Generals made of?* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1987), p. 4.

> "… this is the means whereby they achieve professional competence. I refer to the practice of successful military courses at various levels and covering tactical, staff, and technical and operational subjects. The military profession resorts to courses to a far greater degree than any other profession I know of."[2]

The training, education, and experiences culminated in CSC and prepared an officer for the first true test of command as the CO of a unit, namely the army battalion, navy ship, or air force squadron. CSC is not mandatory for MOs and engineering officers. The overall practice is similar to most first-class militaries around the world.

The road to an officer's commission included enlistment, basic training as a recruit (REC), and completion of a pre-commissioning course as an officer cadet trainee (OCT) in the army and air force, or as a midshipman (MID) in the navy.[3] In the late 60s and early 70s, a potential army OCT would have first completed the section leader course and served as a section commander in a battalion before nomination for an Officer Cadet Course (OCC). Over the years SAF officers have attended OCCs locally and for some at the finest institutions of military leadership overseas.[4] The majority of scholar-officers received the SAFOS, and later OTA (Academic) and SMS, as OCTs and MIDs and were commissioned at the respective scholarship presentation ceremonies prior to the completion of their OCCs. To ensure scholar-officers were commissioned only after completing the OCC with peers the Standard Military Course (SMC) was introduced.[5] The SMC syllabus reduced the OCC duration from 13 months (or more for those in support arms) to 38 weeks.[6] This allowed scholar-officers to commence their undergraduate studies in line with the British and later the American academic calendars. It however became apparent that the nine-month SMC was "short by any standards" and provided inadequate preparation for commissioned service. Only 11

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[2] "Creating a Military Elite," *Pioneer* (June 1972), pp. 13-4.
[3] BMT was initially conducted at SAFTI and the respective infantry battalions until the establishment of the School of Basic Military Training (SBMT) at Nee Soon Camp on 1 December 1971 and the Infantry Training Depot (ITD) on Pulau Tekong on 1 January 1976. On 1 December 1991 the BMT system was reorganized into three schools, each affiliated with an active infantry brigade. SBMT devolved into the 3rd Brigade Training School (3 BTS) and 7 BTS while ITD became 2 BTS. This gave way in 1999 to the current arrangement with the Basic Military Training Centre (BMTC) responsible for all non-unit specific (e.g. armour, commando, combat engineer, and artillery) BMT. CMPB moved from Dempsey Road to its current premises at Depot Road in 1989. See "Last enlistment at Dempsey Road," *Pioneer* (April 1989), pp. 22-3; "Brigade Training Schools to conduct BMT," *Pioneer* (November 1991), pp. 18-9; "Brigade Training Schools take over from SBMT," *Pioneer* (February 1992), p. 26; and "Better through basics," *Pioneer* (March 1992), p. 13.
[4] Singapore's military elite are alumni of OCS Portsea and RMC Duntroon in Australia, Federation Military College in Malaya, The Philippines Military Academy, RMC Sandhurst and Britannia Royal Naval College in the UK, and the Unites States Air Force Academy. Some military elites also completed 'basic officer' courses in the US *after* receiving their commission. No Singaporean graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point or the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis has yet made one-star. Naval officers were all trained overseas until 1974 when the Midshipman School was established.
[5] "Is the SM course good or bad for officer-cadets?" *Pioneer* (June 1975), pp. 6-9.
[6] The SMC comprised a 19-week junior term for recruit and section leader training, and a 19-week senior term covering platoon commander training. Trainees who performed well at the then School of Section Leaders (SSL) could cross over and join the SMC in the senior term.

SMCs were held from 1974 to 1980.[7] Pre-commissioning training in Singapore reverted to 9 weeks of BMT or initial military training (IMT) followed by 43 weeks at training establishments.[8] The majority of scholar-officers received their commissioning mid-OCC and completed their training after they graduated from university.[9] The first tri-service 42-week OCC commenced in 1990 and this lasted until March 2005 when the course duration was reduced to 38 weeks in line with the shortening of NS from 30 to 24 months with effect from December 2004.[10]

Immediately after commissioning, army officers and non-flying air force officers are usually most employable in their primary roles requiring only on-the-job experience.[11] This is not a matter of them being 'better' than counterparts in the navy or pilots in the air force. It is a matter of keeping the respective pre-commissioning courses to the same length and organization ease for joint commissioning parades. Most importantly, officers in vocations with longer training periods could "keep pace in terms of rank and accompanying endowments more than to mark the end of their training."[12]

Naval officers first received indigenous pre-commissioning training at the Midshipman School in Sembawang in 1974. The MIDs received IMT followed by a 43-week course which included a two-month Midshipman Sea Training Deployment voyage.[13] Newly minted naval officers continued their training at the Fleet as an Additional Officer for practical experience to develop their seamanship which is interspersed with training courses – which gradually replaced the certificates and exams of yesteryear – in navigation and competency in taking charge of a ship at sea and safe harbour. Only then did a naval officer hold shipboard appointments congruent with more advanced seamanship in communications, weaponry, and a specialized aspect of maritime warfare.

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[7] From 1975 onward the SMCs catered to officer cadets from 'all-arms' (instead of just the infantry) during the junior term. See "Keep up the traditions: Dr. Yeoh," *The Straits Times*, 13 June 1975, p. 10; and "A Proud Day for Sword of Honour Winners," *The Straits Times*, 17 October 1979, p. 10.
[8] "SAF Combat Officers command men, resources and a top salary (SAF Advertisement)," *The Straits Times*, 20 March 1980, p. 10.
[9] In Singapore they would most often join the 'professional term' of an officer cadet course which covers training specific to vocation. Overseas this is most likely one of the "basic officers' course" in the US (army, air force, or marines).
[10] The 42-week pre-commissioning course consists of an 11-week tri-service term, an eight-week service term (specific to the services), and a 23-week professional term (specific to a vocation within a service). See "Officer training goes Tri-Service," *Pioneer* (November 1990), pp. 12-3; "Towards a Leaner, More Capable 3rd Generation SAF," *Army News*, Issue No. 108 (May-June 2004), p. 8; and "Officer Cadet School: New 38-week Officer Cadet Course," *SAFTI Link* (2006), p. 12. Current pre-commissioning timetable vary as such. Army (weeks duration): Service Term (14), Professional Term (21), Joint Term (3); Navy: Basic Naval Term (16), Sea Training Term (9), Advanced Naval Term (10), Joint Term (3); and Air Force: Air Force Service Term (9), Air Force Professional Term (26), Joint Term (3).
[11] Some officers are required to undertake additional vocation qualification (e.g. commando and guards), skills-specific (e.g. scout, sniper, intelligence, rigger), or confidence (e.g. Ranger) courses.
[12] "The Young Men & the Sea," *Pioneer* (January 1982), p. 10.
[13] Ibid., pp. 9-11.

The first milestone for a pilot is the successful completion of the 'wings' course which marked entry into the flying fraternity. Early pilots were fully trained by the RAF in the UK but basic and advanced flying are now conducted by the RSAF in Singapore and detachments in Australia and France. Passing this basic course is no mean feat as attrition rates are high and OCTs are commissioned as officers. One general humbly admitted:

> "I was not very confident in earning my 'wings'. Flying, whether you can make it or not, is very much 'touch-and-go'. There are a lot of imponderables. In my batch we started with 20 but only six graduated so it is not easy. I was best overall because I was also good in ground school with theory and such but I was not the hottest in terms of flying."[14]

The graduation rate from his class was fairly consistent with other cohorts at the RSAF's Flying Training School during the mid-1970s: 6 of 22 at the 10th course, 9 of 27 at the 11th, and 9 of 26 at the 12th.[15] It is believed that contemporary graduation rates have improved from the 30% average with the implementation of more stringent tests before a pilot trainee progressed to the flying phase of training.[16] Pilot development continued after the 'wings' course with a lead-in or conversion course in one of three flying streams – fighter, transport, and helicopter – at either an operational squadron locally, a training squadron overseas usually in partnership with the United States Air Force (fighter, transport) and Army National Guard (helicopter), or on course with foreign air forces.

The SAF's primary preoccupation in its first decade of existence was with growth in manpower and infrastructural terms. Training and doctrine standards came from foreign advisers or were copied wholesale before being adapted to local conditions and expectations. The Career Planning Branch was only established in 1975 under the purview of OPC, which was then responsible for the career administration of *all* SAF officers. A year later MINDEF issued a general order for officers to rotate among command, staff, and instructional appointments at durations of two, three, and three years respectively.[17] Wranglers and eventual flag-officers invariably bucked such prescriptions because their steeper career trajectory necessitated shorter tours to meet the prevailing retirement age. One general candidly remarked that:

> "To rise through the ranks you need to have a good combination of ground and staff experiences. Ground tours with the troops so that you know what is going on. Staff tours help you understand the mechanics of decision making. These are also key activities that are seen in exercises. The only critique is that in a

[14] Interview No. 25.
[15] "Two Top Performances," *Pioneer* (October 1975), pp. 6-7; "Top of the wings parade," *Pioneer* (March 1976), p. 7; and "Nine 12th FTS Course Pilots get their wings," *Pioneer* (October 1976), p. 22.
[16] This initiative is aided by the RSAF's use of a Computerised Aptitude Selection System (COMPASS).
[17] "Off to a good start," *Pioneer* (August 1976), pp. 7-9.

> deep organization how do you compress the tours into a 25-year career? You end up with a lot of appointments that are 'touch and go'. It is also difficult to let people leap frog because how do you have a meaningful career and postings and still make a 25-year timeline work?"[18]

As a result, most military elites rotated frequently between unit and staff tours. The majority saw limited instructional tours if at all. Some air force generals served as QFIs during the formative years of the RSAF when there was a shortage of local instructors. For army generals their instructional tours were at SAFTI where they trained officer cadets. Various milestone courses had to be checked-off and up until the 1980s usually comprised only a service-specific 'advanced' course. In the army this allowed officers to serve as company commanders and battalion staff (or brigade deputy staff) officers. Naval officers could serve as a shipboard Principal Warfare Officer or hold a 'junior' CO billet of a patrol craft. Air force officers could lead as flight commanders (equivalent of army company commanders). The evolution of operational complexities have since necessitated officers to complete 'intermediate', 'tri-service', and 'advanced' courses specific to service and vocation prior to attendance at CSC.

After junior tours and concomitant courses are cleared a regular SAF officer usually in the rank of MAJ or LTC is ready for CSC. Attendance at this milestone course either locally or overseas is necessary for, but never guaranteed, any further promotions. Non-attendance on the other hand is a sure sign of career stagnation. CSC is not merely a gateway to higher-level appointments but pre-requisite for the first true test of command in leading an active unit. The premium placed on command is further emphasized by service-specific pre-command preparation courses.[19] After CSC the only remaining and mandatory 'course' conducted locally is the senior commanders program, which today comprised mainly of COLs.[20]A handful of COLs attended War College overseas annually. It is also common for the SAF to invest in quality officers through sponsored post-graduate studies at civilian universities. The next four sub-sections examine the post-CSC ascension pathways to one-star and above billets across the different services and at the MINDEF-SAF level.

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[18] Interview No. 22.

[19] For example in 2003 the bi-annual Battalion Commander Course was launched to prepare COs leading active and NS battalions in terms of command, responsibilities, and professional knowledge. A similar course is conducted for brigade commanders. The Navy also holds a Command Preparation Program (CPP) for designated ship COs. Jonathan Chan, "Gearing Up Our Battalion Commanders," *Army News*, Issue No. 192 (September 2011), p. 9.

[20] The first senior commanders course was held in 1980 and has traditionally lasted between five and seven weeks. Attendees at initial courses were officers post-unit (battalion, ship, squadron) command usually in the ranks of MAJ and LTC. Attendees at contemporary courses are usually post-brigade (or equivalent) command in the rank of COL.

7.3 Army

The Singapore Army was commanded directly by the defence chief from independence in 1965 until the 1988 reorganization made the army a separate service. The path into the military elite was limited and reflected the nascent capabilities of the armed force. In the first 13 years there was usually only one general officer who held the most senior uniformed appointed as DGS. In 1978 the post was renamed Chief of General Staff (CGS) and bestowed a second star as Major-General. This paved the way for the concurrent creation of the DCGS position, the SAF's 'number two', which lasted from 1978 to 1986 during which two of the three appointees made BG. It was during this period where the nascent manifestations of the JS began to take distinct shape and opened up more general-grade billets. Officers were first promoted to BG as Chief of Staff of the General Staff (COSGS) in 1984, DJOPD in 1984, and Director Joint Intelligence Directorate (DJID) in 1986. The first nine officers who made one-star between 1965 and 1987 were from the army. Five did so in command and four in staff billets.[21]

By 1988 the SAF had matured and was restructured into a tri-service defence force. On 1 July that year the two-star CGS was replaced by the three-star CDF. The growing size and capabilities of the army, navy, and air force justified the appointment of a DCGS (Army) to command the army. This allowed the CDF to concentrate on leading the SAF with functional assistance from the JS and three two-star service chiefs responsible for the army, RSN, and RSAF.[22] The General Staff departments were subsumed under Army HQ and their work coordinated by the Chief of Staff – General Staff (COS-GS). On 1 May 1990 DCGS (Army) was renamed COA but the General Staff retained its nomenclature and in effect functions as the 'Army Staff'.[23] From 1988 to 2013 another 66 army officers would made the ranks of general. 49 received their first star as Division Commanders and one as the Deputy Force Commander of a UN observer mission.[24] Three of the 16 who did not were MOs for whom there is no

[21] The five from command billets were: 1) BG Thomas James Duncan Campbell who was forwarded to Brigadier as commander of the Singapore Infantry Brigade and later served as DGS (1969-70); 2) BG Kirpa Ram Vij as DGS (1970-4); 3) LG Choo Wee Leong, Winston as DGS (1976-8), CGS (1978-90), CDF (1990-2); 4) BG Sim Hak Kng, Patrick, as DCGS (1978-80) and concurrently COMD 3 DIV (1977-8), and; 5) BG Tan Chin Tiong as DCGS (1980-2) including 13 months as acting DGS (1981-2). The four in staff billets were: 1) BG Lee Hsien Loong (SAFOS 1971) as DJOPD/COSGS (1984); 2) BG Chin Siat Yoon as DJID (1986); 3) BG Ng Jui Ping as COS-GS/ACGS (Ops) (1986), and; 4) BG Boey Tak Hap (SAFOS 1971) as COS-GS/ACGS (Ops) (1987).
[22] Functional departments on the Joint Staff include Manpower, Intelligence, Operations, Logistics, Plans and Transformation, Communications and Information Systems
[23] "New SAF post," *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1988, p. 17. In a similar manner the SAF refers to either the defence force as a whole or the army. There is also no 'Republic of Singapore Army' unlike the RSN and RSAF.
[24] COL (RET) Yeo Cheng Ann held the rank of L/BG while serving as Deputy Force Commander and Chief of Staff at UNIKOM (1993-4).

division-size command in the army and the only one-star billet is as CMC.[25] The other 13 officers made BG in staff billets on the JS.[26] The list of operational command appointments held by army generals is in Annex L.

For officers who made BG as division commanders the specific division and date of command was crucial. This was because the commanders were first promoted to one-star in a staggered manner beginning with 3 DIV in 1990 followed by 21 DIV (1991), 9 DIV (1993), 6 DIV (1995), 25 DIV (1998), 2 PDF (2002), and most recently the Combat Service Support Command (CSSCOM) in 2013.[27] Some officers from the First Batch who were the earliest to hold division command invariably missed out on making BG all together because they were at the 'right place' but at the 'wrong time' because the divisions had not achieved full capabilities.[28] Since then only two division commanders, both at 21 DIV, have not made BG; one in relation to performance while the other resigned mid-tour.[29] More importantly, the respective dates reflected the importance and capabilities of the respective divisions to the army. For example 3 DIV possessed the most advanced equipment and the most number of active sub-units which reflected its motto 'Foremost and Utmost'.[30] It can also be considered the 'Scholar's division' with its long lineage of scholar-officers at the helm and accounted for seven of 11 COAs.[31] Another example is 2 PDF which was once considered a second-line and

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[25] The three army MOs who made CMC were BG (RET) (Dr) Lee Kim Hock, Lionel; BG (RET) (Dr) Wong Yue Sie, and; BG (NS) (Dr) Seet Hun Yew, Benjamin.

[26] The 13 officers were: 1) BG Lee Hsien Yang (SAFOS 1976) as DJOPD/COS-GS (1992); 2) BG Tan Yong Soon (SAFOS 1974) as DS (Policy) MINDEF (1993); 3) BG Choi Shing Kwok (SAFOS 1978) as DIR SID (1996); 4) BG Lee Fook Sun (SAFOS 1975) as DIR MSD (1996); 5) BG Pang Hee Hon (SAFOS 1979) as HJL (2000); 6) BG Lim Kah Kee as COMDT SCSC (2000) en-route to COMD 3 DIV; 7) BG Chua Chwee Koh (SAFOS 1982) as DJO (2001) en-route to COMD 21 DIV/CGO; 8) BG Ravinder Singh s/o Harchand Singh as Hd JPTD (2004); 9) BG Lim Feng, Philip as HJL/ACGS (Log) (2005); 10) BG Koh Tee Hian, David as Hd JCISD (2006); 11) BG Lee Shiang Long as Hd JCISD (2009); 12) BG Ngien Hoon Ping (SAFOS 1988) as DJO (2011); and 13) ME8 Lau Cher Loon as Hd Joint Intelligence Department (2013).

[27] The only commander of the now-defunct 1 PDF (1985-2004) promoted to BG was Lim Kim Lye in 1998 who led the formation from 1996 to 2000.

[28] These include COL (RET) Chan Jwee Kay who became COMD 6 DIV in 1980 and COL (RET) Kwan Yue Yeong as who was given command of 3 DIV in 1982 and later 25 DIV in 1991.

[29] Michael Low, a dual President Scholar and SAFOS recipient in 1976, was COMD 21 DIV (1995-7) and subsequently ACGS (Log) before retiring as a COL in 1997. COL (NS) Nelson Yau, relinquished command of 21 DIV abruptly in 2011 citing 'personal reasons'. This took the SAF and general public by surprise as he was also the Chairman of the Executive Committee in charge of organizing the annual National Day Parade that year.

[30] 3 DIV was formed in 1976 and became the first fully active division with three infantry brigades (2, 3, and 7 SIB). It later became the first combined arms division in 1991 and was manned by active units until 1995 when the army's divisions were reorganized into mixed active and NS units. As the SAF transformed under the Third Generation (3G) concept 3 DIV became "the first networked Division in the Army (with) the capabilities of the Integrated Knowledge-based Command and Control (IKC2) system." It was also the first equipped with the "digitised Division Command Post". At present 3 DIV has the most of number of operational units under command among all the army divisions including the 3rd Singapore Infantry Brigade with three active infantry battalions (2, 5 and 6 SIR) and the 8th Singapore Armoured Brigade (8 SAB) with one active battalion (40 SAR). See "First Combined Arms Division," *Pioneer* (May 1991), pp. 4-5; "Towards a Networked Division," *Army News*, Issue No. 147 (October-November 2007), p. 6; "Moving 3 Div Forward as a Team," *Army News*, Issue No. 150 (January-February 2008), p. 2; Jared Yeo, "Tiger Family Gets New Commander: BG Lim helms 3 DIV," *Army News*, Issue No. 189 (June 2011), p. 3; and "3 DIV Turns 40," *Army News*, Issue No. 205 (November 2012), pp. 18-9.

[31] 13 of the last 15 commanders at 3 Division have been SAFOS recipients with then COL Boey Tak Hap (SAFOS 1971) the first to assume command on 1 December 1984. 11 of the 25 SAFOS army officers who

perhaps second-rate formation responsible for homeland defence.[32] Although the division-sized outfit has long deployed and employed soldiers for the protection of installations such operations have taken on greater importance after the September 11 attacks. 2 PDF is today a frontline formation in Singapore's interagency approach to island defence and the first SAFOS officer was appointed Commander 2 PDF in 2014.[33]

The first important step for army generals who ascended through the command route is to lead an active battalion. The number of such units has grown from two infantry battalions in 1965 to its present size of at least 17 combat and 14 combat support battalions.[34] Combat officers are appointed COs of combat battalions though not necessarily from the same vocation subjected to caveats.[35] They are ineligible to lead combat support battalions frequently because they lacked the specialized skills and relevant experiences to do so effectively. Combat service officers only command battalions congruent with their specific vocation and it is extremely rare for them to command a combat battalion.[36] Battalion command provided the first true test of leading and moulding a self-contained unit both in the field and the barracks. The appointment is prized, visible, and closely scrutinized by superiors, peers, and subordinates. Stringent pre-requisites and intense competition from the high demand and low supply of such billets meant very few failed to discharge their duties and exercise command responsibility.[37] For those on their way to making BG and above staff appointments at formation, army, or MINDEF levels invariably awaited post-CSC. It is, however, rare for them to hold training or instructional billets. This period frequently, but not always, also included a period of post-graduate studies.

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have held division (or equivalent) command did so at 3 DIV. Of the remainder, three did so at 6 DIV, five at 9 DIV, two at 21 DIV, two at 25 DIV, one at CSSCOM, and one at 2 PDF. Of the 11 COAs between 1990 and 2014, seven commanded 3 DIV, three 9 DIV, and one 6 DIV.

[32] See for example "PDF: A second line of defence," *National Pioneer* (November 1970), pp. 10-1.

[33] For example, soldiers were deployed for POI duties at various oil refineries at Pulau Bukom (Shell), Pulau Merlimau (Singapore Petroleum), and Pulau Ayer Chawan (Esso) after the 1974 'Bukom Bombings'. 2 PDF also has elite Guards battalions under its command. See Yeong Wai Cheong, "Military Protection for oil refineries," *Pioneer* (March 1974), p. 19; and Jotham Yeo, "Ready to Strike, Best NS Unit for 2PDF Command: 747 Guards," *Army News*, Issue No. 213 (July 2013), p. 15.

[34] The 17 combat units comprised Special Operations Force, Army Development Force, 8 infantry (2 motorised, 4 light, 2 installation defence), 1 commando, 2 guards, and 4 armoured (3 mechanized, 1 tank) battalions. The combat support units are estimated to comprise 4 artillery, 5 combat engineer, and 5 signals battalions.

