

A MATTER OF DUTY

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A MATTER OF DUTY

**A MEMOIR OF MY TIME IN THE
SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES (1967–1982)**

Tan Chin Tiong

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of Dr Goh Keng Swee,
Minister of Defence (1965–1967 and 1970–1979),
and the first generation of SAF Officers who served with him.*



Dr Goh Keng Swee, as Honorary Colonel of the Singapore Artillery, inspecting the second batch of PDF volunteers, which included Minister for Labour, Jek Yuen Thong (*left*), on 29 November 1966.

Photo Credit: *Goh Keng Swee: A Public Career Remembered*, by Barry Desker and Kwa Chong Guan (World Scientific, 2011), p. 99.

Contents

<i>Foreword by Peter Ho</i>	ix
<i>Message from Winston Choo</i>	xiii
<i>Message from Lui Pao Chuen</i>	xix
<i>Preface</i>	xxv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xxxix
1. A Rite of Passage	1
2. An Unexpected Call to Serve	13
3. Army Staff College, Camberley	20
4. Learning the Ropes	28
5. Pushing the Boundaries	38
6. A New Frontier: Overseas Training	58
7. Towards Excellence	67
8. The Commander-in-Chief	81
9. A High Command for the SAF: The General Staff	91
10. Learning from Others	108

11. Caring for the Troops	116
12. Homeland Defence	121
13. Changing of the Guard	129
14. Ending on a High Note	144
Epilogue: The Men Who Made It Happen	154
<i>Abbreviations</i>	156
<i>Index</i>	161

Foreword

The early history of independent Singapore is justifiably dominated by the narrative of an accidental nation striving to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. For many Singaporeans, this struggle is personified by the political leadership of the times—giants like Lee Kuan Yew, Dr Goh Keng Swee, and S. Rajaratnam. However, the account remains incomplete without acknowledging those who have worked diligently behind the scenes to implement the vision and directions of those in power.

These individuals were not mere followers acting in blind faith. Instead, they embraced the responsibility of nation-building when the nation was barely emerging. They knew the risks and uncertainties. They were acutely aware that they had shouldered the burden of making things work despite few resources and even fewer markers and no established guidelines to point them in the right direction. There were no guarantees then—as now—of good outcomes. They acted on conviction, doing what they felt was right, stretching themselves to the utmost of their abilities, believing that failure was not an acceptable option.

In concert with the political leadership, the actions and beliefs of these pioneers transformed Singapore from a mudflat to a metropolis,

from Third World to First, within two generations. Their legacy is particularly remarkable when we consider their starting point of profound scarcity.

One such story is that of Tan Chin Tiong's. When I entered national service at the end of 1972, he had already graduated from the then University of Singapore with a rare first-class honours in History. He then joined the Civil Service. But the urgent and critical need to build up Singapore's defences swept Chin Tiong as a young civil servant into the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). He was enlisted into national service under a new scheme which put graduate civil servants on a through-train to become officers in the SAF.

This is where *A Matter of Duty* begins. Chin Tiong uses his own journey in the fledgling SAF as the setting to delve into Dr Goh Keng Swee's central role in establishing the national service system and building the SAF. He had been talent-spotted by Dr Goh, who persuaded him to put on hold his ambitions in the Civil Service to serve as a military officer. Despite his doubts, Chin Tiong accepted this as a call of duty to the nation. He rapidly advanced from a green second lieutenant to become a brigadier general, a rank of almost mythical eminence in those days.

Throughout his military career, Chin Tiong held pivotal positions from which he could, and would, influence the shape, direction and ethos in the young SAF, amply justifying the faith that Dr Goh had placed in him. These included Commanding Officer of the Officer Cadet School in SAFTI, Head of Training Department, Assistant Chief of General Staff for Plans, and Deputy Chief of the General Staff, the number two man in the SAF.

