

# MAJULAH SINGAPURA

OUR GOLDEN JUBILEE



Home Team  
celebrates

**SG  
50**

**WALKING  
DOWN  
MEMORY  
LANE**

**RESCUE**   
**995** 

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Picture (left to right): Ms Michelle Lim and Mdm Alice Goh



My strongest memory of my childhood is my father reciting to me the ancient history of countries from all over the world. It was no surprise to everyone in my family when they found out that I now share the same interest in history as my father.

While history has always been my passion, it never occurred to me that I would learn so many things of historical significance at where I work – the SCDF. Frankly speaking, it was not until the start of the SG50 journey did I come to realise the rich history of the SCDF, some of which have not been unearthed or told to the younger generation.

The difference between learning about the history of the world and SCDF is that the latter presented an opportunity for me to meet the pioneers of the SCDF in real life or at least, get first-hand accounts about these SCDF historical figures from veteran SCDF officers who had interacted with them. It has been such an enriching experience to be able to meet them in person to hear their stories, their endeavours to reach out to those in distress even in the most precarious situations and their burning passion to save lives.

I have lost count of the number of SCDF pioneers whom I have met since mid-2014 and since the start of my journey in preparation for this special edition of Rescue 995 magazine. In fact all of them have in one way or another left a deep impression in me. Here, due to space constraint, I am only able to highlight two special individuals with whom I had exceptionally meaningful encounters.

Before my first face-to-face interview with SCDF Commissioner (RET) James Tan, many SCDF officers informed me of his stern leadership personality. For a young lady in a junior position, hearing such reviews about your

interviewee with whom you would be spending hours together with is utterly intimidating.

Nonetheless, there was no way out for me. Surely, an SCDF SG50 publication cannot possibly be published without featuring a story on Commissioner (RET) James Tan, a man who is widely regarded to have modernised SCDF and instilled the organisation with a strong culture of innovation and adaption to meet challenges.

The interview sessions, in three days, took almost eight hours and I must say that it was one of the best eight hours I ever had. I was tremendously inspired by his ‘Never Say No’ attitude and if you know him personally, I am sure you would have been impressed by the power of his memory. Well, I did occasionally sense a tinge of that stern personality but his vivacious nature and superb oratorical skill were so captivating that he not only put me at ease but enabled me to thoroughly enjoy the process of interviewing him for hours!

If you have been following the SCDF SG50 journey, you would have been well acquainted with WO (RET) Yunos Shariff. At 72 years old (well I had his permission to reveal his age which he is proud of), he is not only the oldest volunteer with the Civil Defence Auxiliary Unit but on a more personal note, he is also my oldest colleague and friend.

If you know him or have met him, the first thing that will catch your attention is his sweet and charming smile and his hearty laughter. In July this year, we had the privilege to work with DJ Zaza Majid from Warna FM94.2, who conducted an exclusive half hour radio interview with WO (RET) Yunos. I took some photographs of them during the interview and realised that even my friend, Zaza was intrigued by

the great sense of happiness exuded by WO (RET) Yunos. I cannot help but felt that this sense of in-depth and wholehearted happiness must have been a result of the job satisfaction in which he had derived from his decades of life saving mission.

During the celebration of Singapore’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday at the National Day Parade last month, I met the SCDF Vintage Parade Contingent comprising our SCDF pioneer officers. As they marched past the seating gallery in their elegant green khaki uniform from the Singapore Fire Service era, the crowd at the Padang applauded and roared with excitement. I, seated in the crowd, instinctively raised both my hands up in the air and waved frantically at them. I was exhilarated by their presence! I know I sound like a fanatic fan of theirs now but believe me, this entire SG50 journey has made me feel very proud of all our SCDF pioneer officers.