[35] The combat vocations comprised infantry, armour, commando, and guards. As a rule of thumb any combat officer who has held company command and completed CSC can command an infantry battalion. Infantry and armour officers must complete the Guards Conversion Course in order to command a guards battalion. Non-armour officers can command an armoured battle group (battalion) subject to training requirements prescribed by HQ Armour. Only a Ranger-qualified commando officer can command a commando battalion.

[36] One rare exception is BG Tan Ming Yiak, Mark, a combat engineer who commanded 3 SIR (1998-2000).

[37] Some have failed in the sense the performance of the battalion was found unsatisfactory during unit evaluation by the Army Training and Evaluation Centre (ATEC) which evaluates all combat units or by the respective combat support formations. There were also two instances of failure in leadership when the respective battalions were disqualified from the annual Best Unit Competition for questionable conduct amounting to 'cheating'.

The next key appointment is command of an active brigade. At present there are five combat brigades and six combat support brigades in contrast to the sole infantry brigade in 1965. Each combat brigade has an established lineage of more than 30 years and is subordinate to one of the army's divisions.[38] Of the combat support brigades only 3 Division Artillery (3 DIV ARTY) is comparable.[39] The remaining combat support brigades were established recently as army- and SAF-level assets.[40] The caveats on vocation compatibility applicable to battalions also applied to the brigades. Active brigade command provided COL-rank officers with first-hand experiences and understanding of the division's operating template, and exposure to army- and SAF-level manoeuvres. They also mentored subordinate active battalion commanders and ensured the brigade HQ remained operationally ready amidst technological and doctrinal changes. This advantage stood in contrast to peers who commanded NS brigades as secondary or appointments.

Brigade command posed several implications for officer ascension. First, the force structure long favoured the progression of combat (infantry, armour, commando, guards) and to some extent combat support (artillery, combat engineers) officers from active battalion to active brigade command. This situation was partially alleviated for combat engineers when the brigade-sized Army Combat Engineer Group (ARMCEG) was created in 1994. Second, the imbalance faced by combat support vocations obliged the army to channel them into command of an active combat brigade or appointment as formation chiefs in lieu of brigade command before they progressed to division command.[41] Third, the force structure disadvantaged signal officers the most among all combat and combat support vocations. While they provided critical communications capabilities the nature of their specialization limited their exposure to manoeuvre warfare. Ascension through the Signals formation or the signals brigades did not result in division command. As such signal officers have either transferred to a combat

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[38] The 5 active combat brigades include the light infantry 2 SIB (active since 1968), the motorised 3 SIB (1969), the mechanized 4 SAB (1970), the heliborne 7 SIB (1975), and mechanized 8 SAB (1980). 10 SIB was an active brigade from 1995 to the mid-2000s. Similarly 1 SIB was active for a brief period in the early-2010s.

[39] 3 Division Artillery was formed in April 1976. In November 1980 the brigade was placed under the command of HQ Singapore Artillery. In March 1991 it was transferred to 3 Division which was inaugurated as a Combined Arms Division.

[40] The other active brigade-equivalent combat support units are: 1) Army Combat Engineer Group (ARMCEG), an army-level asset established in 1994; 2) SAF Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Explosives Defence Group (CBRE DG) with 36 SCE, 39 SCE, and the Medical Response Force under command is an SAF asset formed in 2005; 3) Army Command Systems Group is an army-level signals unit; 4) C4 Operations Group under Joint Communications and Information Systems Department (JCISD) is an SAF-level signals unit; 5) Imagery Support Group (ISG) is an SAF-level intelligence unit. See "Singapore Combat Engineers," *Army News*, Special Supplement #9 (June 2011), pp. 2-7.

[41] Combat support officers who led active infantry brigades en route to division command included LG (RET) Ng Jui Ping (artillery, 3 SIB 1978-9), MG (RET) Lim Neo Chian (combat engineer, 3 SIB 1989-91), LG (RET) Ng Yat Chung (artillery, 3 SIB 1994-5), BG (RET) Tay Lim Heng (artillery, 3 SIB 1995-6), MG Ravinder Singh s/o Harchand Singh (signals, 2 SIB 1998-2000), BG (NS) Tan Yih San (combat engineer, 2 SIB 2001-3), and BG Tan Ming Yiak, Mark (combat engineer, 3 SIB 2006-7).

vocation as some have done, or take command of an active combat brigade and compete for division command. Only one signal officer – MG (RET) Ravinder Singh – successfully travelled this path.

The appointments after relinquishing brigade command established a pecking-order among the COL-ranked officers and indicated their likelihood of division command. Since the 1988 reorganization no officer has made BG from staff appointments at the army level. The post of COS-GS is either held concurrently with or after division command. The second most senior staff appointment ACGS (Operations) was normally held by COLs post-brigade command en-route to division command.[42] It became a post-division command billet held by a BG in 2009 and finally aligned the army with counterparts in the RSN and RSAF. Similarly, an army officer appointed Director Joint Operations (DJO) on the JS was normally a COL post-brigade command and en-route to division command. In 2010 DJO was first held post-division command. Army officers responsible for plans at the General Staff and JS were based on historical trends and presently are the closest certainties for division command. Others who counted themselves in the mix included the respective ACGS for manpower, intelligence, or training; COMDT GKSCSC; Head National Service Affairs Department, or; the non dual-hatted chiefs of a combat or combat support formation.[43] Post-graduate studies (if not taken earlier) or attendance at War (or Defence) College overseas at this career stage was also a positive sign. It is this pool of officers from which division commanders are usually selected.[44] It must be also highlighted that while these are the 'cookie-cutter' pathways, alternative albeit rare possibilities existed. First, one can hold active brigade command without commanding an active battalion.[45] Second, one can hold division command without command of an active brigade (or

[42] Ng Jui Ping (1986) and Boey Tak Hap (1987) were both promoted to BG while ACGS (Ops) but the 'star' received was for the concurrent appointment as COS-GS. In 2007 Lim Chern Tjunn, Philip, was promoted to BG while ACGS (Ops) but relinquished the appointment days later when he assumed command of 25 DIV.

[43] All formation chiefs are non dual-hatted except for Chief Guards Officer/Commander 21 Division (since October 1994), Chief Armour Officer/Commander 25 Division (since June 1998), and Chief Infantry Officer/Commander 9 Division (since August 2004). 21 and 25 Divisions were established as "holding" divisions for reservist units in 1991. See "New reservist divisions in SAF," *Pioneer* (April 1991), p. 17; and "SAF forms 2 reserve divisions as number of reservists grows," *The Straits Times*, 1 May 1991, p. 25.

[44] The SAF has tragically lost some officers from this pool. COL Ha Weng Kong, then commandant of the Staff College, passed away from cancer age 42 on 12 December 1986. His prominent appointments included CO 7 SIR, Commander 4 SAB, Chief Armour Officer, and ACGS (Personnel). He was one of five senior officers sent for a 14-month post-graduate degree in military history and international relations at Duke University in the early 1980s. COL Tan Cheow Han, Bernard, then ACGS (Personnel), passed away age 39 after suffering a heart-attack during the Navy biathlon on 26 March 2006. He graduated from RMC Sandhurst and held prominent appointments such as CO 3 Guards and Commander 7 SIB.

[45] BG Siew Kum Wong commanded the active 4 SAB from 2009-12 without command of an active battalion. Similarly, COL Tan Kian Heong was CO 441 SAR (a mechanized NS unit) from 1997 to 2002 and later commander 4 SAB from 2006-8.

active equivalent).[46] Third, it is possible to progress directly from active brigade to active division command.[47] These are, however, exceptions rather than the norm.

The importance of force structure for officer ascension into the military elite is best illustrated by CSSCOM. Logistics and army engineering officers once seemed capped at the rank-ceiling of COL. They could command combat service (CSS) support units and proceed on to a brigade-sized CSS formation, a divisional support command (DISCOM), or the Army Logistics Command.[48] The most senior appointments were staff billets in-charge of logistics on the General Staff and the JS. The latter allowed two officers to make BG although this proved ephemeral.[49] It was not possible to run logistics as a joint command in the same way as the medical corps. G4 Army (the General Staff department for logistics) and the CSS formations were instead integrated and reorganized as the division-sized CSSCOM in 2006.[50] The formation's capabilities and importance to the army warranted the officer at its helm – a logistician, engineer, or any army vocation with a logistics specialization – to wear a star.[51]

7.4 Navy

Twenty-four naval officers have had the honour to serve as admirals in the RSN. They included 20 naval combat officers, two naval engineers, and two naval MOs.[52] The majority of combat officers first wore the rank of RADM1 holding RSN appointments with 11 from command and four from the Naval-Staff. Of the remaining five, two earned their first star on MINDEF-SAF billets and three in command of an international naval task force.[53] The list of operational command appointments held by

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[46] BG (VOL) Ishak Ismail was COMD 12 SIB and later COMD 6 DIV (2008-11); and COL Chiang Hock Woon was COMD 76 SIB and later COMD 9 DIV (2013-present).
[47] MG (RET) Lim Neo Chian (SAFOS 1972) went from 3 SIB to 3 DIV (1991); LG (RET) Lim Chuan Poh (SAFOS 1980) from 10 SIB to 9 DIV (1996); and BG Siew Kum Wong from 4 SAB to 25 DIV (2012).
[48] CSS units included Army Maintenance Bases, Logistics Bases, Transport Battalions, and the Ammunition Base. CSS formations included Maintenance and Engineering, Supply and Transport, and the Ammunition Command.
[49] Pang Hee Hon made BG in 2000 while Head Joint Logistics Department (HJL) (2000-4); Lim Feng, Philip, made BG in 2005 as HJL (2005-7). Officers in the appointment have since remained in the rank of COL.
[50] The formations and units under CSSCOM included Maintenance and Engineering Support, Supply, Transport, Army Logistics Training Institute, and the SAF Ammunition Command. See "Combat Service Support Command," *Army News*, Special Supplement #5 (January 2011), p. 2.
[51] The first and second commanders of CSSCOM were logistics officers. The third and incumbent commander since 2014, COL Lam Sheau Kai, is an artillery officer who specialized in logistics. He was formerly Chief Supply Officer (2009-11), Commander 9 DISCOM, and HJL (2011-4).
[52] Naval combat officers serve on surface (strike or specialized warfare) platforms, on submarines, or as divers. There are no naval aviators in the RSN because all manned aircraft fall under the ambit of the RSAF. Two air force squadrons currently serve in support of naval operations: 121 SQN which operates Fokker-50 maritime patrol aircraft in support of fleet operations; and 123 SQN which deploys one Sikorsky S-70B Seahawk helicopter on each Formidable-class frigate when at sea.
[53] MINDEF-SAF Billets: RADM2 Ng Chee Peng (SAFOS 1989) as DIR (Policy) DPO (2007); and RADM2 Leong Weng Keong, Joseph (SAFOS 1990) as Hd JPTD (2008). Command of Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) in the Gulf of Arabia: L/RADM1 (RET) Bernard Donald Miranda from 20 January to 20 April

RSN admirals is in Annex M. The first admiral's star was bestowed unsurprisingly on the CNV in 1988. Subsequent promotions to RADM1 were allocated to the Chief of Staff – Naval Staff (COS-NS) in 1994, Head Naval Operations (NHO) in 1994, Fleet Commander in 1995, and most recently Commander Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF) in 2009. Seven admirals would also wear a second star with six as CNV (first in 1994) and one as Director Military Intelligence (first in 2013) on the JS. These admiral billets reflected the navy's growth from a modest 'fleet' of three ships – one of which was permanently berthed as a training school and early HQ – manned mainly by volunteers in 1965 to the professional and well equipped outfit it is today.[54] Its mission template also expanded from mere coastal patrol duties in the early days. Today, Singapore's sea lines of communications and maritime interests are protected by a RSN capable of multidimensional (surface, subsurface, air) operations and its capabilities allowed participation in and even leadership of combined operations abroad.[55]

In earlier chapters it was noted that the navy played third fiddle to the army and air force for close to 25 years. Its sister services not only received priority in funding and technical development but the RSN also lacked sufficient and adequate manpower. The outfit was cobbled together by a motley crew of enthusiastic volunteers before a professional naval officer corps matured. LTC (RET) Jaswant Singh Gill juggled teaching during the day and spent evenings training to earn his 1951 commission into the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.[56] Singh entered fulltime service with the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) in 1964 during *Konfrontasi* and subsequent led an infant navy which numbered just 1,000.[57] The late COL (RET) James Aeria was also a teacher who spent "seven years with the Singapore Division of the Royal Naval Reserve as a volunteer officer" before his secondment to the RMN in 1963.[58] Aeria charted the future of the navy in 1968 and subsequently served as its helm from 1970 to 1975.[59] The late COL (RET) Khoo Eng Ann who succeeded Aeria as chief (1975-8) joined the RSN in September 1974 at age 47 after a 27-year career with the Taiwanese Navy.[60] Two scholar-officers were parachuted into the navy to fill senior appointments in the 1980s

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2010; RADM1 Chan Weng Yip, Harris (SAFOS 1991) from 31 March to 30 June 2011; RADM1 Giam Hock Koon 7 March to 6 June 2013.

[54] At independence "[t]he Singapore naval force comprises only two operational craft, the patrol boat *Panglima* and the launch *Bedok* run by less than 100 mobilised personnel and backed by about 300 volunteers." See "Defending ourselves," *The Straits Times*, 5 June 1968, p. 10; and Lo, *Onwards and Upwards: Celebrating 40 Years of the Navy*, pp. 14-7.

[55] Lo, *Onwards and Upwards: Celebrating 40 Years of the Navy*, p. 11.

[56] Sarah Hardy, *30th Anniversary: Onwards and Upwards* (Singapore: Republic of Singapore Navy, 1997), p. 20.

[57] "First in Honours-Roll meets CNV," *Navy News*, Issue No. 1 (2007), p. 12.

[58] Lim Suan Kooi, "Full steam ahead for the future," *The Straits Times*, 9 August 1972, p. 2.

[59] "First navy chief of Singapore dies," *The Straits Times*, 26 April 1994, p. 17.

[60] "Anchors aweigh for Navy chief," *The Straits Times*, 3 March 1985, p. 14; and "Adieu, Comd RSN," *Pioneer* (April 1985), p. 24.

due to the shortage of qualified naval officers.[61] The first two CNVs who made admiral had unusual ascension pathways. RADM1 (RET) James Leo, who succeeded Khoo in 1985, was an engineering officer with expertise in maintenance, engineering, and logistics. Succeeding him in 1991 was RADM1 (RET) Teo Chee Hean. His initial years were stationed at the RSN Fleet and included appointment as ship executive officer before a decade (1981-91) in key staff appointments on the Naval Staff and JS interspersed with a year each at the US Naval War College and Harvard.[62] Teo was the inaugural SAFOS officer appointed CNV (1991-2).

From 1992 onward, the starting point of ascension for the 19 naval combat officers into admiralship has been the quintessential post-CSC command of a naval vessel. Command at sea and appointment as CO of a Republic of Singapore Ship (RSS) is undoubtedly a highlight of any RSN officer's career. This is the first test of command and the CO is responsible for *everything* that happened on and to the ship whether at port or at sea and independent of higher ranking individuals (civilian or military) onboard. The ships commanded by officer on the path to admiral are not just any ship in the navy's fleet. They are usually from the most modern ships at a particular time. In the early days it was the patrol craft, patrol boat, and minesweeper but this gave way to cutting-edge strike platforms such as the Missile Gun Boat (MGB) from 1973 to 2008, the Missile Corvette (MCV) from 1988 to present, and the Stealth Frigate from 2007 onward. An admiral's post-CO tour could include a second tour in command of another ship from the same or more advanced class, key staff billets at the navy- or joint-level, and often a period of postgraduate studies.

The next milestone in the ascension of 16 of the 19 naval combat officers is squadron (SQN) or equivalent command. These units usually comprised six platforms for a strike squadron, or four ships for a support squadron. Although a squadron CO does not have a ship of his own his task is nonetheless critical in mentoring the individual ship COs and responsible for the warfighting capabilities of an entire class of platforms in the RSN's arsenal. A squadron CO is also experienced enough to lead a task group configured to meet specific mission objectives. Yet one must be mindful not all squadrons are the same. 14 of these 16 admirals served as CO of either 185 or 188 SQN which housed the RSN's strike platforms.[63] Of the remaining two RADM1, one helmed 191 SQN which operated Landing Ship Tanks (multipurpose transport ships)

[61] LTC Ho Meng Kit (SAFOS 1975), an infantry officer, was appointed Head Naval Plans (HNP) while then LTC Lim Chong Kiat (SAFOS 1975), an artillery officer, was appointed Head Naval Operations (HNO).
[62] After service in the fleet Teo was HNP (1981-2), student at the US Naval War College (1982-3), Head Joint Plans Management Department in JOPD (1983-6); candidate for Master in Public Administration at Harvard (1986-7), HNO (1987-8); Chief of Staff – Naval Staff (COS-NS) (1987-88); DJOPD (1988-91), Deputy CNV (1990-1) and then CNV (1991-2).
[63] 185 Squadron was established in 1975 and housed six MGBs until they were decommissioned in 2008. It is now home to the Formidable-class frigates. 188 Squadron was established in 1987 and has six Victory-class MCVs in its ORBAT.

and the other led the Naval Diving Unit (NDU). After squadron command these officers often returned to the familiar pattern of key staff billets at the navy- or joint-level and interspersed with postgraduate studies (if not taken earlier) or attendance at War College. The navy's growth in terms of assets and manpower over time necessitated the formation of an additional hierarchical layer. In 1992 the fleet's strike and support assets were placed under the First and Third Flotillas respectively. Of the 14 admirals who commanded a strike squadron, nine of them also led the First Flotilla (1 FLOT) which frequently overlapped with their squadron command. To date only one Commander Third Flotilla (3 FLOT) has tasted admiralship and even he had prior command of a strike vessel.[64]

The 19 admirals between 1992 and 2013 usually earned their first star in, or en-route to, one of three appointments. The first is as Fleet Commander overseeing the RSN's tri-dimensional capabilities. Since the first Fleet Commander earned his star in 1995 eight of the following ten commanders also made RADM1 in the same capacity.[65] Nine of these 11 officers were flotilla commanders, eight of them at 1 FLOT.[66] The second and rarer pathway is to bypass fleet command altogether for direct appointment as HNO. This only occurred to three admirals and is often a result of having two or more officers ascending the hierarchy at the same time while billets that matched their seniority at both the Naval Staff and JS are occupied. There is only one fleet and for the command to be meaningful and beneficial to both the RSN and the said officer tour lengths have lasted 18 months or longer. To do otherwise would have rendered fleet command perfunctory. Relief of this log-jam at the apex of the naval hierarchy came with the creation of a second ascension pathway in parallel with fleet command. The amalgamation of operational necessity and force structure design resulted in the 2009 re-establishment of Coastal Command (COSCOM), long the fleet's 'poor cousin', as MSTF bolstered by additional surface assets, anti-submarine and mine countermeasure capabilities, and interagency operability. Commander COSCOM was a 'senior' COL's billet and several former commanders held prior squadron and flotilla commands. Commander MSTF is a one-star billet although its first three appointees did not hold squadron or flotilla command. They, however, possessed other experiences which commensurate with the formation's mission to safeguard the Singapore Straits.

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[64] L/RADM1 (RET) Bernard Miranda was CO RSS Sea Wolf (1996-9), a MGB in 185 SQN. He then ascended through the command of transport vessels as CO RSS Persistence (1999-2002), CO 191 SQN (2004-6), and Commander Third Flotilla (2006-9).

[65] The fleet command to receive a star was RADM1 (RET) Loon Leong Yoon, Larry, in 1995 who served as the 14th commander (1994-7). Since then only two officers relinquished command in the rank of COL. One was RADM2 (NS) Ronnie Tay, the 16th fleet commander (1999-2000), who earned his first star the very next year as HNO. The other was COL (RET) Soon Peng Hock, James, the 18th fleet commander (2003-4), who retired from naval service in 2004.

[66] The only exceptions are RADM1 (NS) Tan Kai Hoe, the 20th fleet commander (2006-7) and RADM1 Lo Khee Chik, Timothy, the 24th fleet commander (2012-present), both of whom did not command a flotilla.

These trends highlighted three important characteristics in the ascension and profile of RSN admirals. First, their command experiences were usually rooted in the strike community where they served as ship and squadron CO. Half also commanded at flotilla- and fleet-levels. Second, for the few who earned their stars as staff officers it was more a matter of 'demand over supply' of billets rather than command ability. Finally, despite a second ascension route through MSTF, it seemed officers from non-surface strike communities such as 3 FLOT, NDU, and the submarine services are disadvantaged. Only two officers from these specialized communities have made RADM1. In particular, history seemed unkind to officers from 3 FLOT who have knocked on the door of admiralship. James Soon made Fleet Commander but retired as a COL.[67] Bernard Miranda was deemed competent for command of an anti-piracy combined task force as L/RADM1 but no billets were available back home for him to earn a permanent promotion to RADM1. It remains to be seen if COL Lim Kai-Chuan, Richard (SAFOS 1994), will be the first officer from 3 FLOT to buck this trend.