In this account, Chin Tiong provides detail and flavour to the challenges—both strategic and operational—of building the SAF virtually from scratch. How these challenges were met and overcome is very much at the centre of this book. In the beginning, Dr Goh and his team worked with few resources of men and money. Yet they derived confidence from a belief that they had to—and could—make things work if they applied themselves. They studied and adapted

the best ideas and insights from the experiences of others. Slowly at first, but soon gathering pace and momentum, the SAF grew from just two battalions, one wooden patrol boat and no air force at independence into the formidable deterrent that it is today. This was achieved not just on the back of the government's priority on defence—which saw the Ministry of Defence getting the lion's share of the budget at 7.5 per cent of GDP in those days—but also from the meticulous attention to detail and a focus on implementation that have since become the hallmarks of the Singapore government.

In telling this story, Chin Tiong brings to bear an historian's eye, picking out key events, layering them with anecdotes about people, connecting them to outcomes, and to how these created the foundational principles and values that drove Singapore and the SAF to this day. His work is particularly valuable because little has been written about the early years of the SAF. Chin Tiong was a key player during that period, so his insights are a rich and reliable source of information, filling in gaps which help us understand how the SAF came to be.

Beyond the military narrative, Chin Tiong's story reflects the struggles on the larger canvas of Singapore's development after independence. The values forged through these struggles, dealing with uncertainty and few resources, defined the character of the leaders and the citizens in those formative years. These include values of resilience, determination and adaptability—never say die—which are just as salient today as they were more than half a century ago.

While the book ends with Chin Tiong's departure from the SAF, his own story does not end there. It continued into another chapter, but this time in the Civil Service, which saw him serving in pinnacle positions as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Information and the Arts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and latterly as Singapore's Ambassador to Japan. His own journey has been diverse and eclectic, and it has taken him through unexpected turns. Like many of his generation, he never flinched in the face of new challenges, accepting

the burdens of duty to country. In so doing, he did himself, his family and his country proud.

Inherently modest, Chin Tiong maintained a low profile throughout his career. He was reluctant to write this book and only did so at the urging of friends. By sharing his story, he has filled some critical historical gaps, offering fresh insights into the SAF's development and Singapore's remarkable nation-building journey.

Peter Ho
Senior Advisor
Centre for Strategic Futures
Permanent Secretary (Defence) (1995–2004)

Message

He was called to serve, and as a matter of duty, served he did with distinction.

Tan Chin Tiong began his journey with a solid academic foundation, graduating with first-class honours in History from the University of Singapore before it became the National University of Singapore following its merger with Nanyang University. In April 1967, he joined the Singapore Administrative Service, where his commitment to public service soon became evident. He was then conscripted under the amended National Service Act, which required selected civil servants to serve up to three years of national service in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). After completing basic military training and section-leader courses, he was selected for officer-cadet training at the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI). He was commissioned as a second lieutenant on 17 November 1968.

As Chin Tiong approached the end of his full-time national service in 1970, he had already attended a course at the School of Advanced Training for Officers (SATO) and earned a promotion to captain ahead of his course mates from earlier batches. However, his return to the Administrative Service was short-lived. In August 1970,

Dr Goh Keng Swee began his second term as Minister of Defence. Dr Goh was aware of the challenges ahead: transforming Singapore's multiracial community of immigrants, refugees and shopkeepers into a cohesive society dedicated to survival amid regional uncertainties. Dr Goh understood that a capable defence force was essential for national security. During his earlier tenure in the Ministry of Interior and Defence (MID), he navigated an organisation staffed by police officers, mobilised volunteer military officers, and career soldiers from the two Singapore Infantry Regiments (SIRs). These battalions had operational experience fighting the communist insurgency and the Indonesian Confrontation.

In the interim period between Dr Goh's first and second terms as Defence Minister, the withdrawal of the British Forces based in Singapore was almost completed. Key SAF milestones were soon established, including the setting up of the School of Advanced Training for Officers (SATO), Singapore Command and Staff College (SCSC), and an additional infantry brigade as well as national service battalions.

Recognising Chin Tiong's academic credentials, infantry officer training, and performance in national service, Dr Goh encouraged him to consider a career as a regular officer in the SAF. He articulated a pressing need for talented individuals to assist in building up a staff corps in the Ministry of Defence (Mindef). Dr Goh revealed his plans to recruit officers through a prestigious scholarship scheme. This long-term strategy would ensure a steady flow of high-calibre officers into the military ranks. This pathway would take time to institutionalise. Chin Tiong, who became an important figure in the SAF, was the prototype of the SAF scholar it was intended to produce even though he preceded it.