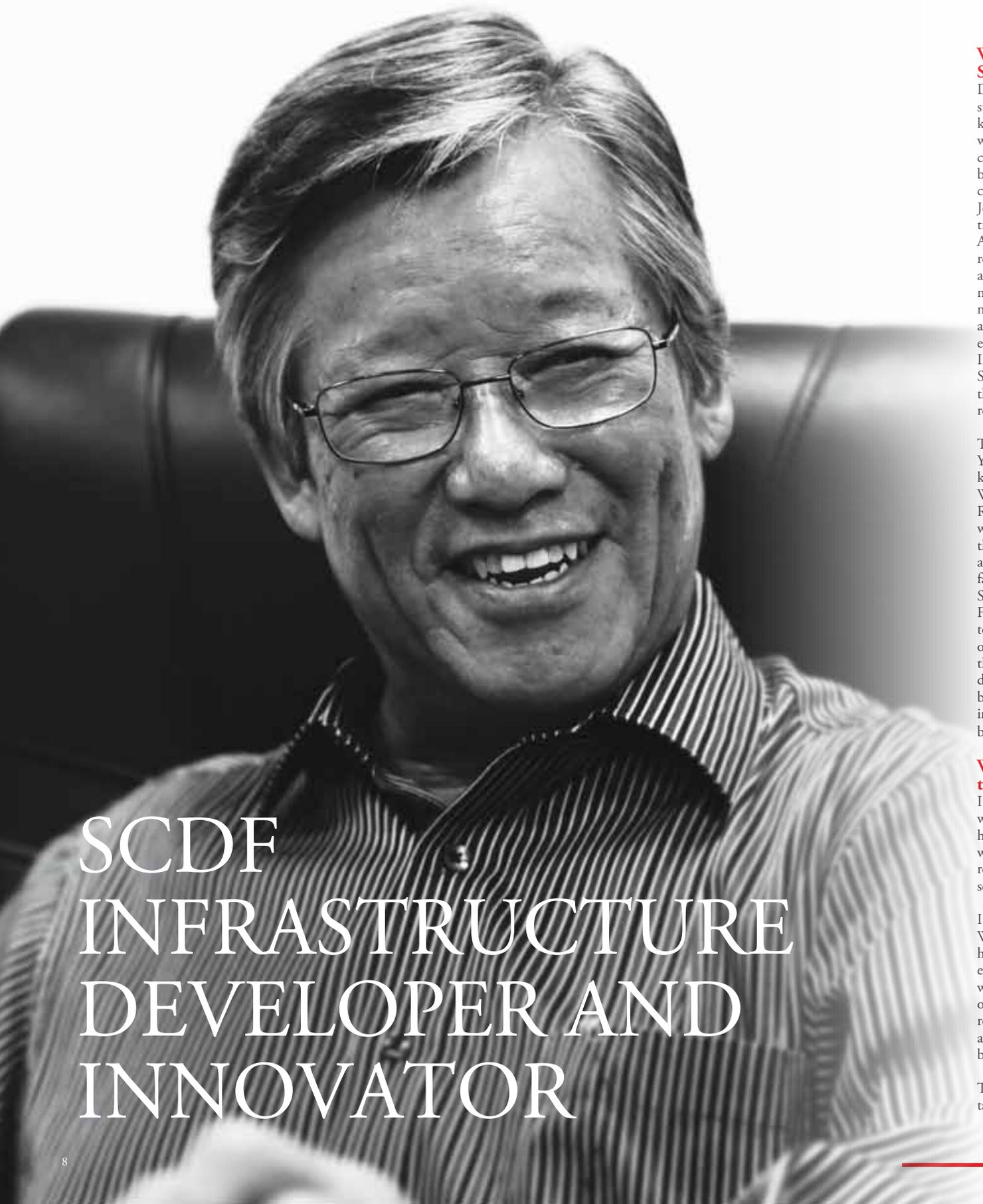
On behalf of the editorial team of Rescue 995 magazine, I would like to say a **Big THANK YOU to the Pioneer Generation of Singapore**. You have experienced a far more challenging life than the one that we have today. You were resolved to defend our young nation and survived. We salute your indefatigable contributions, sacrifices, sheer determination and resilience. Together with my generation of Singaporeans, we will continue to build upon your successes and continue your legacy for a better tomorrow.

I sincerely hope that you would enjoy this special edition of Rescue 995 magazine - a Tribute to our esteemed SCDF pioneer officers.

Michelle Lim  
Editor, Rescue 995  
4 Sep 2015

*Source: This article first appeared in Rescue 995 Volume 1 Number 4, Pgs 8 and 9.*





# SCDF INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPER AND INNOVATOR

## Why was there a need for the integration of the Singapore Fire Service and Civil Defence Force?

During the Second World War, many innocent Singaporeans suffered as war casualties due to the lack of self-protection knowledge and First Aid skills. Civil Defence was found wanting in Singapore then. It was felt that if there had been a civil defence capability during the war, the suffering could have been minimised. As such, the idea of developing a civil defence capability was mooted in 1982. By 1985, the Singapore Joint Civil Defence Force (SJCDF) was established with the transfer of 65,000 National Servicemen from the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and the Singapore Police Force. Our role then was to protect and save lives and property during a war. Therefore, the training of the civil defence officers was mainly focused on First Aid, search and rescue at incident sites, managing of shelters and siren, water and food distributions and public education, etc. It was not responsible for daily emergency operations. Instead, the Singapore Fire Service (SFS) undertook the day-to-day emergency response then.

The collapse of the Lian Yak building (commonly known as the Hotel New World) along Serangoon Road in 1986 paved the way for the integration of the Civil Defence Force and the SFS. During that fateful incident, both the SFS and Civil Defence Force were activated to carry out the rescue operations. It was then that the government saw the duplications between these two forces. And on 15 April 1989, both entities were formally integrated to harness their synergies in the overarching Life Saving operations. The SJCDF was born and eventually renamed as the SCDF.

## What were your first thoughts when you were tasked to lead the newly established force?

I was previously a military officer from the SAF and the role I was tasked for at the SCDF was different altogether. Instead of having to deliberate on military tactics, training and doctrines which were not as time sensitive, I had to manage real time round-the-clock emergency response to major fire incidents, search and rescue operations etc., that are life threatening.