Only one naval engineer has made RADM1 in the capacity as Head Naval Logistics (HNL).[68] This aberration can be attributed to a cap on the number of admirals even though HNL is a one-star billet.[69] Practical reasons explained why this is so. First, naval logistics is apportioned to the Naval Logistics Department (NLD) led by HNL, and the Naval Logistics Command (NALCOM) headed by Commander NALCOM. Both officers hold the rank of ME7 (COL-equivalent). NLD focused on the "longer-term strategic plans, policies and governance" to meet logistical requirements.[70] NALCOM on the other hand is responsible for the current maintenance and logistical support for RSS platforms at sea or berthed at Tuas and Changi naval bases.[71] Second, in 2011 both NLD and NALCOM were brought under the umbrella of the Naval Logistics Organisation (NLO) without a single officer at its helm because it acted as an interface to streamline logistics processes and not as a command HQ.[72] Finally, the naval logistics and engineering community is small (~500 including civilian staff) relative to

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[67] COL (RET) Soon Peng Hock, James, enlisted in 1979 and completed his midshipman training at Britannia Royal Naval College. His education includes degrees in Electrical and Electronic Engineering from Nanyang Technological University and in International Relations from Tufts University He was CO Naval Diving Unit when appointed the 1996 NDP Parade Commander; Commander Third Flotilla (1998-2000), and Head Naval Plans (2000-3) prior to Fleet Commander (2003-4). He was subsequently Head, MINDEF Defence Technology Office (2004-7), Senior Vice President with ST Marine (2007-11), President of Hovertrans Solutions (2011), and since May 2011 the President of Zycraft which develops unmanned surface (maritime) vessels.
[68] Jway Ching Hua made RADM1 in 2000 while Head Naval Logistics Department (HNL) (1996-2002).
[69] The RSN seems to have a cap of one RADM2 allocated to the CNV and four other RADM1s holding naval billets usually COS-NS, HNO, Fleet Commander, and Commander MSTF.
[70] NLD comprises four sub-groups: Operational Logistics Group, Total Systems Group, Resource Group, and Engineering Group. See Ong Hong Tat, "New structure for better naval logistics," *Cyberpioneer*, 15 November 2011; and Lee Kwok Hao, "A better NLO for a stronger navy," *Navy News*, Issue No. 1 (2012), pp. 18-9.
[71] NALCOM is comprised of the Force Generation Squadron, Force Readiness Squadron, and Force Support Squadron.
[72] Lee, "A better NLO for a stronger navy," pp. 18-9.

the size of army logistics (division-size with multiple independent brigade-size support commands and battalions) while the delineation between success and failure is also less obvious than air logistics (~4,000 including civilian personnel).[73] For such reasons it is unlikely that a naval engineer will make ME8 (RADM1-equivalent) unless an additional 'star' is allocated to the navy or if the appointment of Head NLO is created.

7.5 Air Force

Since the CAF was first promoted to BG in 1987, 37 other RSAF officers have joined him in the ranks of the military elite. Twenty-one of these 38 air force generals were qualified flyers with 17 from the fighter community, three from transport squadrons, and one flew helicopters. Of the 17 non-flyers, 12 were Air Warfare Officers (AWOs) with eight responsible for C3 (command, control, and coordination) systems and four for ground-based air defence.[74] The other five possessed specialized skills and included four air engineering officers (AEOs) and one aviation MO. Thus far no unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) pilot has made BG only because of the vocation's relative youth but its technological edge and future prospects will undoubtedly see its fair share of generals in the future. 25 of the 37 air force generals earned their first star holding RSAF appointments while the remaining 12 earned theirs in Joint billets.[75] The list of operational command appointments held by RSAF generals is in Annex N.

The ascension pathway for pilots until the 2007 RSAF reorganization usually followed the template of squadron command, air base command, followed by a senior staff appointment on the Air Staff or JS in which the one-star was warranted. As with counterparts in the other sister services these key ascension appointments are frequently interspersed with staff billets at the RSAF and/or SAF HQ and a period of post-graduate studies and/or attendance at War College. After the 2007 reorganization

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[73] Lee, "A better NLO for a stronger navy," p. 19; and "Defence Technology Community," *Defence Science and Technology Agency Website*, www.dsta.gov.sg/scholarship-student-outreach/defence-technology-community (accessed 28 May 2014).

[74] The Air Warfare Officers (AWOs) were first called Air Operations and Communications Officers (AOCOs) and Air Defence Artillery Officers (ADAOs). They were later renamed Weapons Systems Officers (WSO) specializing in command, control, and coordination (C3) and air defence artillery (ADA) respectively. The latest changes in nomenclature included the renaming of ADA to Ground-Based Air Defence (GBAD). On 28 August 2009 the WSO (C3) and WSO (ADA) vocations were renamed AWO (C3) and AWO (GBAD) respectively. Other AWO vocations included AWO (Radar), AWO (C3 – Aerodrome/PAR). The 'WSO' designation is still in use for WSO (Fighter), See "ADOC 3rd Anniversary Celebrations," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 112 (December 2009), p. 43; "RCGC/RGDI 01/13," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 125 (2013), p. 26.

[75] The 12 officers are: 1) BG (RET) Yeo Yong Boon, George (SAFOS 1973) as DJOPD (1988); 2) BG (RET) Wesley Gerard D'Aranjo (SAFOS 1972) as DS (Technology) MINDEF (1992); 3) MG (RET) Goh Yong Siang as DJOPD/COS-AS (1994); 4) BG (RET) Jek Kian Yee (SAFOS 1983) as DIR MSD (2000); 5) BG (RET) Yap Ong Heng (SAFOS 1979) as Military Adviser at the UN (2000); 6) BG (RET) Voon Tse-Chow as DA Washington (2002); 7) MG (NS) Ng Chee Khern (SAFOS 1985) as DJO (2003); 8) BG (RET) Wong Huat Sern (SAFOS 1983) as DJO (2004); 9) BG (NS) Ang Aik Hwang, Gary (SAFOS 1988) as DIR (Policy) DPO en-route to COMD TAB (2005); 10) LG Ng Chee Meng as DJO (2008); 11) BG Cheng Siak Kian as DA Washington (2008), and; 12) L/BG Tan Chee Wee as DA Washington (2012).

the operational commands replaced the air bases in importance for career ascension. 16 of the 20 pilots who made general ascended via squadron command and command of an air base and/or operational command. Of the other five, one held squadron command twice, and two had no records of squadron command but later held air base command. The last two officers had no record of command from any of the open-source literature published by the RSAF.

Although the flying fraternity seemed to have a 'flattened' post-CSC command ascension pathway from squadron to air base/functional command one must be cognizant of the amount of resources and time required for a pilot to improve his Operations Category (CAT) which reflected both ability and responsibility.[76] The rationale was rather simple as one pilot general explained:

> "CAT-A is the pinnacle of the flying profession. You want to be there if you aspire to be OC (flight commander) and CO. Otherwise you cannot lead as a pilot if you don't have CAT-A. As a pilot, you need CAT-A to be credible. It is one requirement for the profession, leadership, and command. But without CAT-A, it does not mean you cannot be a good officer or leader because you can follow the staff line. CAT-A is not the be all and end all. As a commander I also pushed people to develop other aspects and not just to aspire towards being CAT-A. For example the ability to interact and communicate with people is very important especially from the flying point of view."[77]

This had implications for the military elites especially when their relatively short SAF careers – two years longer for pilots on average – are taken into account. Some were appointed as staff officers at the opportunity of flying with the squadron. It was a simple case of prioritizing needs and allocating resources because:

> "There is no perfect system. In the 90s the air force was expanding. There was no structured career route in place as this took years to develop. Furthermore with a short career do you have time to do that (structured route)? Today with a proper structure there are better HR mechanisms in place. The priority in the early days was to produce, to churn out pilots. Now we are more HR focused. If you want someone to be chief [of air force] can he be taken through all the appointments (pilot, flight lead, OC, CO)? Remember that developing a pilot takes time. Each CAT takes anywhere from nine to twelve months to attain. So that's already four years at very least to reach CAT-A. So there is not always the luxury to let them take all the appointments. The RSAF is also small. Is an OC appointment available? It becomes a matter of time and space; one of duration versus availability (of an appointment). Is the RSAF a factory for churning out OCs or are we preparing a war-fighting unit (with experienced personnel)?"[78]

[76] The CAT status was initially based on UK standards for fighter pilots and Australian standards for transport pilots until the RSAF could develop its own requirements.
[77] Interview No. 16.
[78] Interview No. 16.

For pilots who made flag-rank the first test of command came with command of a squadron according to aircraft of expertise. The first operational fighter squadron was established in 1970 and the fighter community reached a peak of seven operational squadrons based in Singapore at several periods in RSAF history (1990-7, 2000-3, 2004-5) before the current status of five.[79] It is a very competitive and selective community which one interview participant described as "a mafia" in a "dog-eat-dog world."[80] The transport community comprised four air combat support squadrons and each operated aircraft with specialized roles.[81] COs of these squadrons then vied for command of an air base that housed fixed-wing aircraft, namely Tengah (TAB), Paya Lebar (PLAB), and Changi (CAB) which are located in the west, central, and east of Singapore respectively. For members of the smaller helicopter community their ascension commenced at one of five operational squadrons and one operational detachment stationed at Sembawang Air Base (SBAB) in the north of Singapore.

While an air base commander is technically a one-star appointment, incumbents have usually remained as COL. Only three commanders at TAB have bucked this trend. Two were en-route to serve as the Defence Attaché at the Singapore Embassy in Washington (DA Washington).[82] The third officer was forwarded to BG shortly before he assumed command of TAB.[83] A fourth officer was somewhat of an aberration as he commanded the same air base twice and earned his star in a staff billet before the second tour.[84] One interview participant explained why so few officers made BG while serving as an air base commander:

> "In terms of established rank a division commander in the army and the base commander in the air force are both one-star but they are not seen as equivalent. But within the 3G air force concept the newly established operational commands are similar to the army divisions and the navy task group. In the past the base commander played a more supporting role in the sense that what you do in peace is not what you do in war. The operational commands now ensure that the commander in peace is also the commander in

[79] Aircraft such as the F-74 Hawker Hunter, A-4 Skyhawk, F-5 Tiger, F-16 Falcon, and F-15 Eagle were operated at various times by 140 SQN (since 1970), 141 SQN (1972-81, 1990-?), 142 (1974-2005), 143 (1975-97, 2000-present), 144 SQN (since 1979), 145 SQN (1984-2003, 2004-present), and 149 SQN (since 1985). See Yang Shunxiong, Sean (ed.), *Air Combat Command: Poised and Deadly* (Singapore: Air Combat Command, Republic of Singapore Air Force, 2009), pp. 100-4, 105-12, 113-7.
[80] Interview No. 16.
[81] 111 Squadron (SQN) provides airborne early warning; 112 SQN (KC-135) extends the RSAF's operational endurance and Area of Operations through air-to-air refuelling capabilities, 121 SQN (Shorts Sky-Van then Fokker-50) supports naval operations with maritime patrol aircraft, and 122 SQN (C-130 Hercules) supports army operations with transport aircraft and aerial delivery options.
[82] BG (RET) Loh Kok Hua was promoted to BG in 1999 during this tour as Commander Tengah Air Base (1998-9). BG (RET) Richard Lim was likewise promoted to BG in 2004 in the same command (2001-5). Both generals were en-route to their last appointment in uniform as Defence Attaché at the Singapore Embassy in Washington.
[83] BG (NS) Ang Aik Hwang, Gary (SAFOS 1986) was promoted to BG in 2005 while serving as Director Policy Office, four days before assuming command of Tengah Air Base (2005-7).
[84] BG (RET) Wong Huat Sern (SAFOS 1983) was promoted to BG in 2004 as DJO. He served as the Commander Sembawang Air Base from 1999-2003 and again from 2006-8.

> war. You are given a stake in plans, in decision making, in ensuring the concept and execution are similar. So with the new command structure you could say it is more deserving of a one-star and the appointments will be seen different across the SAF."[85]

The first two pilots to make general did so as commander and deputy commander of the RSAF in 1987 and 1989 respectively. Between that time and prior to the 2007 RSAF reorganization, most of the pilot generals received their first star as Chief of Staff – Air Staff (1992), Head Air Operations (1997), or in appointments on the JS namely DA Washington and DJO.

Of the 12 AWO generals, seven made BG as Commander of the now defunct Air Defence and Systems Division (ADSD) which was reflagged as Air Defence and Operations Command (ADOC) after changes to the order of battle (sub-units under command) and operational responsibilities.[86] Four others were promoted in staff billets on the JS and one from air base command. The path to the helm of ADSD mirrored that of an army division with the squadron-brigade-division template as a normal route of advancement. The only difference is that within the RSAF there was only one such division with three subordinate brigades and only a handful of active battalions.[87] The ascension pathway was even narrower as the Commander ADSD usually came from either the Air Defence Brigade (ADB) or the Air Force Systems Brigade (AFSB). The only exception is BG (NS) Gary Ang (SAFOS 1986), an AWO (C3) whose command appointments mirrored a pilot's with service as CO 111 SQN (an airborne early-warning squadron) and Commander TAB.[88]

The third group of military elites within the RSAF comprised the Air Engineering Officers (AEOs). The first AEO made BG in a Joint billet but since 2001 the remaining three have earned their star (or equivalent) as Head Air Logistics (HAL) Department. This billet has the longest continuation of appointees promoted to BG/ME8 among the four heads of logistics at the service and Joint levels.[89] This

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[85] Interview No. 16.
[86] BG (RET) Yam Ah Mee was promoted to BG in 1997 while Chief of Staff – Air Staff (1995-7) with an eight-month overlap as Commander Air Defence and Systems Division (1997-8). BG (NS) Tan Meng Dui (SAFOS 1986) was promoted to BG in 2005 while serving as Head Air Training Department seven days before assuming command of the Air Defence and Systems Division/ Air Defence and Operations Command (2005-7).
[87] The brigades are: 1) Air Defence Brigade (with 160, 163, or 165 SQN) for medium-range air defence coverage over Singapore; 2) Air Force Systems Brigade (with 201, 203 SQN, and other classified units) which acts as the 'eyes and ears' of the RSAF; 3) the Divisional Air Defence Artillery Brigade (with 3, 6, 9, 18, and other reserve battalions) provides a short-range air defence coverage for the army's divisions. See "Heritage, Heartware and Hardware," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 94 (2005), p. 16; and Augustine Khoo (ed. Chairman), *ADSD: 20 Years of Integrated Air Defence Operations* (Singapore: Air Defence Systems Division, 1999).
[88] See "14th Commander for Tengah Air Base," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 95 (2005), p. 26.
[89] Even though all four heads of logistics at the service and joint levels have been one-star billets it has only been the norm for the RSAF's logistics head to receive the commensurate rank. For the other appointments there have been but few exceptions. Jway Ching Hua made RADM1 in 2000 while HNL (1996-2002); Pang Hee Hon made BG in 2000 as HJL (2000-4); Lim Feng, Philip, made BG in 2005 as HJL (2005-7), and;

highlighted the importance of engineering and logistics as a critical part of RSAF capabilities. The air force was once plagued by flying accidents as a result of shortcomings in engineering support and/or pilot training. This reached crisis point in the 1980s when at its height five A-4 fighter/ground-attack aircraft were lost.[90] The first HAL to make one-star, BG (RET) Lim Yeow Beng, then a CPT and staff officer in Air Logistics Department (ALD) recalled the harsh lessons learned:

> "There was an urgent need to investigate and find out the root causes of the accidents. On the other hand, we also had to update the operators on the findings and recovery actions, so as to help restore confidence in the A-4 flee in the aftermath. In fact, one of the key lessons learnt was the need for close integration between operations and logistics, not only in a crisis like this, but in day-to-day operations too."[91]

The crucial role played by air engineering and logistics was by no means less than those who took to the skies. In fact the lives of the latter literally depend on the quality of the former. The drive for quality at the expense of quantity proved difficult but necessary as:

> "While the technical cause of the Skyhawk crashes was the ageing J65 engine, a key lesson learnt was in logistics management. One of the concerns was the inadequacy of maintenance competence and supervision, attributed to the dilution of skilled manpower in a period of expanding [ORBAT] (Order of Battle) and operational demands. Depth of skill was inadequate and the quality control system was stretched."[92]

Since then, Air Engineering and Logistics (AEL) units with their comparatively large numbers of engineers and technicians vis-à-vis the army and navy have ensured the airworthiness of all RSAF aircraft. Defects have been minimised to a point such that non-engineering factors such as human error and 'nature' (e.g. birds, lightning) are the most probable cause(s) of accidents.

The AEO ascension pathway towards the vocation's pinnacle rank of BG/ME8 is the flattest and narrowest of all RSAF vocations. This was certainly the case before the 2007 reorganization. The various junior engineering billets supporting the squadrons at air bases to staff appointments across the sections and branches of ALD converged to the all-important post of CO Air Logistics Squadron (ALS) at an air base.[93] The

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Tan Peng Kuan made BG in 2013 as Commander Combat Service Support Command (2010-present) which oversees the readiness of the army's logistics (supply, engineering maintenance, transport, medical, and ammunition) capabilities.

[90] The SAF also suffered fatalities from helicopter accidents in Singapore (1982, 1991) and Brunei (1983, 1987).

[91] Leow Meng Fai et al., *Super Skyhawks: The RSAF A-4 Story* (Singapore: Tengah Air Base, Republic of Singapore Air Force, 2006), p. 46.

[92] *At the leading edge: 30 years of RSAF logistics* (Singapore: Published for the Ministry of Defence by Times Editions, 1999), p. 185.

[93] Other units such as the former ADSD and Tactical Air Support Command (TASC), which was the predecessor of today's UAV Command, also received support from their dedicated ALS.

importance of TAB to the RSAF was further highlighted as it was where three of the last four HAL served their respective ALS tours.[94] The next post after ALS command was one of four Deputy HAL appointments with each responsible for a specialization in aviation engineering and air logistics. These posts have grown to the current six as the RSAF assets become more diverse and technologically complex.[95] A successor to the incumbent HAL is normally selected from one of the deputies.

The 2007 RSAF reorganization into five operational commands strengthened the warfighting capabilities of the RSAF and also redesigned the cookie-cutter pathways of ascension toward generalship for pilots, AWOs, and AEOs. The first test of squadron command remained quintessential but ascension now seemed to include leading specialist groups and operational commands which corresponded roughly in size and seniority to the army's brigade and division, and the navy's squadron/flotilla and fleet. Current practices indicated three of the five commands are billets for promotion to BG. The first is ADOC which is the "high readiness core" responsible for operations in times of peace and "ensures the development and operational readiness of the command and control and ground-based air defence units of the RSAF."[96] Despite its metamorphosis from ADSD and change in nomenclature, the key functions provided by ADB and AFSB are retained.[97] Their importance for AWOs as a key ascension billet remained intact and was bolstered by the addition of a third active brigade within ADOC.[98] However, unlike ADSD, both pilots and AWOs have led ADOC which refuted any AWO monopoly on the appointment. The second is Air Combat Command (ACC) which is the sharp-edge of the RSAF with fixed-wing assets under Fighter Group and Transport Group respectively. Thus far only fighter pilots have led ACC. Finally, the once-prime air base command billet has faded in importance but the four bases remained the centre-piece of the Air Power Generation Command (APGC) which sustains the RSAF's ability to fight through the launch, recovery, and turn-around of aircraft. Like ACC, only fighter pilots have helmed APGC.

The remaining two commands seem destined to remain as 'senior' COL billets until additional stars are allocated to the RSAF. For the time being this is unlikely because their peacetime roles are to 'raise, train, sustain' sub-units which are allocated to support other SAF units during operations. Participation Command (PC) supported

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[94] BG (RET) Lim Yeow Beng was CO ALS TAB (1991-3), BG (RET) Tsoi Mun Heng was CO ALS SBAB (1998-2001), ME8 (RET) Lee Ling Wee was CO ALS TAB (2004-6). Incumbent HAEL ME7 Francis Cheong was CO ALS TAB (2006-7).
[95] The six deputy HALs are responsible for: 1) Planning and Control; 2) Engineering; 3) Electronics and Weapons; 4) Systems; 5) Material; and 6) Aircraft.
[96] "Organisational Restructuring – The New RSAF Commands," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 107 (Special Issue 2008), p. 11.
[97] Air Surveillance and Control Group (ASCG) with 203 SQN and Unit 8043 under command replaced the former Air Force Systems Brigade (AFSB) while Air Defence Group (ADG) succeeded the Air Defence Brigade (ADB).
[98] The Air Operations Control Group (AOCG) was formerly the Air Force Operations Group (AFOG).

the army and navy with rotary aircraft (Helicopter Group), mobile command posts (Tactical Air Support Group), and short-range air defence coverage (Divisional Air Defence Group). UAV Command (UC) oversaw the development and operational-readiness of the SAF's UAV capabilities and its three squadrons supported SAF requirements.[99] Although UC is a brigade-sized command its importance to the future development of the RSAF is clear and a notable billet in general ascension. Every officer at the helm of UC (or its predecessor the Tactical Air Support Command) since 2005 has made BG.[100]

There are early indicators that more senior RSAF billets are beginning to be 'vocation-free' which allowed officers regardless of vocation to reach the apex of the RSAF. One general provided this straight-forward explanation:

> "When you are the top guy you don't have all the expertise. Even within the ranks of pilots. There are specializations within the fighter, transport, and helicopter communities. Leadership is about understanding the organization, the people, and asking questions to everyone to make sure things are done properly. You must be prepared to learn and listen. Be humble. War plans are already in place with specialized staff in place to assist so there is no need to be so fixated with a certain vocation to be chief (of air force). Certain vocations need to break the mentality of the 'ruling class'. Just because you are paid more it does not mean you are more important. It simply reflects the function of supply and demand. It does not mean you have the right to promotion. With this, the question became: 'If we have or were allocated a certain number of stars, who do we give it to?'"[101]

In fact, with current trends in UAV development one should not be surprised if pilots (in the traditional sense) become redundant before their AWO and AEO counter-parts.

How has this impacted the ascension pathways to generalship? First, there are three operational commands – ADOC, ACC, and APGC – for pilots to make BG in a command billet. Previously this was only possible as CAF or Commander TAB as most pilots made general in staff billets on the Air Staff or JS. Second, with commander ADOC opened to both flyers and non-flyers the latter seemed to have lost the only command billet they once monopolized as Commander ADSD. However, AWOs need not worry as closer inspection revealed that their vocations have increasing broken appointments long-dominated by pilots. For example, COL (RET) Soh Poh Theen (SAFOS 1984) was the first non-pilot and AWO (C3) appointed CO of a flying squadron

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[99] "Organisational Restructuring – The New RSAF Commands," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 107 (Special Issue 2008), p. 11; and Wayne Tan, "Persistent Surveillance: The New Heron 1 UAV," *Air Force News*, Issue No. 122 (2012), pp. 8-9.
[100] The officers include Richard Pereira (2005-7) who paved the way for TASC's transition to UC in 2007 and made BG as Commander ACC in 2008; Sarbjit Singh (2007-8) who made BG as Commander APGC in 2011; Lim Tuang Liang (2008-10) who made BG as Commander ACC in 2013, and; Neo Hong Keat (2010-1) who made BG as HAO in 2012.
[101] Interview No. 25.

when he led 111 SQN (1995-6).[102] BG Tan Meng Dui (SAFOS 1986) bucked the trend of pilots serving as Head Air Operations when the AWO (C3) officer held the post for nine months in 2007. Similarly, MG Hoo Cher Mou broke another ceiling when he was the first non-flyer appointed CAF in 2013. Third, the reorganization has also impacted those responsible for keeping all the RSAF's mechanical assets in top condition. The structure of APGC as a 'force generator' has enhanced the importance and billets available for AEOs. The command ceiling for AEO is no longer the ALS. Instead, it commenced with specialized squadron (i.e. ground logistics, operational maintenance, specialist maintenance) and then onward to an Air Engineering and Logistics Group which oversaw these squadrons at an air base. Deputy HALs have also been appointed deputy commander and commander of air bases. At the apex is the one-star billet of Head Air Engineering and Logistics (HAEL) Organization as HAL is now known after the nomenclature was appropriately changed in October 2012. While it is early days yet there are no rational reasons to prevent the appointment of an AEO as commander APGC.