Persuaded by Dr Goh's vision, and recognising that there were areas for improvement in Mindef, Chin Tiong accepted Dr Goh's call to serve in the SAF as a matter of duty. In April 1971, he re-enlisted as a regular captain, embarking on an accelerated career meticulously planned by Dr Goh himself: starting as an infantry

company commander, training at the Army Staff College, Camberley, and a course at the School of Infantry, Warminster, both in the United Kingdom. Upon his return, Chin Tiong would assume staff appointments in an infantry brigade, command an infantry battalion, lead an officer-training school, and eventually serve in the General Staff Division.

Dr Goh's deep-seated belief in the need to fast-track capable officers also influenced my own career profoundly. I recall him laying out an ambitious plan for my future a year before Chin Tiong became a regular officer. He intended to appoint me as Director of the General Staff and outlined a comprehensive career path for me. This included completing the SCSC course, transitioning from my position as Chief of Communications and Electronics, and returning to the infantry as the commanding officer of 4 SIR. Following a course at the US Army Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth, Kansas, I would command an infantry brigade and serve in various roles in the General Staff in Mindef, including as Head of Training and Head of Organisation, and eventually becoming the Director of the General Staff. This enlightened approach exemplified Dr Goh's commitment to nurturing talent, ensuring that nothing was left to chance and that leaders were thoroughly prepared for their future roles.

Upon returning from the UK, Chin Tiong was assigned to HQ, 2nd Singapore Infantry Brigade (2 SIB). As I was the brigade commander, Chin Tiong reported to me for his assignment as the brigade's General Staff Officer. I became acquainted with him and soon noted his keen intellect and capabilities. During his time with 2 SIB, Chin Tiong effectively coordinated work and training plans for the brigade and its three battalions while leading the HQ's staff through the brigade confirmation exercise to test its operational readiness.

After six months in command of 4 SIR, Chin Tiong moved on to lead the Officer Cadet School (OCS) in SAFTI. Besides training several batches of officer cadets, he oversaw the implementation of a

pecially designed course for the Scholars Platoon, which comprised SAF scholars selected for university studies overseas. This course, which I, as Head of the Training Department in the General Staff Division, had modified into a nine-month programme, was designed to dovetail with overseas university programmes starting in September each year.

Chin Tiong joined the General Staff in August 1974, reporting directly to me after I had become the director in May. He took charge of the Training Department, which Dr Goh had prepared him for, to leverage his talents to influence the development of the army. This marked the beginning of a working relationship that lasted more than eight years, during which we collaborated closely. The Training Department was crucial in overseeing the SAF's expansion, particularly in establishing training facilities for the arms and services. The chiefs of these arms—infantry, artillery, armour, combat engineers, and communications and electronics—served as Senior Specialist Staff Officers (SSSOs) and were key partners in enhancing training. As Head of the Training Department, Chin Tiong supervised SSSOs through regular General Staff meetings, which I often designated him to chair along with the formation commanders' meetings in my absence.

In September 1976, the General Staff was formally established in the SAF. This reorganisation introduced the position of Chief of the General Staff (CGS)—which implied a command role absent in the Director of the General Staff position it replaced—and categorised key staff functions into six departments: G1 through to G6, covering personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, plans, and training, with each department led by an Assistant Chief of General Staff (ACGS). The titles were designated accordingly: G1 became ACGS (Personnel), G2 as ACGS (Intelligence), G3 as ACGS (Operations), G4 as ACGS (Logistics), G5 as ACGS (Plans), and G6 as ACGS (Training). This structure mirrored the practices of the US Army and was implemented throughout the command hierarchy down

to individual units. Chin Tiong was designated ACGS (Training) following this pivotal change.

