

Epilogue: The Men Who Helped Make It Happen

On 30 June 1992, the SAF celebrated its 25th anniversary. On that day, in an interview with *The Straits Times*, Dr Goh Keng Swee recounted the SAF's early days and how it was transformed from two infantry battalions officered by the British at the time of independence to a conventional armed force formed and led by Singaporean citizens. He also explained why the government invited retired military officers from Israel to advise Mindef on the establishment of the SAF's training system. He praised Singapore's young men who had "the guts and the gumption to take to military careers and make a success of it".*

In the interview, which *The Straits Times* headlined, "The Men Who Helped Make it Happen", Dr Goh attributed the success of the SAF's early development to the contributions of four men: Tan Teck Khim from the Police; Lieutenant-General Winston Choo, the first Director of the General Staff, whom Dr Goh described as "the most outstanding of the officers from the two Singapore Infantry Regiments"; Kirpa Ram Vij, the pioneer Director of SAFTI; and Tan Chin Tiong who, in his words, "opted out of the Administrative

* *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1992, p. 19.

Service for a military career and provided much-needed brain power in General Staff work”.[†]

On 14 May 2010, Dr Goh passed away at the age of 91. The Prime Minister’s Office issued a press statement that day describing Dr Goh as “foremost among the architects in the transformation of Singapore”. A State Funeral was organised in recognition of his outstanding services to the nation.

Several dignitaries closely acquainted with Dr Goh delivered eulogies at his State Funeral Memorial Service held on 23 May at the Singapore Conference Hall. They included Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and former Minister for Foreign Affairs S. Dhanabalan. Mr Dhanabalan recounted how Dr Goh persuaded talented people to serve in the government and personally nurtured them, citing, as examples, his induction into the government and that of Mr Goh Chok Tong and me.[‡]

I attended the memorial service, having been asked by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to return from Tokyo, where I was then Singapore’s Ambassador to Japan. Many SAF officers who had served under Dr Goh were also present to pay their last respects. They included graduates from the first officer cadet batch of SAFTI, the premier military institute established in 1966 under his guidance. Today, the Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College in the new SAFTI Military Institute at Upper Jurong Road serves as a permanent honour to the man who has since become a legend in the annals of the SAF.

[†] Ibid.

[‡] Text of S. Dhanabalan’s eulogy at the State Memorial Service for Dr Goh Keng Swee on 23 May 2010.