I was faced with several challenges during the initial phases. When I took over in 1992, we did not have a proper headquarters, headquarters for divisions, training academy or even a clubhouse for our National Servicemen (NSmen). All we had were 12 fire stations to sustain our daily firefighting operations and ambulance services. All the headquarters were residing at old government premises such as disused schools and old police stations. None of the buildings were purposed built then.

Thus, infrastructural development was my first priority when tasked to lead this integrated Life Saving Force.

We literally had to build everything from scratch.

## Share with us the origins of the Civil Defence Academy (CDA).

For a start, we did not even have a specialised training facility for conducive learning to take place. Instead, we leveraged on Jurong Fire Station and the Mandai Training Village as our main training facilities.

In those days, training for firefighters involved the burning of wooden pellets. The set up was laborious and time consuming and our trainees had little opportunities for repetitive training which are crucial to enhance stamina and psychomotor skill. Training is of utmost importance as it not only physically equips but mentally prepares our emergency responders to mitigate life threatening situations. We needed a specialised facility to meet these needs.

As such, the concept of the CDA materialised.

With a leap of faith, we installed gas-training simulators in the 10-storey 'furnace' located at the CDA and we were among the first to leverage on this technology back then. Over the years, we continually assessed our training methodologies and today, the CDA has evolved to become a premier training institution and an icon in the firefighting fraternity. In fact, many foreign fire brigades have modelled their training schools after the CDA.

Today, the academy is also training emergency responders from all over the world including disaster managers from the United Nations.

## Besides training, what was your next priority for the organisation?

The demanding nature of the job requires our emergency responders to work very hard. Besides the regular staff, we had to train our officers in the reserve units as they formed the main bulk of the SCDF. Then, the SAF NSmen had access to the SAF Reservists Association (SAFRA) clubs but there was none for our NSmen. I saw a dire need for a similar establishment, as it was important that we take good care of their welfare too.

Building a clubhouse for our NSmen became my top priority too. Despite several challenges faced along the way, the Home Team National Servicemen Clubhouse, (formerly known as Singapore Civil Defence Association for National Servicemen (CDANS) Country Club located at Bukit Batok, was officially opened on 30 March 1998.

I drove to the site along with my wife one evening before the official opening of the country club. As I was sharing my excitement with my wife, a group of cyclists stopped and started chatting among themselves. To my horror, one of them casually exclaimed, "Since when was this Home for the Aged

“For 17 years, I enjoyed every single day of my work.”  
– Commissioner (RET) James Tan

built?” to which my wife burst out laughing.

I was troubled by this episode because I wanted it to appeal to our NSmen as a place that they can retreat at and not a Home for the Aged! After some deliberation, we employed electricians to strategically place lighting fixtures to brighten up the facade. Fortunately, it resulted in a complete change in its outlook.

### **Was the SCDF Headquarters at Ubi part of your infrastructural development plan too?**

Indeed! Bendemeer Camp first started out as the headquarters of the Kolam Ayer Civil Defence Corps' headquarters in 1951 before it became home to the Worker's Brigade in 1959 and finally our headquarters. I will leave you to imagine how dilapidated the place was.

During the official opening of the SCDF headquarters at Ubi, then Minister for Home Affairs Mr. Wong Kan Seng said in his speech “Bendemeer Camp was not designed to be your headquarters. Nevertheless the SCDF, with much improvisation, made the best out of adversity. In the meantime, SCDF patiently waited and made preparations for a purpose built headquarters building.”

More importantly, we were relieved from the problem of space constrain and lack of proper facilities. Everyone was happy! Not only is there sufficient space available for our employees now, we are also able to cater to the needs of the members of the public at the Customer Service Atrium and discussion rooms.

### **Share with us a memorable experience on the fire ground.**

I was still considerably new to the SCDF then.

One Saturday morning, I received a phone call at around 0430 hrs. The control room operator said: “Sir, there is a fire at Gay World located in Geylang Road. Make Pump 10, Sir.” With this information, all I could figure out then was that 10 pump ladders (fire engines) had been despatched to the incident scene.

The operator repeated frantically “Make Pump 10, Sir!” and I curiously replied, “Make Pump 10, ok. And what am I supposed to do now?” He hurriedly informed that in a “Make Pump 10” situation, I am required at the fire ground. That was my “induction” to the Life Saving Force as a fire ground Commander.

Months later, I received a similar call with the same mention of “Make Pump 10”. I knew what to do this time round - I responded to a warehouse fire that occurred along Penjuru Road in my own car without waiting for a staff to pick me up.

I was also the first senior officer to arrive at scene!

The fire at Penjuru Road was the first major fire I came across in my life. Never had I seen such a furious fire incident. The fire was raging with chemical drums exploding and tossed up into the air. The situation was chaotic and the fire was threatening to spread. A warrant officer ran to me and informed me that

there was a fire. I told him I could see that. I asked who was in-charge of the incident and he shocked me by saying he was the one. That means, I had to take over command, as I was the most senior then! Without any experience, I took over the command of the incident and started to make my appreciation of the situation. Immediately, I surveyed the site and made two observations.