7.6 SAF and MINDEF

Key appointments at the SAF HQ (Annex O) and within MINDEF (Annex P) offered a 'fourth avenue' after the three services to earn their first star. It is at this level that the first nine officers made general between 1965 and 1987 before the army was reorganized in 1988 into a separate service with a COA instead of the CDF at the helm. Since then, 28 officers (13 army, two navy, 13 air force) and the six MOs (one air force, three army, two navy) for a total of 34 have earned their first star at this highest echelon of the defence establishment. There are differences between the SAF and MINDEF billets of note. First, MINDEF billets are *usually* held by civilians but 'hybrid' positions can be filled by civilian or military personnel. These billets addressed issues in defence administration, policy, and technology and reported to the Permanent Secretaries for Defence (PS (D)) and defence development (PS (DD)). SAF-level billets in contrast fell under the ambit of the CDF and dealt with the warfighting capabilities of the SAF. Both the PS (D) and CDF are responsible to political appointees at the apex of the defence establishment. Second, some billets have dual MINDEF-SAF reporting lines. Most notable are the Chief of Staff – Joint Staff (COS-JS) and the Future Systems

[102] Goh Yong Kiat, *The Cutting Edge of the Air Force: Tengah Air Base: A pictorial history 1939-2001* (Singapore: Tengah Air Base, Republic of Singapore Air Force, 2001), p. 68. Since then several other AWO (C3) such as Ang Aik Hwang, Gary (SAFOS 1986) in 1997-8 and Tan Ying Kiat (SAFOS 1993) in 2005-6 have commanded 111 SQN.

and Technology Architect (FSTA) who reported to the CDF and also had concurrent reporting lines to the PS (D) and PS (DD) respectively.

7.6.1 SAF-level billets

The CDF stands at the apex of all SAF appointments both military and civilian. He is assisted by the COS-JS who coordinates the joint principal staff functions covering manpower, intelligence, operations, logistics, plans and transformation, and communications and information systems. The COS-JS can be considered the fifth most senior military appointment trailing only members of the elite nucleus comprising the three-star CDF and two-star service chiefs. Three other one-star billets external to the JS also report to the CDF, namely the CMC, COMDT SAFTI MI, and the Future Systems and Technology Architect (FSTA).

The JS supported the CDF to lead the SAF as an institution and exercise command over forces in the field. It is responsible for coordinating the staff work of departments with the SAF HQ and the additional assets that come under the CDF's direct control in times of emergency which otherwise fell under peace-time administration of the respective services.[103] The conception of the JS came to fruition when MINDEF went public with the JOPD in 1983 and Joint Intelligence Directorate (JID) in 1984.[104] JOPD's subordinate departments – namely Joint Plans Department (JPD), Joint Operations Department (JOD), and Joint Communications and Electronics Department (JCED) – followed suit in 1986.[105] The Joint Manpower Department (JMPD) and Joint Logistics Department (JLD) rounded-out the five main departments of the JS. The Directors of JOPD and JID respectively started out as one-star billets while the subordinate department heads were held by officers in the rank of LTC and COL. Over time this changed as the SAF successfully eradicated service rivalries and the ranks held by appointment holders reflected the both the levels of responsibilities and joint capabilities attained. The established-ranks for DJOPD and DJID were set at two-star which essentially placed them on par with the service chiefs but only one officer wore a second star while DJOPD.[106] Three officers earned their first

[103] For example the Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF).
[104] "SAF should be the concern of every Singaporean," *The Straits Times*, 16 April 1983, p. 14.
[105] "JOPD – Playing a key role," *Pioneer* (June 1987), p. 19; and Sherlyn Quek, "SAF Joint Staff celebrates 25 years and beyond," *Cyberpioneer*, 18 September 2008.
[106] The only exception is Ng Yat Chung (SAFOS 1980) who made MG as DJOPD/COS-JS (1998-2000) in 1999 and was later appointed COA (2000-3) and subsequently CDF (2003-7).

star as DJOPD after the 1988 reorganization but since 1995 the appointment has been a *post one-star* billet where the appointee earned his star in a prior appointment.[107]

The role of DJID has had a more storied evolution from establishment until its current manifestation as Director Military Intelligence (DMI) in charge of the Military Intelligence Organization (MIO). Until 2012, there were two other billets among its various subordinate departments where officers have been forwarded to flag-rank. The first is as DA Washington although the rank associated with the appointment has oscillated in seniority. For three officers it was a post one-star billet but another four first made BG in the appointment, three of them as L/BG.[108] The second appointment is the Military Adviser at the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations (MA UN). This proved ephemeral with only one officer earning his first star in this capacity and for his successor it was a third tour as a general-rank officer.[109] Every officer appointed MA UN since 2007 has remained in the rank of COL. In the last decade the importance of military intelligence has increased in tandem with the SAF's transformation and as part of an interagency approach to possible threats from both state and non-state actors. This has been evident through the acquisition and reorganization of intelligence assets across the three services and the establishment of the Intelligence Officer as a vocation instead of a skill set that officers specialized in when required. In 2013 the testament of the role played by the intelligence community was underlined when the DMI received a second-star and concomitantly allowed his subordinate Head Joint Intelligence Directorate (HJI) to make the equivalent of BG.[110] It is unknown whether the DMI's promotion reflected the responsibilities of the appointment and capabilities of MIO, or in time will simply prove another aberration in SAF promotions.

Flag officership is also possible at the departmental level. Five were forwarded to BG as DJO who is responsible for joint doctrine and its concomitant manifestations as operational plans which enabled the SAF to apply tri-service solutions to a spectrum of missions.[111] DJO commenced as a 'pre-brigade/squadron command' staff

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[107] 1) Yeo Yong Boon, George (SAFOS 1973) made BG as DJOPD (1986-8) in 1988; 2) Lee Hsien Yang (SAFOS 1976) made BG as DJOPD (1991-4)/COS-GS in 1992; and 3) Goh Yong Siang made BG as DJOPD (1994-5)/COS-AS (1992-5) in 1994.

[108] 1) Sin Boon Wah (DA 1997-2000) made BG as COMD 9 DIV in 1993; 2) Loh Kok Wah (DA 2000-2) made BG as COMD TAB in 1999; 3) Voon Tse-Chow (DA 2002-5) made BG in 2002; 4) Lim Keng Yong, Richard (DA 2005-8) made BG as COMD TAB in 2004; 5) Cheng Siak Kian (DA 2008-11) made L/BG in 2008 and in 2010 was promoted to BG; 6) Tan Chee Wee (DA 2011-13) made L/BG in 2012; Leong Kum Wah (incumbent DA since 2013) made L/BG in 2013.

[109] Yap Ong Heng (SAFOS 1979) was MA UN from 1999 to 2004 where he made BG in 2000. His successor Leong Yue Kheong, Lawrence, made BG as COMD 9 DIV (1998-2000) in 1999 and subsequently completed tours as COMD TRADOC (2000-4) and MA UN (2004-7).

[110] Lau Cher Loon made ME8 in 2013 as Hd Joint Intelligence Department, a subordinate department of the Military Intelligence Organisation (formerly Joint Intelligence Directorate).

[111] 1) Chua Chwee Koh (SAFOS 1982) made BG as DJO (1998-2001) in 2001 en-route to COMD 21 DIV/CGO 53 days later; 2) Ng Chee Khern (SAFOS 1985) made BG as DJO (2003-4) in 2003; 3) Wong

appointment (1986-90) but evolved to 'pre-division/air base/fleet command' (1990-2003) and has since become a 'post-division/air base/fleet command' appointment and thus a *post one-star* billet. Two earned their first star as Head Joint Planning and Transformation Department (HJPT), the present manifestation of JPD, which is responsible for budget allocation and future infrastructure and manpower requirements at the SAF-level. This seems somewhat of an aberration given HJP has long been a 'pre-division/air base/fleet command' COL's billet.[112] Furthermore, the promotions were non-consecutive and the last three HJPs have remained as COLs.

Two army officers also made BG as Head Joint Logistics Department (HJL) from 2000 to 2007 while executing the responsibilities to meet logistical requirements at the SAF-level.[113] These promotions occurred when an initiative was taken to restructure JLD from a staff department into a tri-service command. However, realities indicated the optimal solution was for the individual services to run their own logistics and for JLD to utilize such expertise when required. Since 2007, the HJL has remained as COL and at times held the concurrent appointment as commander of a Divisional Support Command (DISCOM), a role which is accountable to an army division commander. Finally, since 2006 the post of Head Joint Communications and Information Systems Department (HJCISD), which evolved from JECD, has allowed two army signals officers to make BG.[114] This critical part of the military's 'central nervous system' facilitated inter-service communication and enabled shared information.[115]

There are also three one-star billets at the SAF-level external from the JS. COMDT SAFTI MI is a post one-star tri-service billet established in 1994 with responsibility for all formal military leadership training and education in Singapore, from section commanders through to the senior commanders program. Only one officer was promoted to BG as COMDT of the then-SCSC a sub-unit of SAFTI MI.[116] Similarly, the FSTA who headed the Future Systems and Technology Directorate (FSTD) which was inaugurated in February 2003 is also a post one-star billet. FSTD, as its name suggests, is responsible for the research and development of advanced technological systems for the SAF with funding of up to 1% of the annual defence

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Huat Sern (SAFOS 1983) made BG as DJO (2004-6) in 2004; 4) Ng Chee Meng made BG as DJO (2006-9) in 2008; and 5) Ngien Hoon Ping (SAFOS 1988) made BG as DJO (2010-13) in 2011.

[112] 1) Ravinder Singh s/o Harchand Singh made BG as Hd JPTD (2004-5) in 2004 and assumed command of 6 DIV 18 months on in January 2006; and 2) Leong Weng Keong, Joseph (SAFOS 1990) made RADM1 as Hd JPTD (2007-9) in 2008 and assumed command of the RSN Fleet 17 months later in December 2009.

[113] 1) Pang Hee Hon (SAFOS 1979) made BG as HJL (2000-4) in 2000; and 2) Lim Feng, Philip, made BG as HJL (2005-7)/ACGS (Log) (2000-5) in 2005.

[114] 1) Koh Tee Hian, David, made BG as Hd JCISD (2004-6) in 2006; and 2) Lee Shiang Long made BG as Hd JCISD (2006-13) in 2009.

[115] JCISD comprises an IT Infrastructure Office, C4 Plans Group, and C4 Operations Group.

[116] Lim Kah Kee made BG as COMDT SCSC in 2000 en-route to COMD 3 DIV four months later.

budget. The directorate is staffed by both military officers drawn from the three services and civilians.

Finally, six MOs have made one-star as CMC with the first in 1994.[117] This is the sole one-star billet for MOs and reflected both the importance of the SAFMC – arguably the most decorated and operationally experienced outfit in the SAF – despite its small numbers relative to other formations. The CMC does not command the SAFMC as a holistic entity because the majority of its units are decentralised in support of their respective services. That said the CMC is still responsible for tri-service units at the SAF-level and as adviser to the CDF on all medical issues related to the SAF.

The pathway to CMC began with the completion of a recognized medical degree, houseman attachment at a government hospital, and pre-commissioning MOCC which focused primarily on preparing NSF doctors for service in the army's various and numerous medical units.[118] For regular MOs in the early days they had a less structured path simply because there was none in place. This was hardly surprising since the SAFMC, formerly called the SAF Medical Services, started as an independent department under MINDEF's manpower division.[119] The early pioneers built expertise from scratch in areas relevant to the respective services and the military profession in general. The number of regular MOs was, however, very small underlined by lengthy tours, concurrent appointments, and some held almost every appointment available.

Various initiatives were implemented to attract doctors into a military career. The MO Career Scheme was introduced in 1986 through a six-year contract in a '3+3' format. The first three were on supernumerary secondment to MOH to master a selected specialization. The next three years were in uniformed service although these junior MOs (usually in the rank of MAJ) also spend two days weekly at hospitals to maintain currency or as part-time university lecturers.[120] The Advanced MOs Course was implemented in 1988 to further develop MOs as military officers and their ability "to plan and command medical support for large scale operations and to coordinate this with other arms of the SAF."[121] In 1991 MOH attachments on a '3+3' format were extended to MOs who opted for a second six-year contract allowing them to become

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[117] 1) Dr Lim Meng Kin (Aviation Medicine specialist) made BG as CMC (1986-95) in 1994; 2) Dr Lee Kim Hock, Lionel (Sports Medicine) made BG as CMC (1995-2001) in 1998; 3) Dr Wong Yue Sie (Orthopaedic) made BG as CMC (2001-6) in 2003; 4) Dr Wong Chee Meng, John (Psychiatry) made RADM1 as CMC (2006-9) in 2007; 5) Dr Seet Hun Yew, Benjamin (Ophthalmology) made BG as CMC (2009-11) in 2009; and 6) Dr Kang Wee Lee (Ear, Nose, and Throat) made RADM1 as CMC (2011-present) in 2013.
[118] "The making of the SAF doctor," *Pioneer* (December 1988), pp. 30-3. This includes but is not restricted to the Battalion Casualty Station (BCS) which supports a battalion; a medical company which supports a brigade; and a Combat Support Hospital (CSH) which supports a division. The MO also serves as brigade and division staff officers.
[119] "Medical Services' mixed bag of miracles," *Pioneer* (May 1976), p. 6.
[120] Specialists in oral surgery, psychiatry, occupational medicine, and aviation medicine were also part-time lecturers at NUS. See "Operational Medical Unit," *Pioneer* (January 1989), pp. 8-11; and "SAF Medical Professionals," *Pioneer* (February 1989), pp. 28-9.
[121] "SAF Doctors: Grooming for Command," *Pioneer* (August 1989), p. 54.

full-fledged specialists (usually in the rank of LTC) with salaries commensurate with peers in the public medical sector.[122] A SAF Local Medicine Scholarship (LMS) was later introduced somewhat belatedly with recipients bonded for 12 years service in return. This has somewhat alleviated the manpower crunch through a steady pipeline of regular MOs in the ranks of CPT to LTC. As one CMC explained:

> "The SAF awards six to eight LMS scholarships annually. For a six-year cycle that would be 36 to 48 officers. Over 12 years around 60 to 80. Around half of each cycle will be on basic and advance specialist training. The program for the first twelve years is very structured with progression through various job grades and appointments. There is no prescribed path, no cookie-cutter <smiles>, for advancement on the military side of things. There is flexibility to align individuals to work of significance depending on ability, vacancies, competency, and manning requirements. Every individual is managed due to the small number (of regular MOs) … There is no specialization bias but certain specialized training helps to prepare an officer for the job because there are inherent advantages. For example, if an individual specializes in say public health, he or she would be better for an appointment dealing with public health. Someone with a background as a surgeon may not have the exposure. The key issue is to find job match in terms of core competency and organizational needs. Sure, if you are intelligent you can overcome the challenges. The question is also whether you are willing to learn 'new tricks' and draw on the background of past experiences."[123]

Certain appointments indicated an MO checked the right boxes for ascension although there are no 'cookie-cutter' pathways into the upper echelons of the SAFMC. Examples included the army's Soldier Performance Centre, the Naval Underwater Medical Centre, the Aeromedical Centre, and some SAF-level medical units such as the Medical Classification Centre at CMPB, the inter-ministry Military Medicine Institute, and the SAF Medical Training Institute (formerly School of Military Medicine).[124] There are also important staff appointments such as Head General Staff Branch of the medical HQ at the respective service and SAF levels, and the two now-defunct Senior MO (Healthcare) billets. After this only the quintessential billets as chief of the respective medical services remained from whom one of the three was selected as CMC.

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[122] An enhanced specialist allowance for these specialists (in the rank of 'senior' MAJs and above) was also introduced ranging from $570 to $2,600 to reflect market rates. "Specialist SAF doctors," *Pioneer* (May 1991), p. 21.
[123] Interview No. 18.
[124] The Naval Underwater Medical Centre was formerly called the Naval Medicine and Hyperbaric Centre. It was first established as the Naval Medicine Research Centre (NMRC). The Military Medicine Institute (MMI) was established in March 1998 and is a joint collaboration between MINDEF and the MOH to optimise resources and provide specialist medical and dental services to the SAF. See Gail Wan, "Keeping the SAF fighting fit: The Military Medicine Institute," *Cyberpioneer*, 19 August 2004; and Gan, "Aviation Medicine," pp. 324-9.

7.6.2 MINDEF-level billets

While SAF-level appointments traced their way to the CDF, MINDEF billets lead to the PS (D) and at times directly to the Minister of Defence. The military elites in MINDEF often held hybrid appointments in the sense that these could be filled by either civilians or uniformed personnel.[125] The PS (D) and PS (DD) have been exclusively held by civilians and only one was a former career SAF officer.[126] The most senior hybrid post is Director Security and Intelligence Division (SID) who is responsible for the collection and analysis of external intelligence and reported directly to the Minister of Defence.[127] A uniformed officer first held this billet and made BG in 1995.[128] He retired from the SAF mid-tenure and later relinquishing the appointment as a civilian. His successor was also a uniformed officer who held this post both as a post one-star billet and subsequently as a civilian.[129] The two Director SIDs since then have been retired two-star officer who served in a civilian capacity.[130]

The next level below consisted of three Deputy Secretary (DS) appointments which were formed in the mid-1980s to handle the defence establishment's increasingly complex tasks and structure.[131] DS (Administration) has always been a civilian who headed the DMG and provided oversight for personnel and financial matters in MINDEF and the SAF.[132] Subordinate departments included OPC, which is headed by a LTC and managed the careers of scholar-officers, Wranglers, and officers in the rank of COL and above. DS (Technology) led the Defence Technology and Resource Office (DTRO) which guided military capability development through indigenous defence industries and foreign partnerships.[133] Only one officer has made BG in this capacity

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[125] One exception seems to be that post of Director Military Security Department (MSD).
[126] Ho Hak Ean, Peter (SAFOS 1973) was a RSN officer (1972-89) who entered the Administrative Service upon retirement and served as PS (Defence Development) (1995-2000) and PS (Defence) (2000-4) MINDEF.
[127] Chew and Tan, *Creating the Technology Edge*, p. 16.
[128] Choi Shing Kwok (SAFOS 1978) made BG as DIR SID (1996).
[129] Chee Wee Kiong served as Chief of Staff (2004-5) and subsequently DIR SID (2005-10). He made BG in 2000 as COMD ADSD (2000-2) was also COS-AS (2001-4); DJOPD (2003-4).
[130] Ng Chee Khern enlisted into the SAF in 1984 and retired in 2009 including six years as a general officer and te last three as CAF. He was appointed DIR SID in 2010. Leong Weng Keong, Joseph, enlisted in 1990 and retied in 2014 including last six years as an admiral and the last three as DMI. He was appointed DIR SID in 2014.
[131] The deputy secretary (DS) appointments in MINDEF have continually evolved. Starting from one billet it grew to four billets in the early 1980s with DS (Air Force), DS (Development and Engineering), DS (Finance and Administration), and DS (Resources Management). In 1986 this was reorganized into Senior DS (Technology), DS (Personnel and Policy), DS (Development), and DS (Policy). See "New jobs for 4 deputy secretaries at Mindef," *The Straits Times*, 15 February 1986, p. 32.
[132] The Defence Management Group includes the Manpower Division, Professional Services (Defence Psychology Department, SAF Counselling Centre, Centre for Heritage Services), MINDEF Scholarship Centre, Defence Finance Organization, MINDEF Information Systems Division, Legal Services, and Internal Audit Department.
[133] The Defence Technology and Resource Office includes the Defence Industry and Systems Office, Industry Group, Systems Group, and the Shared Services Management Department. Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA), DSO National Laboratories, and Defence Research and Technology Office (DRTO).

although other military elites have either held the appointment as a post one-star billet in transition towards retirement, or as a civilian.[134] One officer also served as Director Defence Industry and Systems Office, a subordinate office of DTRO, as a post one-star billet.[135] Finally, there is DS (Policy) who headed MINDEF's Defence Policy Group (DPG) and reported directly to PS (D).[136] Only one officer made BG as DS (Policy) although others have held the appointment as post one-star billets.[137] Four officers also received their first star heading a subordinate department in DPG. Two were at the helm of the Defence Policy Office (DPO) which formulated policies concerning Singapore's defence interests and relations.[138] This is, however, not precedence setting as Director (Policy) DPO has been a civilian, a COL, and a post one-star billet.[139] Finally, two officers made BG as Director Military Security Department (DIR MSD) although it is a post one-star billet for the incumbent.[140]

7.7 Summary

Ascension into the Aristocracy of Armed Talent reflected the processes which allowed officers to progress in rank and the underlying structure which determined the distribution of the rank hierarchy. From 1965 to 1977 the SAF usually had one active Singaporean general-grade officer which elucidated the nascent state of capability development and a civilian leadership conscious to ensure its primacy over the military. The community of active military elites expanded slowly as the SAF matured with key developments such as the creation of the JS in the early 1980s and a separate army headquarters in 1988. Since then, the exponential albeit capped growth of flag officers has been a reflection of the respective formations' warfighting capabilities, critical role

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[134] Wesley Gerard D'Aranjo (SAFOS 1972) made BG as DS (Technology) in 1992. RADM2 (RET) Lim Cherng Yih, Richard, was CNV (1996-9) and later DS (Technology) from 2000-4; then BG (NS) Ravinder Singh s/o Harchand Singh was COS-JS (2007-9) before serving as DS (Technology) from 2009-11 and later recalled to active service as COA (2011-present); and BG (NS) Tan Meng Dui (SAFOS 1986) was DMI (2008-11) before appointment as the incumbent DS (Technology) since 2011.
[135] BG Tsoi Mun Heng was DIR Defence Industry and Systems Office (2007-9) and earned his star in the capacity of HAL (2003-7) in 2006.
[136] The Defence Policy Group includes the Defence Policy Office, Military Security Department, MINDEF Public Affairs (the Director is usually a COL), Defence Media Centre, Nexus (responsible for National Education and led by a COL), Plans Department, and Engagement Department.
[137] Tan Yong Soon (SAFOS 1974) made BG in 1993 while serving as DS (Policy) from 1992-5. BG (NS) Ang Aik Hwang, Gary (SAFOS 1986) served in this capacity while in uniform from 2008-11 and continued as a civilian until 2012. RADM1 Lai Chung Han (SAFOS 1992) entered admiralship in 2011 as the RSN Fleet Commander (2011-2) and is the incumbent DS (Policy) since 2012.
[138] Ang Aik Hwang, Gary (SAFOS 1988) made BG as DIR (Policy) DPO in 2005 en-route to COMD TAB; and Ng Chee Peng (SAFOS 1989) made RADM1 as DIR (Policy) DPO in 2007 prior to assuming command of the RSN Fleet six months later.
[139] Mr Ong Wee Kiat, Philip, was DIR (Policy) DPO from 2007-8. COL Lai Chung Han (SAFOS 1992) succeeded Ong and held the post from 2008-11. The incumbent Cheng Siak Kian assumed the appointment in 2011 as a post one-star billet having been promoted to L/BG in 2008 and BG in 2010 while DA Washington (2008-11).
[140] Lee Fook Sun (SAFOS 1975) and Jek Kian Yee (SAFOS 1983) made BG as DIR MSD in 1996 and 2000 respectively. The incumbent Koh Tee Hian, David, made BG in 2006 as Hd JCISD (2004-6).

played by staff departments, or the relevance and importance of the specific diplomatic mission to Singapore.