Chin Tiong was like a brain trust to Dr Goh, who expected him to take on responsibilities beyond his primary roles. I was aware of Dr Goh's habit of assigning capable officers tasks outside their designated scope of duties as I had been similarly affected. One example was Chin Tiong's establishment of Hokkien- and Malay-language platoons trained by instructors proficient in these languages because the soldiers lacked proficiency in English, the official language used in instruction. Another example was Chin Tiong's introduction of the Infantry Training Depot, where all recruits underwent basic military training before being assigned to their respective battalions, thereby resolving a long-standing problem of having infantry battalions with companies at different levels of combat readiness.

Chin Tiong had a significant impact on the General Staff as Head of Training and Head of Plans, which he held concurrently. As CGS, I could rely on him not only for efficient staff support but also as a trusted partner and confidant. With Chin Tiong on my team, I could focus on my responsibilities as the head of the armed forces, leading our troops while strengthening our relationships with neighbouring countries, treaty partners, and key allies that provided us with training areas and technical support.

In August 1981, I had the opportunity to pursue a year-long master's programme at Duke University in the US. By then a brigadier-general and Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Chin Tiong stepped up as Acting CGS to cover my absence. I left for the US with complete confidence that the SAF and the General Staff were in capable hands. His leadership ensured continuity and stability within our ranks.

Chin Tiong's account of his tour in the SAF chronicles the significant transformations occurring over 15 years during which the SAF evolved from two infantry battalions with limited ancillary support to a sophisticated, multi-divisional combined arms army.

Among his many accomplishments in this transformation, two stood out: the establishment of the Singapore Guards as an elite infantry formation for heliborne and coastal hook operations, and the landmark decision to award regimental colours to all combat units, along with state colours for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and SAFTI.

Chin Tiong's account, while primarily a personal memoir of his experiences, is also an authoritative history of the formative years of the SAF. He generously acknowledges the contributions of the early pioneer officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs), many by name, documenting their experiences through memory and extensive discussions with each of them. The work is also a tribute to Dr Goh, faithfully recording his significant contributions and highlighting his extraordinary genius, visionary ideas, and strategic insights as the architect of the armed forces. It addresses the gap in published material on Dr Goh's role in establishing and developing Singapore's defence capabilities, ensuring that his legacy is not forgotten. It is a reminder of the enormous debt of gratitude generations of Singaporeans owe to this remarkable man, who is truly the Father of the SAF.

A Matter of Duty should be widely read by Singaporeans and all SAF officers, past and present.

Lieutenant-General (Retd) Winston Choo Wee Leong
Chief of Defence Force (1974–1992)
Singapore Armed Forces

Message

Chin Tiong and I were schoolmates at St Joseph's Institution (SJI), which was then located along Bras Basah Road. On Fridays, we worked closely as a two-man team to write and print copies of *SJI News* with a "Gestetner Cyclostyle machine". After printing, we delivered copies to all the classrooms. It was fun.

In 1966, I enlisted in the newly formed SAF on a Short Service Commission, while Chin Tiong was in the first batch of civil servants drafted into National Service in 1967. In 1971, I became the deputy in the Science and Management Group set up by Second Permanent Secretary J.Y. Pillay. That year, I was sent on a two-year Mindef fellowship to study Operations Research and Systems Engineering at the US Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, as Ong Kah Kok, the Director of Logistics, had plans for me to succeed him eventually. On returning to Singapore in 1973, I was appointed Deputy Director, Logistics.

In 1974, Chin Tiong and I crossed paths again. Chin Tiong, after having served in senior command and staff appointments, became Head of Training in the General Staff Division, while I was appointed by Dr Goh Keng Swee, the Minister of Defence, as Special Projects Director (SPD) in 1975 to oversee strategic projects. These

projects included the development of Changi Air Base, protecting our air defence systems, and upgrading our command, control and communications systems. Dr Goh had a very deep interest in defence science, weapons development and technology, and it was in these areas that I worked closely with him.

Dr Goh's management style was top-down but people-centric. When he assigned tasks to people, he gave them full authority and backing to get the job done, bypassing organisations and chains of command. He told me he preferred officers who were like mustangs, fast-running and needing to be reined in, rather than donkeys that needed to be whipped to get them moving. He had no time to waste and expected his officers to work flat out to complete their assignments. He was forgiving of honest mistakes but unforgiving with staff who tried to cover up their inaction with excuses.