Firstly, the fire was burning everywhere and the entire warehouse was well alight. There were containers parked adjacent to the burning warehouse and it was apparent that we did not have sufficient water jets to handle such a huge fire. The firefighters hoisted all their jets at the fire trying to douse it but in vain. Fire at the far end was also spreading. With limited water source, it was most important to prevent the fire spread. I got hold of another junior officer to re-deploy some of the water jets to prevent the fire spread by spraying water onto unburned goods. They did so but with suspicious eyes looking at me.

Secondly, the containers adjacent to the warehouse were subjected to great heat. When I found out from the owner that there were chemicals stored in the warehouse, I directed the firefighters to deploy some water jets to cool these containers and let the already burnt goods to continue burning. However, there were still water jets preventing the fire from spreading. Some of the junior commanders looked at with great doubt in their eyes. They saw me as being new to the job and not a trained firefighter.

The fire was finally put out after a few hours.

After the fire incident, I explained to my officers the rationale of my actions. First of all, there was not enough water even though we have already pumped up water from the nearby river to supplement the fire hydrants. We should use the water wisely to combat the fires. What was burnt could not be saved under this situation but what we needed to do was to contain the fire from spreading. Water should be used to isolate the fire ground from the safe zones and to prevent other easily combustible materials or chemicals from catching fire. If the latter could not be achieved, the fire damage would be severe. Lessons learnt from this fire incident did make some changes to the way we train our fire fighters as fire site appreciation became an important topic in our teachings subsequently.

During an emergency, every second counts. Our officers must be multi-tasked to help one another. Multi-tasking is a force multiplier to enhance results. This is also the reason why our emergency responders today are so well-versed in every aspect of their Life Saving mission instead of only focusing on one particular skill only.

In order to progress, we have to challenge the norm. We have to constantly think of ways for improvements through corrections and innovations. The mind is like a parachute. Unless you set it free and open up, you will never be able to identify the array of choices available for you to become better and stronger.

### **How would you describe your stay with the SCDF?**

For 17 years, I enjoyed every single day of my work. 🚒



*Mobile Command Post  
1976 to 1994*





# COMMANDER “J” DIVISION

## What enticed you to join the Development and Building Control Division (DBCD) as a Fire Safety Engineer?

It started with a job offer from the Ministry of National Development.

They were looking for someone with a Chemical Engineering background to conduct Fire Safety and Risk assessments on the various proposed plants that were built to join an already established government project team - a S\$2 billion dollar Singapore Petrochemical Complex being built on the then Pulau Ayer Merbau.

To a fresh graduate, that was a chance of a lifetime (ok... for an engineer at least)! I saw it as an opportunity for me to acquire knowledge on chemical plant design and engineering and project management skills through engagements with foreign investors.

Due to my expertise, all industrial development and building projects involving chemical plants, storage and transport naturally found their way to my desk. In addition, the control and regulation of what was termed as Dangerous Trades and Petroleum Storage and Transport also came under my purview.

It was a difficult job but life was never boring because of the never-ending amount of work that I was tasked with.

As I look back, I have to say that all these challenges have moulded my early development.

## When and why did you join SCDF?

Technically, I did not “join” the SCDF. It was a natural “flow” to the SCDF instead.

The responsibility of regulating Fire Safety was divested from the DBCD to the Singapore Fire Service (SFS) in 1985 and all the personnel with the relevant portfolios were also transferred to SFS. Together with Mr Boo Geok Kwang and Mr Peter Lim, we started the Fire Safety Bureau (FSB) in the SFS.

Those were the challenging years, ably led by Mr Boo, as Fire Safety took on greater prominence and new rules and



The Life Saving Force today, is indeed something all SCDF officers, past and present can be proud of.

We did not build an organisation with members who need to place their lives at the mercy of the aftermath of natural disasters, big fires and accidents on a daily basis by chance. It takes a special person with a deep commitment to take on the demanding lifestyle of emergency responder.”

– Senior Assistant Commissioner (RET) Derek Pereira

regulations were constantly moderated and/or introduced to meet the needs of a developing Singapore.

This “transfer” was a strategic stroke of genius. Gradually, the organisation gained understanding of the different needs and perspectives of the industry practitioners and married both fire safety and fire operations to ensure synergy.

This move allowed for new models of fire safety designs to blossom and also accompanying fire safety regulations to take place. We introduced a new emphasis on prevention of fire and contingency planning for emergencies.

It was definitely a challenging phase but I cannot deny that it brought us great satisfaction too.

In 1989, the SFS was merged with the then Civil Defence Force to form the Singapore Joint Civil Defence Force

(SJCDF). Like before, we “flowed” into a “new” organisation again.