Ascension pathways have been etched into the structure but while some seem fairly established others have proven ephemeral, even *sui generis*, as the importance and responsibilities of specific billets evolved. For the army general the well-trodden path of battalion, brigade, and division command seemed set to continue. For the admiral this was captaincy of a ship followed by possible command of squadrons, flotillas, and eventually the RSN fleet. The 2009 restructuring of COSCOM into MSTF has provided a second command billet for admiralship. The pathway for air force generals depended much on their vocations. Prior to the RSAF's 2007 restructuring into operational commands, the requisite pathway for pilots normally included squadron (usually fighter) and air base command but unlike army and navy counterparts their first star usually came in a staff billet. Similarly, air force engineers – the only engineering vocation in the SAF which has consistently made one-star – ascended through squadron followed by staff billets. On the other hand, the pathway for air warfare officers (both air defence and weapons systems) included squadron, brigade, and culminated in command of the sole air defence and systems division. The new operational commands altered the ascension paths and three of the five enabled pilots to make BG in command billets. Air engineering officers also have a wider variety of billets which included air base command. While air warfare officers seemed to have conceded monopoly over division command, their vocation pushed new frontiers when one of them was appointed CAF, a billet that has traditionally been held by pilots.

Beyond the three services the billets at the SAF and MINDEF levels have afforded close to one in three of the military elites the opportunity to enter the ranks of the military elite. It is only at the SAF level where MOs earned theirs in the capacity as CMC. It is also as Head Joint Communications and Information Systems Department on the JS where army signals officers now have a one-star billet to their distinct advantage. In other posts such as Head Joint Plans and Transformation Department it is anyone's guess if the appointee will actually receive a star. Some officers have also earned their first stars in hybrid MINDEF posts which could either be held by military officers or civilian bureaucrats. In some cases these promotions have proven *sui generis* and there seems to be a conscious attempt to ensure that the 'star' is a reflection of abilities in the profession-of-arms and not mere reward for administrative competence.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Why were Singapore's military elites motivated to sign-on as regular officers? Why were they committed to stay-on in the SAF? How did they ascend the rank hierarchy in terms of processes and force structure? The aim of this study was to address these research questions though the 'lived' realities and social contexts of 28 retired generals and admirals whose voices filled the previous chapters. Never before has Singapore's military elite been examined in such detail. This conclusion summarises the empirical evidence that addressed the three central questions, and offers answers that are – for reasons explained – compelling but also inherently and unavoidably limited by the research design. It goes on to discuss the theoretical implications of the study and to suggest areas for further research.

Motivation

The motivation to join the military is a story that began before Singapore achieved self-governance as a British Colony and subsequently independence from Malaysia. For the SAF's pioneering generals their common reasons were grounded in a hardy upbringing where the outdoors and the playground were one and the same. The military appealed to the sense of adventure and the uniform spoke of noble service even though a stigma was generally attached to the profession-of-arms. Few also had an ambition or a clear-cut idea of what they wanted to do in life. Yet this is where commonalities were joined by individual nuances. The late BG (RET) Thomas Campbell joined the Straits Settlement Volunteer Force in 1940 when Britain was already at war in Europe. When Singapore fell Campbell paid the price of uniformed service, first in forced labour on the infamous railway of death and subsequently internment at Changi prison. For BG (RET) Patrick Sim and LG (RET) Winston Choo the opportunity to train at a foreign military college was an extension of school days divided between books, sports, and uniformed activities. Both saw combat as junior officers when the famed 1st Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment, was deployed on operations during *Konfrontasi*.

Singapore's independence in 1965 delivered nationhood unexpectedly. The city state had no hinterland and the only natural resources were its strategic location within the Malacca Straits and the people within its borders. This meant Singapore would not be ignored but the population had sometimes more that divided than united them. Defence was overshadowed by the greater economic concerns of employment,

industrialization, and foreign investments. That changed with the accelerated British withdrawal. Singapore's defence architect Dr Goh Keng Swee made three key decisions against this backdrop in consultation with founding PM Lee Kuan Yew. First, he personally tapped Administrative Officers who were not merely graduates but had the brains, brawn, and requisite character for secondment as regular military officers. They were not promised any reward except to answer a nation's call, serve a pressing need, and entertain an innate interest for uniformed service. BG (RET) Kirpa Ram Vij (commissioned as a part-time volunteer in 1960) and BG (RET) Tan Chin Tiong (commissioned as a national serviceman in 1968) both cut their teeth under Goh's relentless crucible of testing appointments and received their due rewards before returning to the Administrative Service.

Dr Goh's second decision was the creation of SAFTI and Vij played an instrumental role in making the indigenous cradle of the SAF Officer Corps a reality. SAFTI accepted the first cohort of trainees within ten months of independence and 117 were commissioned as officers in July 1967. Among the famed all-regular First Batch alumni included LG (RET) Ng Jui Ping, BG (RET) Gary Yeo, BG (RET) Patrick Choy, BG (RET) Colin Theseira, and BG (RET) Chin Chow Yoon. Together with their peers they laid the foundation for, and proved instrumental in the expansion, development, and modernization of the SAF. Some of these generals were motivated by prospects of doing something new and more interesting that their pre-military occupations (most notably teaching), the competitive starting salaries, and the physical fitness demanded by the rigours of military life. Yet another cited the desire to repay the bursary received for his education and took on the challenges necessary to earn the status as a commissioned officer. Independent of their individual motivations to sign-on nothing quite prepared them for the mental and physical challenges ahead when they walked through the front gates of SAFTI in 1966.

The third of Goh's decisions was the implementation of national service in a stepwise manner in 1967. The first 848 men reported for fulltime NS in August 1967 after which the civil servants and then the most highly educated followed suit. Early teething problems included the small core of regular cadre, infrastructure limitations, and administrative uncertainty over NS eligibility. The latter was clarified by legislature in 1970 for the universal conscription of all eligible males born on or after 1 January 1949. NS has since played a central feature in the career decisions of the military elites. Conscription obligated them to wear the uniform but an overwhelming majority never actively pursued a career in the SAF until they were motivated to do so at various junctures. The 'lived experiences' gleaned from their interviews suggested the dichotomy of motivation into primary and secondary categories. The former included

factors which were necessary and sufficient to sign-on while in contrast the latter were necessary but insufficient reasons.

The first of the five primary motivations were the military scholarships designed to attract the 'best and brightest' from the annual crop of conscripts. The scholar-officers who received the SAF Overseas Scholarship – and later the Overseas Training Award (Graduating) which is presently known as the SAF Merit Scholarship – were educated at the best British and American universities while on a full salary and allowances. It was an opportunity to head overseas, to live independently, and the education and remuneration package would otherwise be beyond reach for the majority. For those who did not receive a military scholarship the SAF was seen as the best opportunity at that point in time for employment. They had already gained some military experiences and in all cases had performed well as conscripts. Most of these officers signed-on only toward the end of their NS, while others were non-military scholars and graduates who chose to serve in the SAF. For medical officers their motivation was not grounded in scholarships or employment opportunities but in an atypical medical career. More lucrative pathways lay elsewhere but the SAF afforded them an avenue to practice medicine in an unconventional and increasingly international environment beyond 'four walls and a patient'. The SAF also attracted engineers and officers in platform-centric vocations keen to gain technical competence and work on cutting-edge technology. Finally, there were the few who harboured genuine interests in the military seeded through a variety of vicarious experiences from an early age.

The first of five secondary motivations was the salary which was attractive to the majority of the military elite. For scholar-officers the salaries and allowances alleviated their respective families' financial needs. For non-graduates it was certainly competitive compared to the other options available. Medical officers would not earn 'a surgeon's pay' but it was pegged to a respectable level. It was the non-military scholars with higher education levels who were disadvantaged but dismal recruitment and retention figures eventually corrected this issue with the drastic salary revisions of 1982. Salaries since then have been pegged to the civil service and private sector with a premium for the arduous and comparably short career. The next motivation is flying. This was cited as a childhood ambition for quite a number of officers but few made the cut as military pilots. In fact, there were no certainties of earning one's 'wings' and all simply started out entertaining the possibility and gave it their best shot.

In contrast to flying, the motivation for a naval career was not as straight forward given the RSN's initial low priority among the three services. Some of the early admirals took up a scholarship offered by the navy, others sought to utilize their

maritime-related skills and education, and the early scholar-officers were channelled into the service. Over time, the strategic importance of the RSN, its strong familial sense among members, and the frequent deployment of naval assets overseas are now motivations for naval service. The SAF also benefitted from those who wanted to 'escape' conscription because of the less than appealing conditions in the army, allowances which paled in comparison to a regular's salary, and sought to better utilize 24 to 30 months of their lives. Finally, the family served as a secondary motivation when encouragement and approval was given for the choice to sign-on. This was not always forthcoming in the earlier days due to the stigma and tough life associated with a military career. This is however less of a concern today.

Commitment

Although officers were motivated – by whatever means – to sign-on, only around a third were committed to remain on active service beyond their initial service obligations. There were many reasons for leaving active duty and the list included the lure of opportunities beyond the SAF, for opportunists the front-loaded benefits were exhausted, the fact that society did not and does not accord the profession-of-arms with adequate respect, discontent with the practice of meritocracy, falling prey to disillusionment and cynicism, and factors unique to individual circumstances. Half of the interview participants considered leaving but decided otherwise for similar reasons to those who never considered leaving. Their reasons for staying-on were an amalgamation of both transactional and transformational commitment.

Transactional commitment was grounded in egotistical considerations where the individual was the ultimate beneficiary of his goals and actions. The first form of this commitment is the legal or contractual obligation to remain in service. This is usually in the form of an initial bond or minimum term of engagement. These varied in length but were around eight (and subsequently revised to six) years for scholar-officers, six for non-scholars and medical officers, and 12 for pilots. Such obligations were invariably extended with attendance at certain additional military courses attended, post-graduate studies, specific postings, and receipt of a meritorious promotion. It was a way to ensure a return on investment and officers who broke such contracts were liable for stiff financial penalties. Remuneration also elicited transactional commitment but not because it was a reason to stay-on in its own right. Instead, it was often because the military paid its officers well enough so that they could concentrate on the tasks at hand and ensured that the family was well taken care of. In fact, some officers considered the SAF salary to be less than what they could confidently

earn in a civilian capacity. The reason why remuneration was for them a non-factor was attributed to the fact that career progression proved more important for the officers. Some made comparisons with peers while others had an inkling of where in the rank hierarchy they should be by a certain age.

While the interview participants showed varying shades of transactional commitment they all converged toward transformational commitment. This reason was anchored in altruistic reasons which sought to benefit and maximise the welfare of others. The first factor was the people they worked with and was underlined by the camaraderie with subordinates, peers, and superiors. Commitment to remain on active duty was about playing their part and not letting down those who depended on them in peace and ultimately on operations if the need arose. This was essential if the military was to be operationally-ready and combat effective yet a few interview participants found reciprocity wanting at times. While the people were important they shared centre stage with commitment to the military profession and the concomitant importance of the sacred mission apportioned to the armed forces. Within the former, the military elites saw it as their personal responsibility as leaders in the field or in staff appointments to ensure that high standards associated with, and demanded of, the profession-of-arms were maintained. Commitment to the mission was symbiotically linked to people and the profession but was more than just having something new and exciting to do. Commitment was in varying degrees about the importance the tasks assigned, the sense of self-fulfilment, and making sure at very least that the defence establishment was no worse off under their watch.

There were instances where commitment was stretched beyond simply remaining on active service. These usually came in the form of hazards inherent to the military profession. While a few of the early generals saw direct combat, most of the risks to life and limb since then have occurred during training accidents or when one pushed the physical limits too far. Such is the price of realistic training and leadership by example. It must be highlighted that categories which surfaced for the motivation to sign-on and the commitment to stay-on revealed by the interview participants might not necessarily be different from those in the rank of colonel and below. Their 'lived experiences' could in fact be even more limited than the very much larger pool of non-military elites.

Ascension

This study not only advanced the understanding of career motivation and commitment among the most senior officers in Singapore's defence establishment. It

also examined the keys processes of performance appraisals and potential estimation which in-turn determined promotions and postings, and the force structure on which the pathways for officer ascension took place. The processes which governed the careers of SAF officers in the early days of the SAF were plagued with various problems. Appraisals were often determined by personality, localized unit conditions, and rather vague guidelines. Potential was often an afterthought. Promotions did not come at the end of the paper work but also included exams and promotion interviews for junior officers. There was also the time-in-rank requirement applicable to all ranks. Dr Goh personally approved promotion lists for officers at the higher echelons. The risks were evident. At worst officers lost faith in a failed system, the unscrupulous perpetuated cronyism and patronage through cliques, and such practices were likely to perpetuate themselves.

To strengthen the ascension processes the military establishment implemented modified practices from Shell Oil in 1982. Every officer since then was assessed annually for realized performance matched against a list of key indicators, and anticipated potential gauged against a list of characteristics. To be sure, such measurements of performance and potential were still subjective but were an improvement on pre-1982 practices. Performance grades were subjected to a standardized bell-curve to account for strict and lenient assessors but with adequate flexibility to reward deserving officers. The processes were made more robust through a series of checks and balances which required consensus from various panels and levels of superiors. Processes which governed promotions and postings were also strengthened and streamlined. Promotions were no longer bounded by time norms, exams were weaved into milestone courses, and were bestowed on officers who performed with consistency and had the potential to serve at the said rank. Postings began with a list of shortlisted officers who met pre-requisites in terms of necessary courses, prior experiences, potential, and recommendations based on character and temperament. Extra attention was paid to command billets from the battalion, ship, and squadron upward, and with all appointments in the highest echelons. Potential and postings were similarly approved through recommendations and consensus at the higher echelons.

Although the guidelines for ascension are spelled out realities were not always so neat. Consensus was required and this practice was only as effective as the panel members' knowledge of the subordinates being appraised. Shortcomings had various concomitant effects. Attributes such as education level, the scholarship received, and whether one was a Wrangler, could exert undue influence and overshadow a holistic view of the appraisee. Some panels adopted strict or lenient postures while others

grouped the officers they did not know at the centre of the ranking list. The effect of positive or negative biases could also be amplified from the absence of opposing views. At worst, collective failure is possible should rankings be altered unilaterally without adequate explanation or queries by panel members. Whether this has ever occurred is unknown and this study has not been able to substantiate alleged concomitant mass resignations.

Promotions and postings have similarly generated controversies at times. The benefit of the doubt and second-chances have allowed scholar-officers to hold highly coveted command billets despite indicators to the contrary. At other times an officer with a higher estimated career potential was given posting preference over a seemingly more capable officer albeit with a lower estimated career potential. Greater scrutiny is made at the highest echelons. Promotions to colonel and above and related postings are recommended by the elite nucleus, seconded by senior defence bureaucrats, and approved at the political echelon. Colonels held a variety of billets which varied in importance, visibility, and prestige. In contrast, every general and admiral reflected not only technical competency but an amalgamation of military professionalism, critical responsibility, impeccable character, diplomatic acumen, and political trust worthiness.

Ascension into the Aristocracy of Armed Talent was not only determined by administrative processes but was also a function of the force structure in place. The number of military elites reflected the maturity of the armed forces, reflected in the operational capability of key formations, the critical roles of certain staff departments, and the relevance and importance of a specific diplomatic mission to Singapore. Premium was placed on command and staff billets at the expense of instructional tours. Officer development commenced with pre-commissioning training through to Command and Staff College which prepared individuals for the first test at the helm of an army battalion, navy ship, or air force squadron. Those who performed well could expect rotations between further key staff appointments and command interspersed with post-graduate studies and/or attendance at War College. Naturally, there were exceptions to such established pathways. The appointments in which officers earned their first star have also devolved from the defence chief, to service chief, and now in various key command and staff billets across the tri-service SAF and at MINDEF.

The force structure seemed to advantage certain vocations while others were restricted by their specialization. The military elite was skewed toward combat (infantry, armour, commando, guards) and combat support (artillery, combat engineer) officers in the army, pilots (especially fighter) in the RSAF, and naval combat (especially surface) officers in the RSN. These vocations had inherent advantages when it came to billets where officers could earn their first star. Yet other vocations were

disadvantaged in the intense competition and the force structure offered very few appointments where they could make one-star. This, however, depended very much on the force structure and invariable changed when reorganizations were made.

Limitations

The ability to make strong generalizations from the findings of this study into the future about the SAF, or about other defence forces, is limited. In a superficial sense, career officers in first-class armed forces globally do/did in all likelihood both display institutional and occupational characteristics in their career motivation and commitment. This was also seen in the senior cohort studied here. Similarly, promotions and postings are given to the 'best' person for the job. Empirical evidence already supported this claim. The key question is how they differed and their respective contextual nuances. Inter-organizational applicability to other militaries, even regionally, is a stretch.

The intra-organizational generalization to other military elites in Singapore faces two issues. The first is to the peers of the interview participants. Recall that 18 of the 46 interview requests were unsuccessful. Of course, none of them owed this study an interview and a proportion had hectic schedules commensurate with their current occupations. But can one simply assume the 'lived' realities of the 28 interview participants are applicable to them too? Although data saturation seemed to be achieved at the 25th interview this could very well be falsified if more than 28 interviews had taken place. Furthermore, what could be said of those whose appointments and career trajectory matched the ascension of certain superiors? Hearsay certainly did not differentiate between correlation and causality. Even if all 46 interview requests were successful questions over the generalization of these findings to all 137 military elites would remain.

The second issue with intra-organizational generalization concerns changes within Singaporean society. Officers who joined the SAF from the 1990s onward faced different contextual circumstances from their predecessors. Families generally became smaller while standards of living and education levels increased. It became increasingly rare for top students to consider forgoing tertiary education in search of employment. Tertiary education, especially at local institutions, became increasingly affordable. Scholarships proliferated but so did competition for them. Within the SAF the culture and the way it treated conscripts has improved over the decades. The tough *kampong* upbringing was consigned to the pages of history. The recruits today are more educated than generations before but so is the prevalence of myopia, asthma, and obesity within

their ranks. Some critics have labelled them the 'Strawberry generation': good to look at but easily bruised. Finally, national education has socially engineered a sense of patriotism and 'duty, honour, country' has entrenched itself in the lexicon of the SAF. The problem is differentiating between form and content.

It must also be reiterated that there are those who will take umbrage at this study; from those who believe that all is copacetic in the SAF to those who believed that only a well made-up and glossy image should be presented. The latter would like the SAF to be a citizens' army but those who fill its ranks should not question or only know about the institution in selective terms. Transparency is, after all, a threat – perhaps greater than any identifiable 'enemy at the gate' – and not a source of strength or an avenue of accountability. Then again, transparency and accountability of the armed forces has always only been to a select few, at times making transient appearances in parliament, but never to a society-at-large which has never had to place national defence at the forefront of its daily concerns.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

In addition to the limitations of inter- and intra-organizational generalizations this thesis also used theory and empirical studies as sensitising concepts to guide the study and address the three research questions. It was never the intention to test or develop grounded theory. Any attempts to force theory for the sake of doing so would be dishonest, not to mention a clear insult to any reader's intelligence. This study, however, has implications for theory and the conclusions drawn from other empirical studies. First, motivation and commitment did not conform to Huntingtonian ideals but were more congruent with Moskos' I/O theory. In many ways the motivation to sign-on was skewed toward occupational considerations. The commitment to stay-on, however, had both occupational and institutional characteristics. The former varied among the interview participants but the overwhelming majority invariably converged strongly toward the latter. As with Janowitz's study of American generals there were variations in motivation and commitment of Singapore's military elites but contexts differed. The obvious included conscription, Singapore's loss of rural areas, scholarships designed to recruit, retain and recycle's 'top brains', and societal views of the profession-of-arms.

In terms of theory empirical data conformed to Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' which explained motivation to join and commitment to stay. This started with lower and mid level needs such as education, employment, remuneration and progressed on to self-actualization of one's potential and idealization where the focus was on the

greater good beyond one's self. As for commitment, empirical data suggested that Meyer and Allen's three component model and Cohen's component model were applicable but remained inconclusive from the 28 interviews. In terms of ascension, the theoretical angles of cronyism and patronage, merit, visibility, and luck were all plausible. Cronyism and patronage depicted through cliques were acknowledged as a clear and present danger which necessitated changes to ensure a robust ascension processes. The practice of meritocracy moved from one based on seniority to a relative merit-based system. Scholar-officers and Wranglers were most visible to superiors (and indeed peers and subordinates) but this was an advantage only if they performed well. Finally, the notion of luck was not entirely applicable but could instead be attributed to intangibles such as scholarships, natural talent, proactive career management, and the proverbial 'godfather' who corrected many a wayward career which ended as part of the military elite.