If he did not trust a person, he would not listen to or accept proposals from them, no matter how brilliant they may have been. He would promptly post such people out of Mindef. This happened to several brilliant officers after having only worked short stints with him. Those who earned Dr Goh's trust were given freedom and resources to accomplish amazing projects for the SAF.

The project with the most significant impact on the SAF that I had the privilege to work on for Dr Goh was the development of the Supreme Command Post (SCP), which would enable the SAF General Staff, or "high command", to coordinate and direct its forces in a national crisis. There was an urgency to accomplish this project because of the failure of the Mindef Operations Centre to function effectively during Operation Thunderstorm, when Singapore was faced with a fleet of Vietnamese refugee vessels in 1975 following the fall of South Vietnam. Arising from this debacle, Dr Goh decided to build the SCP, which would serve as a fully fledged command, control and communications centre for Mindef. He set up a project team and gave it a four-year deadline to complete the development. The project team included one engineer from Mindef and three engineers from the Public Works Department. Two of them, Ho

Cheok Sun and Lim Soo Ping, later rose to senior positions in the Administrative Service. Our project team worked flat out to meet the 1979 deadline. Dr Goh thought of all the details, including the need for the design of the SCP to be flexible enough to accommodate changes in organisation and operational concepts in the future.

The General Staff's requirements, which included staff processes and Standard Operating Procedures for the SCP, were drawn up by the Operations Department headed by Colonel Gurcharan Singh, ACGS (Operations). For communications, I worked with Colonel Chew Bak Khoon, the SAF's Chief of Communications and Electronics.

In 1978, with most of the major issues in the Army settled, Dr Goh asked me to develop a plan for Singapore's air defence. A committee of three, including Chin Tiong, by then ACGS (Plans), and Gary Yeo, Head of Air Operations of the Air Force, was formed to study the operational requirements for defending Singapore and the Army's assets when deployed in the field. With terrain masking, enemy aircraft could only be detected at the last minute. This meant that the air defence system would need to be based on a very intense shield of short-range surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). Dr Goh accepted this assessment but firmly believed that the best air defence for army assets was camouflage and the cover provided by foliage. Dr Goh was also concerned that mobile air defence weapons systems were expensive and unaffordable, given our other priorities. Fortuitously, Chin Tiong came up with a proposal which effectively addressed Dr Goh's concerns about cost while also meeting the operational requirements of the army for air defence. This was to have the Armour Formation's Cadillac Gage V-200 wheeled armoured personnel carriers, which were being replaced by M-113 tracked vehicles, adapted as mobile platforms for RBS-70 SAMs.

Another issue was the question of command over air defence units. The Army's commanders wanted them to be under their command. However, the risk of accidentally shooting down our own aircraft was very real; a risk that could be reduced if we had

full knowledge of the presence of friendly aircraft. As the Air Force had a comprehensive picture of the air situation, and given the short reaction times, it was more logical for the Air Force to be responsible for protecting ground assets. On this question, Chin Tiong's view—which had the support of CGS Winston Choo—prevailed, which was that the Air Force would be responsible for the air defence of Army assets.

I noticed one side of Dr Goh when I played tennis with him in Mindef. For eleven years, from 1974 to 1985, my duty every Thursday from 5 to 7 pm was to ensure that Dr Goh had a hard game of tennis. He was competitive and wanted to win every point. He got upset whenever he sensed that his opponent was trying to feed him balls so that he could score well. In between games, we sometimes chatted about current military affairs and developments. Dr Goh was convinced that during the Falklands War in May 1982 the British would have lost if not for good luck as Argentinian bombs did not explode when hitting their naval targets. He reasoned that, just as the Royal Navy, which did not have an airborne early warning system, could not prevent the Argentinian Skyhawks from penetrating their air defence umbrella, the same could happen to us. He calculated that, even though the cost of buying the Hawkeye E2-C would be high, it was still cheaper than the cost of an oil refinery. This decision changed the Air Force's concept of air defence, with more weight given to fighter interception than dependence on SAM systems.