## How did you end up becoming a Uniformed Officer?

With the merger of the SFS and the Civil Defence Force in 1989, I was offered the opportunity to switch from the Civilian Engineering Scheme to the Uniformed SFS Scheme. This meant that I would have a wider spectrum of opportunities to progress into other area of specialisations instead of only being limited to fire safety related work.

Since I have experienced for myself some operational deployments to real incidents during my stint in the FSB, I saw it as an opportunity for me to break away from a deskbound job. To a young man then, this was certainly an exciting journey to embark on. I made the plunge and it is one of the best decisions that I have made in my life.

I did my conversion course in the United Kingdom (UK) at the Fire Service College for four months and spent another three months attached to the various fire stations in the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands. With the operational

deployment experience that I have gained from this overseas attachment, I actually developed my practical 'firemanship' even before being trained in Singapore.

I saw that as a strange twist of fate.

The experience was highly enriching as I learned about the varied lifestyles of firemen, their hands-on skills and tactics, what makes them tick and the 'tricks' they were usually up to. Most importantly, I learned about the personal qualities of firefighters, the deep love and passion each of them have for the job and the camaraderie and strong bonding that exists among the fire crews in order for them to do their job well while willingly putting themselves at risk on a daily basis.

It was this human factor that shaped my perspectives when I later found myself on the fire ground back in Singapore.

### As Commander 'J' Division, what were some of the challenges that you faced?

Surprise! Surprise!

Upon my return to Singapore, I was slated for my first operational command post at the newly formed J Division, which was also the largest division then. The boundary of the 'J' Division also included all the chemical and industrial high risks installations.

As it was a new division, we had to start from scratch. We occupied the used quarters at the Jalan Bahar Camp and staffing was skeletal.

As the manpower was mainly a mix of staff from the previous SFS and Civil Defence Force, we had to train them to work together cohesively. We also integrated the staff from the different stations to build up our readiness and capabilities to manage the various high risks installations under our charge.

Then, the Tuas Fire Station was the only Hazardous Materials (HazMat) station and as compared to what we have achieved today - it was limited in its capabilities then. We had only one HazMat truck and the doctrines in place were very basic.

We also had to develop contingency and operational plans while conducting exercises on a regular basis to fine-tune them in order to stay relevant. All these were considered to be "new concepts" back in those days.

### How were the firemen like back in those days?

Firefighters then, as now, loved their jobs and I can confidently say that this stems from their desire to be operational, to save lives and to preserve property against all hazards.

Not only was it an opportunity for them to apply their skills to real life operations, they were also motivated by the satisfaction that comes from a job well done. Of course, the training then was not as comprehensive as today with the Civil Defence Academy.

Then, a firefighter's badge of honour represented the number of many fires he had attended to and real 'large-scale fires' experience was highly prized.

Over time, this form of recognition was put to an end as the number of fires decreased as a result of better fire prevention and public education. The Life Saving Force began to transcend from an experience-based competency model to a coordinated balance between education, training and experience coupled with personal self-development.

Another interesting fact is that our firefighters then were not accustomed to wearing the firefighters' protective bunker suit (firefighting suit) even at fire incidents! Fortunately, soon after the integration, we started a full legging bunker suit for firefighters to don on when fighting a structural fire and also replaced our traditional helmets with the Gallet helmet. To be honest, I was impressed at first sight by the Gallet Helmets used by the firefighters from the Paris Fire Service when I first saw them as they looked like something from the Star Wars movie.

### Through your lens as a Senior Assistant Commissioner, how has SCDF evolved from its humble beginnings?

Today, I look back with fond memories at the tremendous journey that the SCDF has made from its humble beginnings - everything from its public image, manpower constraints, training and development, equipping, doctrines and operational procedures are now benchmarked by many others from around the world.

The Life Saving Force today, is indeed something all SCDF officers, past and present can be proud of.

Most importantly, we still continue to perform our duties to do good while guided by our core values of Pride and Care.

We did not build an organisation with members who need to place their lives at the mercy of the aftermath of natural disasters, big fires and accidents on a daily basis by chance. It takes a special person with a deep commitment to take on the demanding lifestyle of an emergency responder.

To be honest, I have never dreamed of becoming a firefighter as a kid. It started as a job for a fresh graduate, which evolved into a serious responsibility to ensure the safety of the lives of my fellow Singaporeans, and finally, a passion.

It was with the many like-minded people around me that gave me all the guidance and support - it was in all, a team effort. That is the essence of the SCDF Teamwork.

As they say in the well-used cliché - "Find something to do that you enjoy, and you will never work a day in your life."

How True... 



Source: This article first appeared in Rescue 995 Volume 1 Number 6, Pg 6.

## NEW FIRE CODE

Since its formation in Feb 85, the Fire Safety Bureau (FSB) has received feedback from professionals/practitioners that the current Fire Code, published in 1982 contained certain ambiguities which needs to be clarified and updated so as to ensure its comprehensibility. Some of these ambiguities pertain to issues like exit conditions for residential units; provisions for external walls and hydrants; and others.