Areas for further research

This study is the most detailed examination of Singapore's military elite to date and has shed light on its motivation, commitment, and ascension to the apex of the rank hierarchy. Although it makes this contribution to knowledge, the conclusions are localized and applicable to the interview participants who graciously shared their 'lived experiences'. The most obvious and realistic areas for further research are those in the immediate periphery of this study. An inter-organizational extension would include the military elites of Singapore's closest neighbours: Malaysia and Indonesia. The armed forces of those states share similarities with the SAF yet have different societal and historical contexts. As for intra-organizational extension the most appropriate avenue is not to find more participants who conform to the categories uncovered but those who would provide new ones. The most interesting and important area for research, however, will not be possible for quite few years to come. This would be a comparative study of military elites amidst changing societal conditions in Singapore. In many ways the commitment of retired military elites captured in this study elucidated the challenges faced, crisis weathered, and conditions endured from yesterday. They also ensured that enough quality individuals constituted the present aristocracy of armed talent. Whether the military elites of tomorrow will possess the same motivation and commitment, or passion and conviction of yesteryear is unknown. This is presently the greatest challenge for Singapore's military elites today.

Annex A

Singapore Armed Forces Act (Chapter 295) Regulation 2(1) Singapore Armed Forces (Ranks of Servicemen) (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The ranks of servicemen in the uniformed services of the SAF (in order of seniority):

1. General (GEN)/Admiral (ADM) [*established but not bestowed on any officer to date*]
2. Lieutenant General (LG)/Vice Admiral (VADM)
3. Major General(MG)/Rear Admiral (Two-Star) (RADM2)
4. Brigadier General(BG)/Rear Admiral (One-Star)(RADM1)/Military Expert 8 (ME8)
5. Colonel (COL)/Military Expert 7 (ME7)
6. Senior Lieutenant Colonel (SLTC)
7. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC)/Military Expert 6 (ME6)
8. Major (MAJ)/ Military Expert 5 (ME5)
9. Captain (CPT)/Military Expert 4 (ME4)
10. Lieutenant (LTA)
11. Second Lieutenant (2LT)
12. Chief Warrant Officer (CWO)
13. Senior Warrant Officer (SWO)
14. Master Warrant Officer (MWO)
15. First Warrant Officer (1WO)/Military Expert 3 (ME3)
16. Second Warrant Officer (2WO)
17. Third Warrant Officer (3WO)
18. Master Sergeant (MSG)/Military Expert 2 (ME2)
19. Staff Sergeant (SSG)
20. First Sergeant (1SG)
21. Second Sergeant (2SG)/Military Expert 1 (ME1)
22. Third Sergeant (3SG)
23. Corporal (First Class) (CFC)
24. Corporal (CPL)
25. Lance-Corporal (LCP)
26. Private (First Class) (PFC)
27. Private (PTE)[1145]
28. Recruit (REC)

[1145] An officer cadet (OCT), a midshipman (MID), a specialist cadet (SCT), a military expert senior trainee or a military expert trainee is equivalent in rank to a private.

Annex B

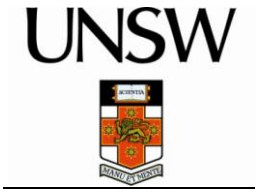
Officers in the ranks of BG/RADM1/ME8 and above (1965-2014)

Army (75)	Highest Rank Attained and Name
Infantry (17)	BG (RET) Thomas James Duncan Campbell; BG (RET) Sim Hak Kng, Patrick; BG (RET) Tan Chin Tiong; BG (RET) Boey Tak Hap; BG (RET) Chin Chow Yoon; BG (RET) Tan Yong Soon; COL (RET) Yeo Cheng Ann [L/BG (1993-4)]; BG (RET) Law Chwee Kiat; BG (RET) Wong Kong Yip, Stephen; LG (RET) Lim Chuan Poh; BG (RET) Leong Yue Keong; BG (RET) Chin Phei Chen; BG (RET) Loh Wai Keong; MG (NS) Chan Chun Sing; BG (RET) Ishak bin Ismail; BG Lim Hock Yu; BG Chia Choon Hoong
Armour (16)	BG (RET) Choy Choong Tow, Patrick; BG (RET) Colin George Theseira; BG (RET) Lee Hsien Yang; MG (RET) Han Eng Juan; BG (RET) Sin Boon Wah; BG (RET) Lam Joon Khoi; BG (RET) Lee Fook Sun; BG (RET) Lim Kim Lye; BG (RET) Ong Boon Hwee, Daniel; LG (RET) Kuek Bak Chye, Desmond; BG (RET) Tay Swee Yee; BG (NS) Tan Kok Kiang, Bernard Richard; BG (NS) Wong Ann Chai; BG (RET) Lowrence Chua; BG Benedict Lim; BG Siew Kum Wong
Commando (4)	BG (NS) Lim Chern Tjunn, Philip; BG (RET) Lim Teck Yin; BG Lam Shiu Tong; BG (NS) Yeo See Peng
Guards (8)	BG (RET) Chua Chwee Koh; LG (RET) Neo Kian Hong; BG (RET) Goh Kee Nguan; BG (RET) Toh Bee Chew, Winston; BG (NS) Tan Chuan-Jin; BG Chan Wing Kai; BG Lim Cheng Yeow, Perry; BG Tan Kok Ming, Desmond
Artillery (10)	BG (RET) Kirpa Ram Vij; BG (RET) Lee Hsien Loong; LG (RET) Ng Jui Ping; BG (RET) Low Yee Kah; LG (RET) Ng Yat Chung; BG (RET) Tan Kim Teck, Andrew; BG (RET) Su Poon Ghee, Philip; BG (RET) Pang Hee Hon; BG (RET) Tay Lim Heng; BG (RET) Tan Huck Gim, Eric [L/MG (2002-3)]
Combat Engineer (8)	MG (RET) Lim Neo Chian; BG (RET) Choi Shing Kwok; BG (RET) Lim Kah Kee; BG (NS) Lim U Yang, Hugh Reginald; BG (NS) Tan Yih San; BG (RET) Teo Jing Siong;

	BG (RET) Tung Yui Fai; BG Tan Ming Yiak, Mark
Signals (4)	LG (RET) Choo Wee Leong, Winston; MG (RET) Ravinder Singh s/o Harchand Singh; BG Koh Tee Hian, David; BG (NS) Lee Shiang Long
Engineering/Logistics (4)	BG (RET) Chin Siat Yoon; BG (RET) Lim Feng, Philip; BG (NS) Ngien Hoon Ping; BG (NS) Tan Peng Kuan
Medical (3)	BG (RET) (Dr) Lee Kim Hock, Lionel; BG (RET) (Dr) Wong Yue Sie; BG (NS) (Dr) Seet Hun Yew, Benjamin
Intelligence (1)	ME8 Lau Cher Loon
Navy (24)	**Highest Rank Attained and Name**
Naval Combat Officer (20)	RADM1 (RET) Teo Chee Hean; RADM1 (RET) Kwek Siew Jin; RADM2 (RET) Lim Cherng Yih, Richard; RADM1 (RET) Loon Leong Yoon, Larry; RADM2 (RET) Lui Tuck Yew; RADM1 (RET) Ong Hung Eng, Simon; RADM1 (RET) Sim Gim Guan; RADM2 (RET) Ronnie Tay; RADM2 (NS) Chew Men Leong; RADM2 (NS) Tan Kai Hoe; RADM2 Ng Chee Peng; RADM1 (NS) Tay Kian Seng; RADM2 (NS) Leong Weng Keong, Joseph; RADM1 Tan Wee Beng; RADM1 Jackson Chia; L/RADM1 (RET) Bernard Donald Miranda [L/RADM1 (2010-1)]; RADM1 Lai Chung Han; RADM1 Chan Weng Yip, Harris [L/RADM1 (2011)]; RADM1 Lo Khee Shik, Timothy; COL Giam Hock Koon [L/RADM1 (2013)]
Medical (2)	RADM1 (RET) (Dr) Wong Chee Meng, John; RADM1 (Dr) Kang Wee Lee
Engineering/Logistics (2)	RADM1 (RET) Leo Chin Lian, James; RADM1 (RET) Jway Ching Hua
Air Force (38)	**Highest Rank Attained and Name**
Pilot (fighter) (17)	BG (RET) Teo Eng Cheng, Michael; BG (RET) Yeo Ping Yong, Gary; MG (RET) Goh Yong Siang; MG (RET) Ng Teck Heng, Raymund; MG (RET) Lim Kim Choon, Rocky; BG (RET) Loh Kok Hua; BG (RET) Voon Tse-Chow; MG (NS) Ng Chee Khern; BG (RET) Lim Keng Yong, Richard; BG (RET) Sih Seah Wee, Charles; LG Ng Chee Meng; BG

	(RET) Richard Christopher Pereira; BG Lim Yong Kiat; BG Sarbjit Singh s/o Tahil Singh; BG Neo Hong Keat; BG Lim Tuang Liang; L/BG Leong Kum Wah [L/BG (2013-present)]
Pilot (transport) (3)	LG (RET) Bey Soo Khiang; BG (RET) Jek Kian Yee; BG Tan Wei Ming, Mervyn
Pilot (helicopter) (1)	BG (RET) Wong Huat Sern
GBAD (4)	BG (RET) Yam Ah Mee; BG (RET) Khoo Siew Kim, Jimmy; BG (RET) Chee Wee Kiong; BG Cheng Siak Kian [L/BG (2008-10)]
C3 (8)	BG (RET) Yeo Yong Boon, George; BG (RET) Yap Ong Heng; BG (RET) Tan Cheng Yaw, Jimmy; BG (NS) Ang Aik Hwang, Gary; BG (NS) Tan Meng Dui; MG Hoo Cher Mou; BG (NS) Kwek Kok Kwong; L/BG Tan Chee Wee [L/BG (2012-present)]
Medical (1)	BG (RET) (Dr) Lim Meng Kin
Engineering/Logistics (4)	BG (RET) Wesley Gerard D'Aranjo; BG (RET) Lim Yeow Beng; BG (RET) Tsoi Mun Heng; ME8 (NS) Lee Ling Wee

Annex C



Approval No: A-12-12

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

ARISTOCRACY OF ARMED TALENT: THE MOTIVATION, COMMITMENT, AND ASCENSION OF MILITARY ELITES IN SINGAPORE (1967-2013)

Dear (rank and name)

[Participant selection and purpose of study]

You (the research participant) are invited to participate in a study of military elites – defined as officers holding the ranks L/Brigadier-General or L/Rear-Admiral to Lieutenant General – in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). Specifically, I aim to learn about the motivation to join, commitment to stay, and ascension to general/admiral. You were selected as a participant in this study because you hold the rank of BG when you left active service. Your personal experience and insights provide invaluable quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence for this study.

[Description of study and risks]

If you decide to participate, I will arrange an appointment to conduct a face to face interview with you. The interview questions are designed to understand your individual motivation, commitment, and ascension up the SAF officer hierarchy. I cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits (including remuneration in any form) from this study.

[Confidentiality and disclosure of information]

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, except as required by law (e.g. Official Secrets Act (CHAPTER 213) (Original Enactment: Ordinance 25 of 1935)). If your permission is given by signing this document, I plan to publish the results in a Ph.D thesis to be examined by academic scholars specializing in military studies, specifically military sociology. It is also envisaged that thesis will eventually be published as a book with a civilian publishing house. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified except with your specific permission.

[Recompense to participants]

Complaints may be directed to: Dr Stephen Coleman; Convenor, Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel, UNSW@ADFA, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia (phone (02) 6268-8812, fax (02) 6268-8899, email s.coleman@adfa.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be investigated promptly and you will be informed of the outcome.

[Feedback to participants]

A weblink to the location of an electronic copy of the thesis will be given to you once it has been accepted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of New South Wales.

[Your consent]

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with the University of New South Wales. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions at any stage of the interview, please feel free to contact me via email at samuel.chan@student.adfa.edu.au.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM (continued)
ARISTOCRACY OF ARMED TALENT: THE MOTIVATION, COMMITMENT, AND ASCENSION OF MILITARY ELITES IN SINGAPORE (1967-2013)

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the information provided above, you have decided to participate.

Signature of Research Participant	Signature of Witness
(Please PRINT name)	(Please PRINT name)
Date	Nature of Witness

REVOCATION OF CONSENT
ARISTOCRACY OF ARMED TALENT: THE MOTIVATION, COMMITMENT, AND ASCENSION OF MILITARY ELITES IN SINGAPORE (1967-2013)

I hereby wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in the research proposal described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** jeopardise any treatment or my relationship with The University of New South Wales.

Signature of Research Participant	Date
(Please PRINT name)	(Please PRINT name)

The section for Revocation of Consent should be forwarded to:

Samuel Chan
Ph.D Candidate
School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS)
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PO Box 7916 Canberra ACT 2610
Australia

Annex D

Approval No: A-12-12

Biographical Sketch of Principal Investigator

Mr Samuel Chan (UNSW ID: 3012433) is a fulltime Ph.D (Politics) candidate at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Australia. Prior to commencing his doctoral studies in March 2011, he was an Associate Research Fellow with the Military Transformation Program at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU). His duties included publishing in journals and lecturing/facilitating classes at the Singapore Command and Staff College (SCSC), SAF Advanced Schools (SAS), and the Singapore Armed Forces Warrant Officer Institute (SWI). In 2006 Mr Chan spent six-months (July-December) as the Jebsen Research Fellow at the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS) in Kabul, Afghanistan. His civilian education includes a Bachelor of Science (Honours Class 1) in Statistics (UNSW), a Master of Science in Strategic Studies (RSIS-NTU), and a Master of Science in Russian and East European Studies (St Antony's College, University of Oxford) which he completed on a British Chevening Scholarship. As an active NSMan, CPT (NS) Chan completed the 39th Advanced Infantry Officers Course (2005), 01/06 Guards Conversion Course (2006), and the 56th Battalion Tactics Course (2010).

Annex E

SAF: The most modern defence force in Southeast Asia

The following studies concluded that the SAF is the most modern, well-trained, well-equipped, and best-organized defence force in Southeast Asia:

1. Willard A. Hanna, "The New Singapore Armed Forces," *Fieldstaff Reports*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (1973), p. 6.
2. Michael Richardson, "Marching to self-sufficiency in arms as well as defence," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 119, No. 2 (13 January 1983), pp. 28-30.
3. Philip Bowring and Patrick Smith, "Cooperation is the new name of the game," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 119, No. 2 (13 January 1983), p. 31.
4. John Keegan, *World Armies* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1983), p. 520.
5. Patrick M. Mayerchak, "The Role of the Military in Singapore," in Edward A. Olsen and Stephen Jurika, Jr. (eds.), *The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies* (Boulder, CO and London, UK: Westview Press, 1986), p. 170.
6. Yong Mun Cheong, "The Military and Development in Singapore," in J. Soedjati Djiwandono and Yong Mun Cheong (eds.), *Soldiers and Stability in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), pp. 279-90.
7. Chin Kin Wah, "Singapore: Threat Perception and Defence Spending in a City-State," in Chin Kin Wah (ed.), *Defence Spending in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 194-221.
8. Andrew T. H. Tan, "Singapore's Defence: Capabilities, Trends, and Implications," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (December 1999), pp. 451-74.
9. Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City: The Armed Forces of Singapore* (St Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), pp. 172-95.
10. John A. Battilega, David R. Beachley, Daniel C. Beck, Robert L. Driver, and Bruce Jackson, *Transformations in Global Defense Markets and Industries: Implications for the Future of Warfare* (Washington DC: National Intelligence Council, June 2001), www.fas.org/irp/nic/battilega/singapore.pdf (accessed 28 May 2014).
11. Felix K. Chang, "In Defense of Singapore," *Orbis*, Vol. 47 No. 1 (Winter 2003), pp. 107-23.
12. Bilveer Singh, *Arming the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF): Trends and Implications*, Canberra papers on strategy and defence, No. 153 (Canberra, ACT, Australia: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 2003).
13. Tim Huxley, "Singapore and the Revolution in Military Affairs," in Emily O. Goldman and Thomas G. Mahnken (eds.), *The Information Revolution in Military Affairs in Asia* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 185-6.

14. Sheldon W. Simon, "Southeast Asia's Defence Needs: Change or Continuity," in Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills (eds.), *Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty* (Seattle, WA and Washington, DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005), pp. 287-8.
15. Ron Matthews and Nellie Zhang Yan, "Small Country 'Total Defence': A Case Study of Singapore," *Defence Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (September 2007), pp. 376-95.
16. "Singapore's military modernisation," *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 13, Iss. 10 (December 2007), p. 1.
17. Tim Huxley, "Defence Procurement in Southeast Asia," *5th workshop of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum on Security Sector Governance (IPF-SSG) in Southeast Asia* (Phnom Penh, 12-13 October 2008), ipf-ssg-sea.net/5th_WS/defence_procurement_overview_Tim+Huxley.pdf (accessed 28 May 2014).
18. Bernard Fook Weng Loo, "Maturing the Singapore Armed Forces: From Poisonous Shrimp to Dolphin," in Bridget Welsh, James Chin, Arun Mahizhnan, and Tan Tarn How (eds.), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong Years in Singapore* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), p. 178.
19. Zachary Abuza, "Hardening National Security: Emergence of an Agile Scorpion," in Bridget Welsh, James Chin, Arun Mahizhnan, and Tan Tarn How (eds.), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong Years in Singapore* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), p. 190.
20. "Armed forces," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment*, 29 March 2011, articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-Sentinel-Security-Assessment-Southeast-Asia/Armed-forces-Singapore.html (no longer available).
21. *The Military Balance 2013* (London, UK: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013), pp. 246, 330-3.

Annexes

Annex F

Former career SAF officers in the Cabinet

Name	SAFOS Year	Left SAF	Terminal Rank	Last Military Appointment	Latest Ministerial Appointment	Political Career
Lee Hsien Loong	1971	1984	BG	Chief of Staff of the General Staff (1982-4); Director Joint Operations and Planning Directorate (1983-4)	Prime Minister (since 2004)	1984-present
Yeo Yong Boon, George	1973	1988	BG	Director Joint Operations and Planning Directorate (1986-8)	Former Minister for Foreign Affairs (2004-11)	1988-2011
Lim Hng Khiang	1973	1987	LTC	Director (Policy) Defence Policy Office, MINDEF (1986-7)	Minister for Trade and Industry (since 2004)	1991-present
Teo Chee Hean	1973	1992	RADM1	Chief of Navy (1991-2)	Deputy Prime Minister (since 2009) and Minister for Home Affairs (since 2011)	1992-present
Lim Swee Say	1973	1984	MAJ	Head Information Engineering Centre, System and Computer Organisation, MINDEF (1982-4)	Minister in Prime Minister's Office (since 2004) and Secretary-General National Trade Union Congress (since 2007)	1997-present
Lui Tuck Yew	1980	2003	RADM2	Chief of Navy (1999-2003)	Minister for Transport (since 2011)	2006-present
Chan Chun Sing	1988	2011	MG	Chief of Army (2010-1)	Minister for Social and Family Development (since 2013) and Second Minister for Defence (since 2013)	2011-present
Tan Chuan-Jin	1989	2011	BG	Commander Army Training and Doctrine Command (2009-11)	Minister for Manpower (since 2014)	2011-present

Annex G

Interview Questionnaire

Interview Particulars:

Date of Interview:	
Location of Interview:	
Observation Recording:	~~Electronic~~ / Handwritten
Consent given to attribute responses to interviewee	N / Y

Interviewee Particulars:

Rank and Name:		
Email address:		
Year of Birth:		
Year of Enlistment:		
Year of leaving service:		
Contract Type:	Transactional (every 6 years) / Relational (open ended)	
SAFOS?	N / Y	
Dual-Career:	N / Y (Year joining Administrative Service:)	
Service and Vocation:	Army / Navy / Air Force (Vocation:)	
School (prior to enlistment):		
Educational Qualifications:		
Parents' occupations:	Father:	Mother:

Open-ended Questions [for qualitative and quantitative data]:

No.	Question
1	Describe your background and thoughts before enlistment for NS: - Ambition growing up - Social-economic status - Thoughts about NS/post-NS/the SAF
2	Signing-on with the SAF: - When? - Why at that particular time? - Reasons for signing-on (did recruiter/NS/family/school friends play a part)?
3	(If applicable) Would you have signed on with the SAF if you did not receive the academic scholarship to study? Would you have accepted a lower-tier scholarship? Why?
4	Scholarship: - How did the academic scholarship you received help your career? - Was the dual-career scheme a factor? - Did the list of SAFOS 'seniors' play a part in your decision to accept the scholarship?
5	If you were not a regular SAF officer what would have been your likely occupation?
6	("anticipatory socialisation") What was the 'minimum' compensation/benefit expectation you had? Did the salary and benefits matter?

7	Did you choose your service/vocation? (Did it matter? OR you just 'stuck with it'?) Would you have considered/chosen another vocation? Was there a service/vocation that you did not want?
8	What kept you serving in the SAF? Did you give yourself any yardsticks/milestones/goals?
9	Did you consider leaving the SAF before retirement? When and what was/were the reason(s)? Why did you stay?
10	When did you decide you would be in the SAF "for life"? Were there any "epiphany" moments?
11	What are the high points of your career? The low points? Were there any moments in your career when you made mistakes that could have 'derailed' your career?
12	During your time in service did you ever think you would carry out what you were trained for in combat?
13	Visibility factor and recognition: - Did you have an 'X'-factor that aided in your career progression? - Did you have outstanding appointments/performances? - Did you have a mentor? - Was there an individual/individual(s) who recognized your talents and helped with your career?
14	As a general-/admiral-grade officer did you ever have friction with the civilian leadership or other general-/admiral-grade officers? How did you handle this?
15	Did you ever think you would your terminal rank/appointment? Why/why not?
16	Why did you leave the SAF at the point you did? [N/A for those in LG-rank]
17	Is there a scholar-farmer divide in the SAF? If so is this 'healthy'?
18	How are SAF officers promoted? How are postings determined? Who makes these decisions?
19	Does clientelism or a patronage system exist in the SAF? How is this prevented?