We presented the Air Defence Plan (1978) to Dr Goh, which he endorsed for tabling at the Defence Council (DEFECO) meeting. However, the news of Dr Goh moving to the Education Ministry came as a shock. Dr Goh called me to his office and told me not to worry and that he would see the paper through DEFECO before leaving Mindef. I sat on Dr Goh's left at the DEFECO meeting. The Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, was not pleased with the plan's high cost. Dr Goh explained the operational need. I did not say anything. I just nodded when he looked at me to confirm what he had said. PM Lee asked if the plan could be trimmed and stretched

out. Dr Goh agreed to buy an initial quantity to meet the minimal operational requirements and to extend the plan by two years. The plan was approved, and implementation began immediately.

These anecdotes illustrated Dr Goh's leadership in challenging his people in the defence science and technology area, as he did for the SAF, to dare to dream, decide, do and deliver. The following remark by Dr Goh is forever etched in my memory: "The only way to avoid failing is not to do anything. That will be the ultimate failure."

Colonel (Retd) Lui Pao Chuen
 Chief Defence Scientist (1986–2008)
 Ministry of Defence
 Singapore

Preface

The history of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) is an essential part of the Singapore Story. The SAF was established in 1965, the same year that Singapore became independent. At that time, the country had few resources, whether in manpower, money, or expertise.

Singapore had serious internal and external problems at birth. We had separated from the Federation of Malaysia under acrimonious circumstances and faced the threat of Malaysian ultra-nationalists undermining Singapore or seeking its return to the Federation. Although the Indonesian Confrontation (*Konfrontasi*) against Malaysia, which then included Singapore, ended shortly after our independence, relations with Indonesia remained fraught in the early days of President Soeharto's "New Order" government.

Beyond our difficulties with immediate neighbours, the situation in mainland Southeast Asia was not promising either. America's efforts to prop up the South Vietnamese government against the Viet Cong insurgents and, later, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) were proving futile. It was only a question of time before South Vietnam fell, triggering, as was then feared, a domino effect leading to Cambodia, Laos and the rest of Southeast Asia falling to the Communists.

In January 1968, Britain announced its plans to withdraw all its military forces from east of Suez, including Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Hong Kong, by 1971. This could not have come at a worse time. Besides the loss of employment for many Singaporeans employed on British bases and the impact on our fragile economy, we were now confronted with an existential problem.

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Defence Minister Goh Keng Swee knew that only a strong and well-trained military formed and led by citizens could guarantee Singapore's independence and territorial integrity. We needed the wherewithal to protect our airspace, our sea lanes of communication, and the water supply from Malaysia. The threat to our security was daunting. Prime Minister Lee said of our parlous situation, "Without a strong defence, there will be no Singapore... It will become a satellite, cowed and intimidated by its neighbours..." This sober truth was the *raison d'être* for the building up of the SAF, which Singapore plunged into at a feverish pace from the very beginning. Priority was given to building the Army first as there was an urgent need to have boots on the ground. The Navy and Air Force followed a step behind because of their heavier capital expenditures, logistical support requirements and specialised training.

Parallel with the build-up of the SAF, priority was given to economic development. A young nation lacking all manner of resources needed urgently to attract investments and technology that would create jobs. Dr Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's first finance minister, spearheaded Singapore's economic development and, together with our first-generation leaders, laid the foundations for our transformation from Third World to First. His accomplishments included the creation of industrial estates, the setting up of statutory boards such as the Economic Development Board, Jurong Town Corporation and Housing and Development Board, and developing financial institutions such as the Monetary Authority of Singapore and the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation to safeguard and grow our financial reserves. Dr Goh also contributed

immensely to our sociocultural landscape by establishing the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Zoological Gardens and Singapore Bird Park. He even established a research organisation—The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)—for scholars to study and better understand our neighbouring countries.