In reaction to this, an advisory committee to review the Code was formed on 14 May 87 with 2 other working committees, the FCR Technical Committee (M & E) and the FCR Technical Committee (Arch), assisting it. On completion of the draft code, a briefing was conducted by FSB on 23 Feb 91 at the NUS to highlight to the practising professionals, both architects and engineers, the revisions made in the new Code and to obtain valuable feedback and comments from them.

The new Fire Code made away with the ambiguities mentioned above by spelling them out in specific terms. It also made changes to requirements for the accessibility for fire fighting appliances; the number of exit staircases for residential buildings; the provision of pressurisation staircase; and the provision of smoke control system for basements and mechanical ventilation system for smoke stop lobby among others.

**SURVIVOR 11**



# THE MAN BEHIND THE FIRE SAFETY AND SHELTER DEPARTMENT

“

High-rise buildings seemed like a new concept to most people in the late 70s unlike how it has already become a way of life for the present generation.”

– Mr. Boo Geok Kwang

## Why the interest in Building Designs?

I was brought up in the Tanjong Pagar vicinity in one of those pre-war looking shop houses that once existed. There were hardly any tall buildings in Singapore, not even in the Central Business District. Then, the highest building was the 12-storey Asia Insurance Building and it was also the tallest building in South East Asia.

Gradually, the construction of other high-rise buildings like the DBS building began. I remember I used to be so fascinated by how majestic the tall buildings looked.

High-rise buildings seemed like a new concept to most people in the late 70s unlike how it has already become a way of life for the present generation. As more and more high-rise buildings were built, I began to appreciate the designs and was curious to find out more on its dynamics.

I love buildings. I appreciate the look of nice buildings and it was just inherent in me. What fancied me then was the reason why it can be built so high and how they can be made safe even

though they were of that kind of height.

## What was your first job like?

During my time, there were no Junior Colleges. I graduated from Gan Eng Seng School and my original vision was to become an architect. I fell short of the qualification and was enrolled to the next best course with the University of Singapore to study a Degree in Building Construction instead.

I joined the Control Division of Public Works Department under the Ministry of National Development (MND) as a fresh graduate in 1982.

As a Building Surveyor, I regulated building constructions and the scope of my work was focused on Fire Safety. I dealt with issues related to building designs for lightings and ventilation, structural safety and even energy conservation.

As I gradually acquired the industrial skills and knowledge, I began visiting sites to familiarise myself with buildings to compare them to what was drawn on plans. It was my responsibility to approve these plans before the buildings were built. Those were the days.

### Were you involved in the construction process of any high-rise buildings in Singapore?

Raffles City. I was so excited because it was the tallest building then!

In fact, I still feel a sense of pride in me every time I walk past it today. The main atrium space used to be huge. In fact, the vast space was subjected to discussions when it was first built because some were worried that it might be a fire hazard. To me, it was just very beautiful and grand.

The atrium looks a little different today as certain features have been removed and the space reduced. Now, the sense of grandeur is no longer there but one comforting point would be that both buildings are still sprinkler-protected.

### When did you join the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF)?

In 1985, I joined the Fire Safety Bureau of the Singapore Fire Service (SFS). SFS and SCDF integrated in 1989 to become the Singapore Joint Civil Defence Force and eventually SCDF. I was first seconded during the transfer of the fire safety function to SCDF in 1985.

### Share with us the origins of the Fire Safety Regulation.

The Public Works Department of Ministry of National Development first implemented the Fire Safety Regulation in 1974. Arising from the fire at the then Robinson's Department Store that occurred in 1972, a Code of Practice on Fire Precautions in Buildings was put in place.

At that time, the SCDF was still known as the Singapore Fire Brigade. When the function of Fire Safety was transferred to the SFS, the Fire Safety Bureau (FSB) was formed.

### What were some of the challenges faced during the initial years?

The approval of building plans used to be so tedious and painstakingly long. Building plans were hand drawn and our comments were also handwritten. If you are a fan of technology, you might find the process extremely backward.

The submission, vetting and revision process can take up to a total of four years for big projects such as the construction of Raffles City.

Urbanisation was picking up quickly and we had to introduce a more efficient system. Shortly after FSB was formed, we started working on the idea of partnerships in 1986.

Then Minister of Home Affairs, Professor S. Jayakumar tasked the formation of a Fire Safety and Shelter Department (FSSD) Committee to identify and study problems faced by the practitioners and owners from the building industries as well as the SCDF.

We began to rope in the involvement of professional institutions like the Singapore Institute of Architects, Association for Consulting Engineers of Singapore and Institution of Fire Engineers in the FSSD Committee to discuss the problems faced and methods of improvements in getting the plans approved.

Our goal was to educate the industry practitioners. We wanted the architects to vet their own work and identify for themselves the areas that may require waivers instead. In doing so, it reminds them to be more precise in their drawings and in turn, forces them to think thoroughly before the actual submissions to the SCDF. Over the years, we have successfully imbued in the architects a deep sense of self-awareness.