Annex H

A selection of literature on military elites in the West

Biographies and History

1. Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964).
2. Bernard Norling, "The Generals of World War I," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (May 1969), pp. 14-26.
3. Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1971).
4. Edgar F. Puryear, Jr, *Nineteen Stars: A study in military character and leadership* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1981).
5. Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
6. Roman Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985).
7. Aubrey S. "Red" Newman, *What are Generals made of?* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1987).
8. Correlli Barnett (ed.), *Hitler's Generals* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989).
9. Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991).
10. Phil Grabsky, *The Great Commanders: Alexander, Caesar, Nelson, Napoleon, Grant, Zhukov* (London, UK: Boxtree, 1993).
11. Thomas B. Buell, *The Warrior Generals: Combat leadership in the Civil War* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 1997).
12. Herbert R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1997).
13. Ronald Andidora, *Iron Admirals: Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).
14. Harold Shukman (ed.), *Stalin's Generals* (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Press, 2002).
15. Eric Larrabee, *Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants and Their War* (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 2004).
16. Edgar F. Puryear, *American Admiralship: The moral imperatives of naval command* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004).
17. Peter Cosgrove, *General Peter Cosgrove: My Story* (Sydney, NSW, Australia: HarperCollins, 2006).

18. John Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922–1940* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
19. Paul Yingling, "A failure in generalship," *Armed Forces Journal* (May 2007), www.armedforcesjournal.com/a-failure-in-generalship (accessed 28 May 2014).
20. David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four generals and the epic struggle for the future of the United States Army* (New York, NY: Crown Publications, 2009).
21. Andrew Lambert, "Admirals: Command, Leadership and Genius," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 154, Iss. 1 (2009), pp. 72-6.
22. Trevor Royle, *Montgomery: Lessons in leadership from the soldier's General* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
23. Paula Broadwell with Vernon Loeb, *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2012).
24. Nicholas Jans with Stephen Mugford, Jamie Cullens and Judy Frazer-Jans, *The Chiefs: A Study of Strategic Leadership* (Canberra, ACT: Centre for Defence Leadership and Ethics, Australian Defence College, 2013).
25. Jonathan Bailey, Richard Iron and Hew Strachan (eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013).

Military Academies and Colleges

26. David Chandler, *Sandhurst, the Royal Military Academy: 250 years* (Shrewsbury, UK: Airlife Publishing, 1991).
27. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country; A History of West Point* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1999).
28. Ed Ruggero, *Duty First: A Year in the Life of West Point and the Making of American Leaders* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).
29. Theodore J. Crackel, *West Point: A Bicentennial History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002). Robert Cowley and Thomas Guinzburg (eds.), *West Point: The First 200 Years* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 2002).
30. Robert M. S. McDonald (ed.), *Thomas Jefferson's Military Academy: Founding West Point* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004).
31. Angela Holdsworth and Christopher Pugsley (eds.), *Sandhurst: A Tradition of Leadership* (London, UK: Third Millennium Publishing, 2005).
32. Jason Hedges, *Celebrating 100 Years at Duntroon: Royal Military College of Australia 1911-2011* (Newport, NSW, Australia: Big Sky Publishing Pty Ltd, 2012).

Annex I

One-star and above billets in the SAF

The following is a list of one-star – Brigadier-General (BG), Rear-Admiral (RADM), or Military Expert 8 (ME8) – and above billets held by officers.

- 'Established' billets are one-star appointments where officers usually remained in the rank of colonel or ME7 although there were some exceptions in the past.
- 'Hybrid' appointments can be filled by either senior civil servants (non-career military) or flag-officers that transit from uniformed to civilian service.
- An asterisk (*) denotes that a billet is usually held on a concurrent basis.

MINDEF-SAF Billets (12)
1) Chief of Defence Force (three-star); 2) Chief of Staff – Joint Staff; 3) Director Military Intelligence; 4) Director Joint Operations Department; 5) Head Joint Communications and Information Systems Department; 6) Commandant SAFTI Military Institute; 7) Director Military Security Department; 8) Future Systems and Technology Architect; 9) Chief of Medical Corps; 10) Defence Attaché at the Singapore Embassy in Washington; 11) Head Joint Intelligence Department; 12) Chief C4I (Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence) Community*.
MINDEF hybrid posts (civilian or military) (4)
1) Deputy Secretary (Policy); 2) Deputy Secretary (Technology); 3) Director Security and Intelligence Division; 4) Director (Policy) Defence Policy Office.
Joint established (1)
1) Head Joint Logistics Department.
Possible one-star billets at MINDEF-SAF level (1)
1) Military Adviser at the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations.
Army (11)
1) Chief of Army (two-star); 2) Chief of Staff – General Staff; 3) Commander Training and Doctrine Command; 4) Assistant Chief of General Staff (Operations); 5) Commander 3rd Singapore Division; 6) Commander 6th Singapore Division; 7) Commander 9th Singapore Division/Chief Infantry Officer; 8) Commander 21st Singapore Division/Chief Guards Officer; 9) Commander 25th Division/Chief Armour Officer; 10) Commander 2nd Peoples Defence Force; 11) Commander Combat Service Support Command; 12) Director National Service Affairs*.
Navy (5)
1) Chief of Navy (two-star); 2) Chief of Staff – Naval Staff; 3) Head Naval Operations Department; 4) Fleet Commander; 5) Commander Maritime Security Task Force.
Navy established (1)
1) Head Naval Logistics Department.
Air Force (7)
1) Chief of Air Force (two-star); 2) Chief of Staff – Air Staff; 3) Head Air Operations Department; 4) Commander Air Combat Command; 5) Commander Air Power Generation Command; 6) Commander Air Defence and Operations Command; 7) Commander Air Participation Command; 8) Head Air Logistics Department.

Annex J

Active Service and Rank Attainment of SAFOS recipients (1971-86)

Year	Full career to retirement		Left service early
	One-star and above	*COL/ME7*	*LTC and below*
1971	Lee Hsien Loong; Boey Tak Hap; Sin Boon Wah	Lai Seck Khui	Liu Tsun Kie
1972	Lim Neo Chian; Wesley Gerard D'Aranjo	Soon Eng Boon	Chong San Chew; Choo Chun Wei; Chua Chin Kiat (transferred to SPF); Goh Liang Kwang (transferred to SPF); Lim Koon Heng, Richard; Ng Ann Hoe, Dominic; Pek Beng Choon; Tan Check Hoon; Tan Keng Hiang; Tan Kian Chew; Tsao Chieh; Wong Cheong Fook, David Cecil Vivian; Yong Choon Kong
1973	BG Yeo Yong Boon, George; Teo Chee Hean; Han Eng Juan	Ho Hak Ean, Peter; Tan Kim Siew	Khoo Boon Hui (transferred to SPF); Lim Hng Khiang; Lim Swee Say; Lim Teik Hock
1974	Bey Soo Khiang; Tan Yong Soon	-	Chew Leng Hock; Kwa Boon Hwee, James; Leong Peng Kiong; Tan Yoke Meng, Willie
1975	Lee Fook Sun	Ho Meng Kit	Lim Chong Kiat
1976	Lee Hsien Yang	Low Oon Hoe, Michael; Siew Chee Kin, Terence	Gan Juay Kiat; Kee Teck Koon; Lee Hon Sun; Ng Ee Peng, Ed; Tham Kui Seng
1977	Lim Kim Choon	-	Kan Wei Seng, John; Lee Nyuk Sze; Ng Koh Wee; Tan Ching Wen, James; Tang Kok Fai
1978	Choi Shing Kwok; Lam Joon Khoi	Lee Wai Mun	Chua Wee Meng, Philip; Eng Heng Chiaw
1979	Pang Hee Hon; Yap Ong Heng	-	Eng Hung Chiaw; Ong Siang Hor; Steven Ong; Seah Boon Thong (perished on active service); Shae Toh Hock; Tay Hun Kiat; Tong Min Way
1980	Lim Chuan Poh; Ng Yat Chung; Lui Tuck Yew	-	Goh Heng Heng, Benny

1981	Khoo Siew Kim, Jimmy; Tan Cheng Yaw, Jimmy	Poh Hee Kim	Cheong Kin Wah; Lu Cheng-Yang
1982	Kuek Bak Chye, Desmond; Chee Wee Kiong; Tay Lim Heng; Chua Chwee Koh; Ronnie Tay	Goh Leong Huat	Chong Kai Yew, Paul; Gwee Choon Lin, Peter; Lim Boon Wee; Lim Ming Yan; Tan Sing Hock
1983	Jek Kian Yee; Sim Gim Guan; Wong Huat Sern	Cheong Keng Soon	Chai Chin Loon; Goh Kok Huat; Lee Kin Seng; Ng Chee Yuen; Poh Kwee Lin; Tan Kim Hong, David; Wong Chen-Guan; Yap Guan Hong, William
1984	Loh Wai Keong; Lim U Yang, Hugh Reginald	Kwok Fook Kay, Kenneth; Soh Poh Theen	Teo Kian Bin
1985	Neo Kian Hong; Ng Chee Khern; Tan Kok Kiang, Bernard Richard; Tan Kai Hoe; Tan Yih San	Chng Ho Kiat; Tan Wei Ming; Toh Boh Kwee	Yoon Kam Choon
1986	Ang Aik Hwang, Gary; Tan Meng Dui; Wong Ann Chai; Tan Wee Beng	Koh Peng Keng	Chua Hwee Song, Nicholas; Ho How Hoang, Joshua; Neo Wei Ming; Ying Jat Mum, Edmund (perished on active service)
TOTAL	**41**	**17**	**64**

Raw Figures:

Number of SAFOS recipients (1971-86): 122.

Percentage who made one-star and above: $\frac{41}{122} = 33.61\%$.

Percentage who served until retirement: $\frac{41+17}{122} = \frac{58}{122} = 47.54\%$.

Percentage of flag-officers among those who served until retirement: $\frac{41}{58} = 70.69\%$.

Adjusted Figures (accounting for the three officers transferred to the police force and the two who perished on active service):

Percentage who made one-star and above: $\frac{41}{117} = 35.05\%$.

Percentage who served until retirement: $\frac{41+17}{117} = \frac{58}{117} = 49.58\%$.

Percentage of flag-officers among those who served until retirement: $\frac{41}{58} = 70.69\%$.

Annex K

Distribution of SAFOS flag-officers by service and vocation

Category	Raw Statistics			Adjusted Statistics		
	Total	SAFOS	SAFOS as % of Total	Total	SAFOS	SAFOS as % of Total
Flag-officers	137	54	39.4%	126	54	42.9%
Army Officers	75	27	36.0%	68	27	39.7%
Infantry	17	6	35.3%	14	6	42.9%
Armour	16	8	50.0%	16	8	50.0%
Commando	4	0	Nil	4	0	0.0%
Guards	8	4	50.0%	8	4	50.0%
Artillery	10	4	40.0%	9	4	44.4%
Combat Engineer	8	4	50.0%	8	4	50.0%
Signals	4	0	Nil	3	0	0.0%
Engineering/Logistics	4	1	25.0%	4	1	25.0%
Medical	3	0	Nil	*Incomparable with SAFOS*		
Intelligence	1	0	Nil	1	0	0.0%
Naval Officers	24	12	50.0%	22	12	54.5%
Naval Combat Officers	20	12	60.0%	20	12	60.0%
Medical	2	0	Nil	*Incomparable with SAFOS*		
Engineering/Logistics	2	0	Nil	2	0	0.0%
Air Force Officers	38	15	39.5%	37	15	40.5%
Pilot (fighter)	17	3	17.6%	17	3	17.6%
Pilot (transport)	3	2	66.7%	3	2	66.7%
Pilot (helicopter)	1	1	100.0%	1	1	100.0%
GBAD	4	2	50.0%	4	2	50.0%
C3	8	6	75.0%	8	6	75.0%
Medical	1	0	Nil	*Incomparable with SAFOS*		
Engineering/Logistics	4	1	25.0%	4	1	25.0%

Annex L

Command Appointments of Generals in the Singapore Army

S/N	Year Promoted	Rank and Name	Vocation	Battalion Command	Brigade Command	Division Command	Appointments held as one-star and above	Year Retired
1	1965	BG (RET) Thomas James Duncan Campbell	Infantry	1st Battalion, Singapore Volunteer Corps	Singapore Infantry Brigade, 1 SIB	N/A	COMD Singapore Infantry Brigade, DGS, COMDT SCSC	1971
2	1972	BG (RET) Kirpa Ram Vij	Artillery	*Unknown*	3 SIB	N/A	DGS	1974
3	1976	LG (RET) Choo Wee Leong, Winston	Signals	1 SAF Signals Bn, 4 SIR, 1 SIR	2 SIB	N/A	DGS, CGS, CDF	1992
4	1978	BG (RET) Sim Hak Kng, Patrick	Infantry	10 PDF, 5 SIR	2 SIB, 3 SIB	6 DIV, 3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, DCGS	1981
5	1980	BG (RET) Tan Chin Tiong	Infantry	4 SIR	-	-	DCGS, Ag CGS	1982
6	1984	BG (RET) Lee Hsien Loong	Artillery	23 SA	-	-	COS-GS, DJOPD	1984
7	1986	BG (RET) Chin Siat Yoon	Logistics	*Unknown*	*Unknown*	-	DJID; seconded to MFA	1995
8	1986	LG (RET) Ng Jui Ping	Artillery	20 SA	3 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, DJID, COA, CDF	1995
9	1987	BG (RET) Boey Tak Hap	Infantry	3 SIR	*Unknown*	3 DIV	ACGS (Ops), COS-GS, DCGS (Army), COA	1990
10	1990	BG (RET) Choy Choong Tow, Patrick	Armour	41 SAR	8 SAB, 4 SAB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, COMD TRADOC, DJID	1996
11	1991	MG (RET) Lim Neo Chian	Combat Engineer	SAF Ammo Base	3 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, COS-GS, COA	1995
12	1991	BG (RET) Colin George Theseira	Armour	40 SAR	7 SIB	6 DIV, 21 DIV	DIR NS Affairs, COMD 21 DIV	1993
13	1992	BG (RET) Chin Chow Yoon	Armour	42 SAR	8 SAB, 3 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, Unknown Tour (1991-4), SAFTI MI	1996
14	1992	BG (RET) Lee Hsien Yang	Armour	46 SAR	2 SIB	-	COS-GS, DJOPD	1994
15	1993	MG (RET) Han Eng Juan	Armour	46 SAR	4 SAB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, COS-GS, COA	1998

16	1993	BG (RET) Sin Boon Wah	Armour	*Unknown*	2 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, COMD TRADOC, DA Washington	2000
17	1993	BG (RET) Tan Yong Soon	Infantry	*Unknown*	*Unknown*	-	DS (Policy) in MINDEF	1995
18	1993	COL (RET) Yeo Cheng Ann [L/BG (1993-4)]	Infantry	2 SIR	2 SIB	-	Dy Force COMD/COS UNIKOM (Kuwait)	*Unknown*
19	1994	BG (RET) Low Yee Kah	Artillery	22 SA	3 DIV ARTY	21 DIV	COMD 21 DIV/CGO	1995
20	1995	BG (RET) Law Chwee Kiat, Winston	Infantry	6 SIR	7 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, COMD TRADOC	2000
21	1995	BG (RET) Wong Kong Yip, Stephen	Infantry	3 SIR	2 SIB	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV, COMDT SAFTI MI	2001
22	1996	BG (RET) Choi Shing Kwok	Combat Engineer	35 SCE	*Unknown*	-	DIR SID	*Unknown*
23	1996	BG (RET) Lam Joon Khoi	Armour	46 SAR	4 SAB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, COS-GS, DJOPD	1997
24	1996	BG (RET) Lee Fook Sun	Armour	*Unknown*	*Unknown*	-	DIR MSD, DJID	2000
25	1997	LG (RET) Lim Chuan Poh	Infantry	3 SIR	10 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, COS-GS, COA, CDF	2003
26	1997	LG (RET) Ng Yat Chung	Artillery	21 SA	3 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, DJOPD, COS-JS, COA, CDF	2007
27	1997	BG (RET) Tan Kim Teck, Andrew	Artillery	25 SA	3 DIV ARTY, 17 SIB	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV	1999
28	1998	BG (RET) (Dr) Lee Kim Hock, Lionel	Medical	6th Medical Bn, Medical Classification Centre, Physical Performance Centre	Army Medical Services	SAF Medical Corps	CMC, DIR DMRI at DSTA	2001
29	1998	BG (RET) Lim Kim Lye	Armour	46 SAR	54 SAB, 56 SAB, 4 SAB	1 PDF	COMD 1 PDF	2000
30	1998	BG (RET) Ong Boon Hwee, Daniel	Armour	42 SAR	4 SAB	25 DIV	COMD 25 DIV/CAO	2002
31	1999	LG (RET) Kuek Bak Chye, Desmond	Armour	41 SAR	4 SAB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, DJID, COS-GS, COA, CDF	2010

32	1999	BG (RET) Leong Yue Kheong, Lawrence	Infantry	4 SIR	7 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, COMD TRADOC, MA at the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the UN	2007
33	1999	BG (RET) Su Poon Ghee, Philip	Artillery	20 SA	3 DIV ARTY	21 DIV	COMD 21 DIV/CGO	2001
34	2000	BG (RET) Lim Kah Kee	Combat Engineer	342 SCE	Engineer Formation	3 DIV	COMDT SCSC, COMD 3 DIV	2003
35	2000	BG (RET) Pang Hee Hon	Artillery	*Unknown*	3 DIV ARTY	-	HJL	2004
36	2000	BG (RET) Tay Lim Heng	Artillery	20 SA	3 SIB	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV, DIR NS Affairs, DJID	2005
37	2001	BG (RET) Chua Chwee Koh	Guards	5 SIR	7 SIB	21 DIV	DJO, COMD 21 DIV/CGO	2004
38	2001	BG (RET) Tan Huck Gim, Eric [L/MG (2002-3)]	Artillery	20 SA	3 DIV ARTY	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, Force COMD UNMISET (East Timor), COMDT SAFTI MI	2005
39	2002	BG (RET) Chin Phei Chen	Infantry	5 SIR	2 SIB	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV	2004
40	2002	BG (RET) Tay Swee Yee	Armour	42 SAR	54 SAB, 4 SAB	2 PDF	COMD 2 PDF	2005
41	2003	BG (NS) Loh Wai Keong	Infantry	1 SIR	2 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV	2005
42	2003	LG (RET) Neo Kian Hong	Guards	1 GDS	7 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, COMD TRADOC, COS-JS, COA, CDF	2013
43	2003	BG (NS) Tan Kok Kiang, Bernard Richard	Armour	40 SAR	4 SAB	25 DIV	COMD 25 DIV/CAO, DMI	2008
44	2003	BG (RET) (Dr) Wong Yue Sie	Medical	*Unknown*	Army Medical Services	SAF Medical Corps	CMC	2006
45	2004	BG (VOL) Goh Kee Nguan	Guards	3 GDS	10 SIB	21 DIV	COMD 21 DIV/CGO, COMD TRADOC	2008
46	2004	MG (RET) Ravinder Singh s/o Harchand Singh	Signals	3 SIG	2 SIB	6 DIV	Hd JPTD, COMD 6 DIV, COS-JS, DS (Technology) in MINDEF; COA	First in 2009 Second in 2014

47	2005	BG (RET) Lim Feng, Philip	Military Engineer	GSMB	Maintenance and Engineering Formation	N/A	HJL, ACGS (Log)	2007
48	2005	BG (NS) Lim U Yang, Hugh Reginald	Combat Engineer	35 SCE	Engineer Formation	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV, COMD TRADOC, COS-GS	2009
49	2005	BG (VOL) Toh Bee Chew, Winston	Guards	3 GDS	7 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV/CIO	2007
50	2005	BG (NS) Wong Ann Chai	Armour	40 SAR	8 SAB	25 DIV	COMD 25 DIV/CAO	2007
51	2006	BG (RET) Lowrence Chua	Armour	40 SAR	54 SAB, 8 SAB	2 PDF	COMD 2 PDF	2008
52	2006	BG Koh Tee Hian, David	Signals	3 SIG	Signals Formation	-	Hd JCISD, DIR MSD	
53	2006	BG (NS) Tan Yih San	Combat Engineer	30 SCE	2 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, FSA FSD	2011
54	2007	MG (NS) Chan Chun Sing	Infantry	2 SIR	10 SIB	9 DIV	9 DIV/CIO, COS-JS, COA	2011
55	2007	BG (NS) Lim Chern Tjunn, Philip	Commando	1 SIR	4 SAB	25 DIV	ACGS (Ops), COMD 25 DIV/CAO, COS-GS	2010
56	2007	BG (NS) Tan Chuan-Jin	Guards	3 GDS	7 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, COMD TRADOC	2011
57	2008	BG (VOL) Lim Teck Yin	Commando	46 SAR	4 SAB	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV, DIR NS Affairs, COMD TRADOC, COMDT SAFTI MI	2011
58	2008	BG (RET) Teo Jing Siong	Combat Engineer	35 SCE	ARMCEG	2 PDF	COMD 2 PDF	2011
59	2008	BG (NS) Tung Yui Fai	Combat Engineer	35 SCE	ARMCEG	21 DIV	COMD 21 DIV/CGO, ACGS (Ops), COS-GS, DIR NS Affairs	2013
60	2009	BG (RET) Ishak bin Ismail	Infantry	6 SIR	12 SIB	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV	2011
61	2009	BG (NS) Lee Shiang Long	Signals	3 SIG	Signals Formation	-	Hd JCISD, MINDEF Chief Information Officer	2013