Besides these accomplishments, Dr Goh is revered as the architect of Singapore's military defence. Despite his pivotal role in the establishment and development of the SAF—although he knew little about military matters apart from having served as a volunteer in the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (SSVF) during World War II and honorary Colonel of the Singapore Artillery in the post-independence SAF—little has been written about the ethos and ideas that drove him relentlessly as he built the armed forces almost from scratch. He was tough, resolute and uncompromising in handling the mission that fate had thrust onto him.

Dr Goh was Minister of Defence from 1965 to 1967 and 1970 to 1979. Using the build-up plans proposed by former Israeli military officers—who were engaged as advisers given our lack of military experience—he began with establishing the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) in 1966. This was needed to produce a corps of professional military officers to lead and train a national service army. By 1979, when Dr Goh left to become Minister for Education, the SAF had expanded from two infantry battalions to an army of two infantry divisions with armour, artillery, combat engineers, communications, and logistics units to support combined arms operations. As for the Navy and Air Force, a nascent command structure was being raised. Dr Goh had created a defence force that commanded the respect of regional armed forces and provided Singapore with the peace and security it has enjoyed since its separation from Malaysia in 1965.

Dr Goh's tenure as Defence Minister was notable for his insistence on excellence, his resolute leadership in times of crisis, his unconventional approach to solving problems—thinking out of the box, as we would say today—and his uncanny ability to anticipate

issues and think of solutions. He was unrelenting in his adherence to principles and values, and he sought to instil them in the SAF through his persistent exhortations, reminders, and even sanctions, making military professionalism a part of the SAF's "DNA" today. As the quintessential Renaissance man, he was deeply interested in military history, science and technology, and classical music. He did not suffer fools gladly and was quick to recommend Ernest Gowers' *The Complete Plain Words* to anyone who had difficulty putting ideas to paper in concise terms or putting up a paper within four pages.

Ever the practical man, he sought to shorten the learning curve by learning from the experiences of other armies in military history, including that of the Warring States period of ancient China. It wasn't a surprise that Norman Dixon's seminal book *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, documenting the mistakes of British military commanders in past wars, became compulsory reading for senior SAF officers. He was also frugal to a fault, which showed in his annoyance when a Rolls-Royce limousine was hired for his use during an overseas visit. On another occasion, when using a piece of tissue paper as he nursed a cold, he folded it neatly and tore it into smaller pieces to extend its use.

While dogged in his pursuit of professionalism, Dr Goh balanced it with far-sighted schemes for the welfare of SAF personnel. These included condominium-style housing built at the erstwhile Normanton Park for sale to SAF regular officers, SAFE Supermarket exclusively for use by servicemen's families, the Sembawang Golf Club for SAF officers, and an NCO Club for servicemen. SAFRA (SAF Reservist Association) clubhouses were also built for SAF reservists, now known as operationally ready national servicemen (ORNS).

As Singapore celebrates the 60th anniversary of its independence, it is appropriate to acknowledge Dr Goh Keng Swee's monumental role in building up the SAF and establishing values that have passed through generations of SAF personnel. This memoir is dedicated to his memory.

I was privileged to serve Dr Goh during much of my fifteen years in the SAF. He gave me the opportunity for Staff College training overseas and early stints in senior command and staff appointments to acquire experience before serving as one of his officers on the General Staff, where I was able to work on projects he initiated or approved.

Many first-generation SAF officers, including myself, who had the privilege of working with Dr Goh, have deep memories of his lasting impact on the SAF's leadership, values and professionalism. I hope this memoir, which recounts the SAF's transformative years and the significant developments during my years in the SAF when Dr Goh was Defence Minister, will enhance our knowledge of his role in developing Singapore's defence capabilities.

In conclusion, it would be appropriate to quote Mr J.Y. Pillay, who had worked with Dr Goh as permanent secretary in the defence and finance ministries and as managing director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore:

Because of [Dr Goh's] generosity of spirit and sterling character, those who worked closely with him and earned his confidence were prepared to go the last mile for him. They recognised him for what he was: a selfless leader who always put the public interest before his own. Truly, he was the noblest of them all.*

* J.Y. Pillay, foreword to *In Lieu of Ideology: An Intellectual Biography of Goh Keng Swee*, by Ooi Kee Beng (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), p. vii.

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