Through these partnerships, we also received feedbacks on the quality of our Fire Codes. We were still very new then and there were inevitable areas for improvements. Well, that was part of a natural process. The Fire Code Review Committee was formed and they began to work with the industry players on reviewing the fire codes.

It is not possible to be explicit in every code and law. No matter how you want it to be clear and precise, it would still be subjected to interpretations and that is the hardest part in writing a code. Through our discussions with the industry players, we began to understand their sentiments and reservations better. We tried our best to come to a form of agreement and compromise such that the fire codes would meet the needs of theirs and SCDF's.

### What do you think it would have been like for you if you became an Architect instead?

I am glad I fell short of the qualification. I ended up regulating architects for the rest of my career instead of being regulated! I have retired from the Civil Service but I have never looked back since.

I feel for the architects and engineers in Singapore, as they are required to be very immaculate. People tend to take it for granted that buildings are built for commercial purposes because they do not experience the process of what goes into the design. It is usually underappreciated until something happens when safety precautions are breached.

As an old man now, nothing much in me has changed. I still appreciate the looks of buildings and I am still fancied by those very high-rise ones. 🚒



Light Water Tender  
1976 to 1991





Source: This article first appeared in Survivor Volume 7 Number 4, Pg 1.

# SURVIVOR

A Bi-Monthly Publication of The Singapore Joint Civil Defence Forces

Vol. 7 No. 4

ISSN 0217-6629

**DART** stands for Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team. They are the elite rescue force of the SJCDF, highly mobile and specially trained.

DART is presently being established. The first platoon has been formed and the whole company (total of three platoons) will be ready in early 1991.

Members of the GPC for Law and Home Affairs were recently invited to a special preview of their training session on 30 May 90 at the Jalan Bahar Civil Defence Camp. The DART members demonstrated some special rescue techniques such as Commando crawl and buddy rappelling and spider walk to the visitors.

Impressed by the skills of the DART members, Dr Arthur Beng, the GPC Chairman said, "I am glad the SJCDF has produced an efficient and effective operational unit. The team is ready for its task."



Source: This article first appeared in Rescue 995 Volume 1 Number 7, Pg 6.

Cover Story

Ever wish a day on the job could be more predictable?

Cpt Kadir Maideen  
DART

Ever wish a day on the job could be more predictable? I have had this caption pasted in my office for the past two years because that's how operational life has been when I was an Officer Commanding at Alexandra Fire Station. Now posted to DART and just a fortnight after returning from a 7-week DART Conversion Course at CDA, I had to leave for my first overseas mission turnout to earthquake ravaged Taiwan.

Adrenaline started pumping from the moment I received the information from my Commander. I was then preparing for a static exhibition with some DART rescuers at the Singapore Immigration and Registration Building. As time was crucial, I could only make short telephone calls to bid farewell to my family.

Whilst enroute to Taiwan in the RSAF Hercules C-130, I was mentally prepared for the worst and tried to visualise the damage expected. Images of the Hotel New World and Highland Towers kept creeping into my thoughts.