62	2009	BG (NS) (Dr) Seet Hun Yew, Benjamin	Medical	Medical Classification Centre	Army Medical Services	SAF Medical Corps	CMC	2011
63	2010	BG Chan Wing Kai	Guards	1 SIR	2 SIB	21 DIV	COMD 21 DIV/CGO, ACGS (Ops)	
64	2010	BG Lim Hock Yu	Infantry	6 SIR	10 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV, COMD TRADOC, COS-GS	
65	2010	BG (NS) Ngien Hoon Ping	Logistics	GSMB	Supply and Transport Formation	CSSCOM	DJO	2013
66	2010	BG (NS) Tan Ming Yiak, Mark	Combat Engineer	3 SIR	3 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, COMD SAFTI MI, FSA FSD, COS-JS	2014
67	2011	BG (NS) Lam Shiu Tong	Commando	SOF, 3 SIR	2 SIB	2 PDF	COMD 2 PDF	2014
68	2011	BG Benedict Lim	Armour	40 SAR	8 SAB	25 DIV	COMD 25 DIV/CAO, COMDT SAFTI MI	
69	2011	BG Lim Cheng Yeow, Perry	Guards	1 GDS	7 SIB	3 DIV	COMD 3 DIV, DIR NS Affairs, COS-GS, COA	
70	2011	BG (NS) Yeo See Peng	Commando	6 SIR	3 SIB	6 DIV	COMD 6 DIV	2013
71	2012	BG Chia Choon Hoong, Kelvin	Infantry	4 SIR	2 SIB	9 DIV	COMD 9 DIV/CIO, DJO, COS-JS	
72	2012	BG Siew Kum Wong	Armour	*Unknown*	4 SAB	25 DIV	COMD 25 DIV/CAO	
73	2013	ME8 Lau Cher Loon	Intelligence	*Unknown*	*Unknown*	-	Hd Joint Intelligence Department at MIO	
74	2013	BG Tan Kok Ming, Desmond	Guards	1 SIR	3 SIB	21 DIV	COMD 21 DIV/CGO	
75	2013	BG (NS) Tan Peng Kuan	Logistics	1 TPT Bn	Supply Formation	CSSCOM	COMD CSSCOM	2014

Annex M

Command Appointments of Admirals in the RSN

S/N	Year Promoted	Rank and Name	Vocation	~ Ship CO	~ Squadron CO	~ Flotilla Command	~ Fleet Command	Appointments held as one-star and above	Year Retired
1	1988	RADM1 (RET) Leo Chin Lian, James	Engineering	Naval Technical Training School; Naval Maintenance Base	N/A	N/A	N/A	CNV	1991
2	1991	RADM1 (RET) Teo Chee Hean	Combat	*Unknown*	*Unknown*	N/A	*Unknown*	CNV	1992
3	1993	RADM2 (RET) Kwek Siew Jin, Willie	Combat	RSS Jupiter	Unknown	N/A	Y	CNV	1996
4	1994	RADM2 (RET) Lim Cherng Yih, Richard	Combat	RSS Daring	185 SQN	-	N	HNO, COS-NS, DJOPD, CNV	1999
5	1995	RADM1 (RET) Loon Leong Yoon, Larry	Combat	RSS Dauntless; RSS Sea Lion	188 SQN	1 FLOT	Y	Fleet COMD, NHO, COS-NS	1999
6	1998	RADM2 (RET) Lui Tuck Yew	Combat	RSS Sea Hawk	185 SQN	1 FLOT	Y	Fleet COMD, Dy CNV, CNV	2003
7	1999	RADM1 (RET) Ong Hung Eng, Simon	Combat	RSS Freedom; RSS Sea Lion; RSS Vigilance	185 SQN	-	N	HNO, COS-NS, COMDT SAFTI MI	2003
8	2000	RADM1 (RET) Jway Ching Hua	Engineering	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	HNL	2002
9	2001	RADM1 (RET) Sim Gim Guan	Combat	RSS Sea Tiger	185 SQN	-	Y	Fleet COMD, HNO, COS-NS	2006
10	2001	RADM2 (RET) Ronnie Tay	Combat	RSS Swift Warlord, RSS Sea Lion	188 SQN	1 FLOT	Y	NHO, COS-NS, CNV	2007
11	2005	RADM2 (NS) Chew Men Leong	Combat	RSS Vigour	188 SQN	1 FLOT	Y	Fleet COMD, HNO, COS-NS, CNV	2011

12	2006	RADM1 (NS) Tan Kai Hoe	Combat	RSS Swift Knight; RSS Valour	185 SQN	-	Y	Fleet COMD, COS-NS	2009
13	2007	RADM2 Ng Chee Peng	Combat	RSS Victory	188 SQN	1 FLOT	Y	DIR (Policy) DPO, Fleet COMD, COS-NS, COS-JS, CNV	
14	2007	RADM1 (NS) Tay Kian Seng	Combat	RSS Victory; RSS Valour	188 SQN	1 FLOT	N	HNO, DJO	2010
15	2007	RADM1 (RET) (Dr) Wong Chee Meng, John	Medical	Hd Psychological Care Centre, Hd Naval Medicine & Hyperbaric Centre	Military Medical Institute	Naval Medical Services	SAF Medical Corps	CMC	2009
16	2008	RADM2 (NS) Leong Weng Keong, Joseph	Combat	RSS Vigilance	188 SQN	1 FLOT	Y	Hd JPTD, Fleet COMD, DMI, Chief C4I	2014
17	2009	RADM1 Tan Wee Beng	Combat	*Unknown*	NDU	-	N	COMD MSTF, HNO, COS-NS	
18	2010	L/RADM1 (RET) Bernard Donald Miranda [L/RADM1 (2010-1)]	Combat	RSS Sovereignty; RSS Sea Wolf; RSS Persistence	191 SQN	3 FLOT	N	COMD CTF-151, DIR (Multi-National Operations) in CNV Office	2011
19	2010	RADM1 Jackson Chia	Combat	RSS Vigour; RSS Formidable	-	-	N	COMD MSTF, HNO	
20	2011	RADM1 Chan Weng Yip, Harris [L/RADM1 (2011-2)]	Combat	RSS Vigilance; RSS Victory	-	-	N	COMD CTF-151, MSTF, FSTA FSTD	
21	2011	RADM1 Lai Chung Han	Combat	RSS Valiant	188 SQN	1 FLOT	Y	Fleet COMD, DS (Policy) MINDEF	
22	2013	COL Giam Hock Koon [L/RADM1 (2013)]	Combat	RSS Vengeance; RSS Steadfast	185 SQN	1 FLOT	N	COMD CTF-151, COMD MSTF	

23	2013	RADM1 (Dr) Kang Wee Lee	Medical	*Unknown*	Force Medical Protection Command	Naval Medical Services	SAF Medical Corps	CMC	
24	2013	RADM1 Lo Khee Shik, Timothy	Combat	RSS Justice; RSS Vigour	188 SQN	-	Y	Fleet COMD	

Annex N

Command Appointments of Generals in the RSAF

S/N	Year Promoted	Rank and Name	Vocation	SQN CO	Brigade	Air Base or Division	Functional Command	Appointments held as one-star and above	Retirement
1	1987	BG (RET) Teo Eng Cheng, Michael	Pilot (FTR)	140 SQN, 144 SQN	N/A	-	N/A	COMD RSAF, CAF	1992
2	1988	BG (RET) Yeo Yong Boon, George	AWO (C3)	-	-	-	N/A	DJOPD	1988
3	1989	BG (RET) Yeo Ping Yong, Gary	Pilot (FTR)	142 SQN	N/A	TAB	N/A	Dy COMD RSAF, DJID	1993
4	1992	LG (RET) Bey Soo Khiang	Pilot (TPT)	CO Ground School at FTS	N/A	PLAB	N/A	COS-AS, CAF, Ag CDF, CDF	2000
5	1992	BG (RET) Wesley Gerard D'Aranjo	Air Engineering Officer	*Unknown*	N/A	DMO	N/A	DS (Technology) MINDEF	1998
6	1994	MG (RET) Goh Yong Siang	Pilot (FTR)	140 SQN	N/A	PLAB	N/A	COS-AS, DJOPD, CAF	1998
7	1994	BG (RET) (Dr) Lim Meng Kin	Medical	Hd RSAF Aeromedical Centre, CO 3rd Medical Bn	N/A	SAF Medical Corps	N/A	CMC, DIR DMRI at DSO	1995
8	1997	MG (RET) Ng Teck Heng, Raymund	Pilot (FTR)	145 SQN	N/A	TAB	N/A	HAO, COS-AS, CAF	2001
9	1997	BG (RET) Yam Ah Mee	AWO (GBAD)	165 SADA	SADA	ADSD	N/A	COS-AS, COMD ADSD	1998
10	1998	MG (RET) Lim Kim Choon, Rocky	Pilot (FTR)	*Unknown*	N/A	TAB	N/A	HAO, COS-AS, CAF	2006

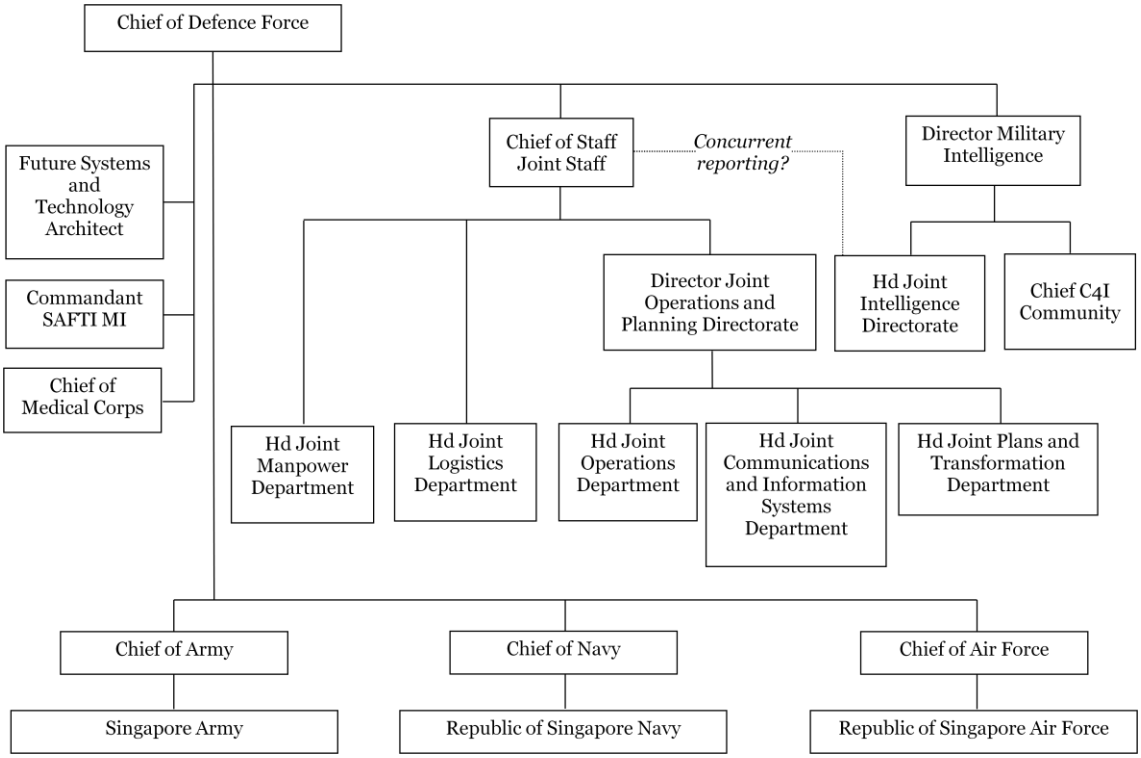
11	1999	BG (RET) Khoo Siew Kim, Jimmy	AWO (GBAD)	160 SADA	*Unknown*	ADSD	N/A	COMD ADSD, DJOPD, MINDEF Chief Information Officer, FSA FSD	2007
12	1999	BG (RET) Loh Kok Hua	Pilot (FTR)	140 SQN	N/A	PLAB, TAB	N/A	COMD TAB, DA Washington	2002
13	2000	BG (RET) Chee Wee Kiong	AWO (GBAD)	*Unknown*	ADB	ADSD	N/A	COMD ADSD, COS-AS, DJOPD, COS and later DIR SID	*Unknown*
14	2000	BG (RET) Jek Kian Yee	Pilot (TPT)	*Unknown*	N/A	*Unknown*	N/A	DIR MSD	2006
15	2000	BG (RET) Yap Ong Heng	AWO (C3)	*Unknown*	*Unknown*	*Unknown*	N/A	MA at the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the UN	2004
16	2001	BG (RET) Lim Yeow Beng	Air Engineering Officer	ALS TAB	N/A	N/A	N/A	HAL	2003
17	2002	BG (RET) Voon Tse-Chow	Pilot (FTR)	142 SQN	N/A	PLAB	N/A	DA Washington	2005
18	2003	MG (NS) Ng Chee Khern	Pilot (FTR)	149 SQN	N/A	TAB	N/A	DJO, DJOPD, COS-AS, CAF	2009
19	2003	BG (VOL) Tan Cheng Yaw, Jimmy	AWO (GBAD) AWO (C3)	20X SQN	AFSB	ADSD	N/A	COMD ADSD, COMDT SAFTI MI	2009
20	2004	BG (RET) Lim Keng Yong, Richard	Pilot (FTR)	140 SQN	N/A	TAB	N/A	COMD TAB, DA Washington	2008
21	2004	BG (RET) Sih Seah Wee, Charles	Pilot (FTR)	145 SQN	N/A	PLAB	N/A	HAO, COS-AS	2008
22	2004	BG (RET) Wong Huat Sern	Pilot (HELI)	120 SQN	N/A	SBAB	PC	DJO, COMD SBAB, COMD PC, COS-AS	2013

23	2005	BG (NS) Ang Aik Hwang, Gary	AWO (C3)	111 SQN	-	TAB	-	DIR (Policy) DPO, COMD TAB, Assistant DS and DS (Policy) MINDEF	2011
24	2005	BG (NS) Tan Meng Dui	AWO (C3)	20X SQN	ADB	ADSD	ADOC	HAT, COMD ADSD/ADOC, HAO, DIR MI, DS (Technology) MINDEF	2011
25	2006	BG (RET) Tsoi Mun Heng	Air Engineering Officer	ALS SBAB	N/A	N/A	N/A	HAL, DIR Defence Industry and Systems Office in MINDEF	2009
26	2007	MG Hoo Cher Mou	AWO (C3)	203 SQN	AFSB	N/A	ADOC	COMD ADOC, COS-AS, COS-JS, CAF	
27	2008	LG Ng Chee Meng	Pilot (FTR)	144 SQN	N/A	CAB	-	DJO, Dy CAF, CAF, CDF	
28	2008	BG (RET) Richard Christopher Pereira	Pilot (FTR)	145 SQN	N/A	-	ACC	COMD ACC	2011
29	2008	BG Cheng Siak Kian [L/BG (2008-10)]	AWO (GBAD)	165 SQN	ADB	N/A	-	DA Washington, DIR (Policy) DPO, COMD ADOC	
30	2009	BG (NS) Kwek Kok Kwong	AWO (C3)	20X SQN	AFOG, ASCG	N/A	ADOC	COMD ADOC	2012
31	2011	BG Lim Yong Kiat	Pilot (FTR)	140 SQN	N/A	CAB	ACC	COMD ACC, COS-AS	
32	2011	ME8 (NS) Lee Ling Wee	Air Engineering Officer	ALS TAB	N/A	N/A	N/A	HAL	2013
33	2011	BG Sarbjit Singh s/o Tahil Singh	Pilot (FTR)	140 SQN	TASC	-	UC, APGC	COMD APGC	

34	2012	BG Neo Hong Keat	Pilot (FTR)	140 SQN	N/A	-	UC	HAO	
35	2012	L/BG Tan Chee Wee [L/BG (2012-present)]	AWO (C3)	203 SQN	-	N/A	-	DA Washington, DIR (Policy) DPO	
36	2013	BG Lim Tuang Liang	Pilot (FTR)	145 SQN	N/A	-	UC, ACC	COMD ACC	
37	2013	BG Tan Wei Ming, Mervyn	Pilot (TPT)	121 SQN	N/A	-	ADOC	COMD ADOC, DMI, Chief C4I	
38	2013	L/BG Leong Kum Wah [L/BG (2013-present)]	Pilot (FTR)	-	-	-	-	DA Washington	

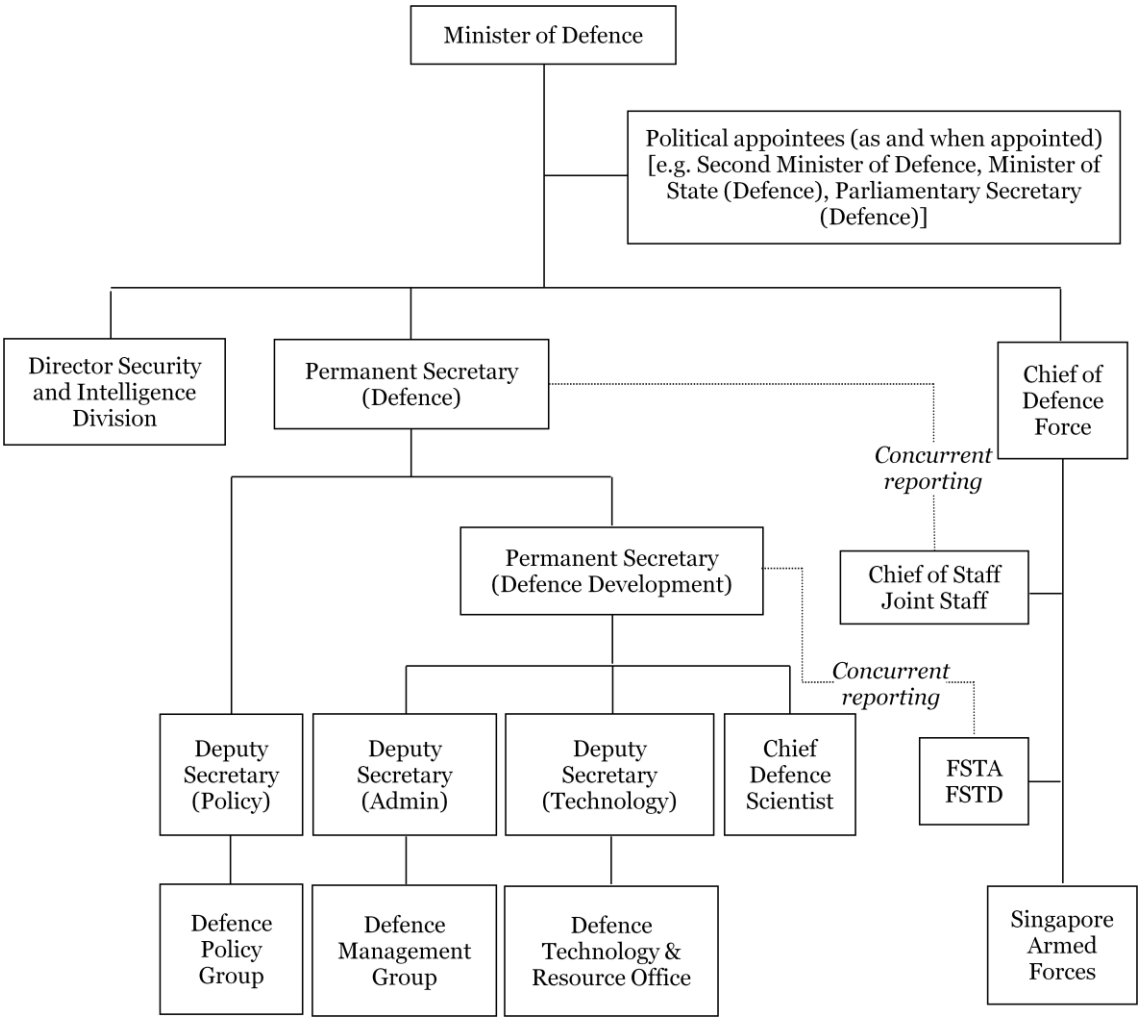
Annex O

Key appointments at the SAF HQ



Annex P

Key appointments at MINDEF



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Interviews

The interview participants are arranged in chronological order starting with the receipt of the first star, followed by highest rank attained, and then alphabetically by surname/name:

1. LG (RET) Choo Wee Leong, Winston (Army) – 1974
2. BG (RET) Sim Hak Kng, Patrick (Army) – 1978
3. BG (RET) Tan Chin Tiong (Army) – 1980
4. BG (RET) Yeo Ping Yong, Gary (RSAF) – 1989
5. BG (RET) Choy Choong Tow, Patrick (Army) – 1990
6. MG (RET) Lim Neo Chian (Army) – 1991
7. BG (RET) Colin George Theseira (Army) – 1991
8. LG (RET) Bey Soo Khiang (RSAF) – 1992
9. RADM2 (RET) Lim Cherng Yih, Richard (RSN) – 1994
10. BG (RET) Law Chwee Kiat (Army) – 1995
11. RADM1 (RET) Loon Leong Yoon, Larry (RSN) – 1995
12. BG (RET) Tan Kim Teck, Andrew (Army) – 1997
13. BG (RET) Yam Ah Mee (RSAF) – 1997
14. BG (RET) (Dr) Lee Kim Hock, Lionel (Army) – 1998
15. BG (RET) Loh Kok Hua (RSAF) – 1999
16. BG (RET) Su Poon Ghee, Philip (Army) – 1999
17. BG (NS) Chua Chwee Koh (Army) – 2001
18. BG (VOL) Tan Cheng Yaw, Jimmy (RSAF) – 2003
19. BG (VOL) Goh Kee Nguan (Army) – 2004
20. BG (RET) Lim Feng, Philip (Army) – 2005
21. BG (VOL) Toh Bee Chew, Winston (Army) – 2005
22. BG (RET) Lowrence Chua (Army) – 2006
23. BG (RET) Tsoi Mun Heng (RSAF) – 2006
24. RADM1 (RET) (Dr) Wong Chee Meng, John (RSN) – 2007
25. BG (NS) Richard Christopher Pereira (RSAF) – 2008
26. BG (NS) Ishak bin Ismail (Army) – 2009
27. BG (NS) (Dr) Seet Hun Yew, Benjamin – 2009
28. L/RADM1 (RET) Bernard Donald Miranda (RSN) – 2010

The following officers also provided invaluable insights into their careers with the SAF (by rank and then alphabetical order of surname):

1. COL (RET) Lim Teck Huat, Michael (army)
2. COL (RET) Soh Guan Huat (RSN)
3. LTC (RET) Boon Hon Lin (army)
4. LTC (RET) David Lee (RSN)
5. LTC (RET) Sng Seow Lian (army)

Acknowledgment is also made to other ex-regular officers in the ranks of MAJ to COL who declined to be identified.

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