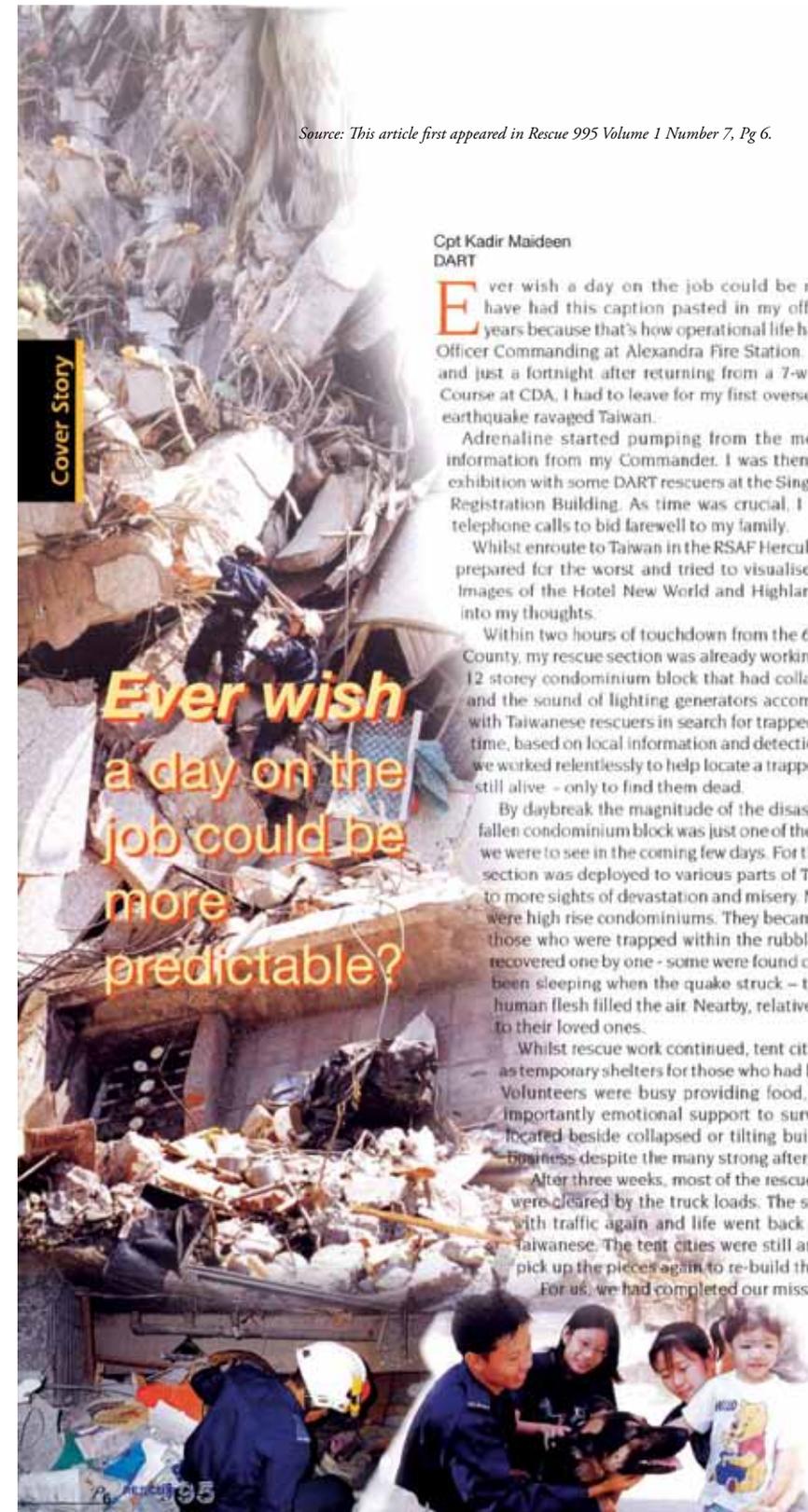
Within two hours of touchdown from the 6 hour flight at Tai Chung County, my rescue section was already working through the rubble of a 12 storey condominium block that had collapsed. It was about 2 am and the sound of lighting generators accompanied us as we worked with Taiwanese rescuers in search for trapped persons. At one point in time, based on local information and detection using our Rescue Dogs, we worked relentlessly to help locate a trapped family we believed were still alive - only to find them dead.

By daybreak the magnitude of the disaster was most evident. The fallen condominium block was just one of the many collapsed structures we were to see in the coming few days. For the next few days, my rescue section was deployed to various parts of Tai Chung and was exposed to more sights of devastation and misery. Many of the fallen buildings were high rise condominiums. They became the final resting place for those who were trapped within the rubble. As the dead bodies were recovered one by one - some were found on their beds where they had been sleeping when the quake struck - the pungent smell of rotting human flesh filled the air. Nearby, relatives were seen offering prayers to their loved ones.

Whilst rescue work continued, tent cities sprouted in the city areas as temporary shelters for those who had lost their homes and families. Volunteers were busy providing food, clothing, shelter and most importantly emotional support to survivors. In other areas, shops located beside collapsed or tilting buildings continued to open for business despite the many strong aftershocks that were felt.

After three weeks, most of the rescue work stopped and the debris were cleared by the truck loads. The streets were beginning to buzz with traffic again and life went back to normal for the rest of the Taiwanese. The tent cities were still around as these people tried to pick up the pieces again to re-build their lives.

For us, we had completed our mission and we headed back home.



## Our Heroes In Taiwan (A Chronological account)

### DAY 1 (21 September 99)

- SCDF Overseas Contingent alerted at 0900hrs, Contingent proceeds to assemble at Queensway Dart Base
- SCDF Overseas Contingent boards 2 RSAF C-130 aircraft at 1630hrs at Paya Lebar Airbase.
- SCDF Overseas Contingent departs for Taiwan at 1700hrs.
- SCDF Overseas Contingent arrives at Taiwan at 2345hrs.

Cover Story

7.6 on the Richter scale was the magnitude of the earthquake which awakened Taiwan from its peaceful morning slumber on 21 September 99. So severe were the tremors that entire buildings collapsed, toppling power and communication lines. Initial reports showed a large number of people dead and injured.

Without delay, the Singapore Civil Defence Force, activated Operations Lionheart. The Overseas Rescue Contingent was activated immediately and put on standby. Within a matter of hours, the team was ready and awaiting further orders for deployment to quake-stricken Taiwan. The contingent were flown to Tai Chung County Taiwan by two of the RSAF's (Republic of Singapore Air Force) C-130s planes.



### DAY 2 (22 September 99)

- Operations Base set up at Fengyuan City Fire Station
- Overseas Rescue Contingent divided into 2 teams, 1 in Fengyuan, 1 in Dali City
- All Rescuers and Operations based in Dali City as of 1200hrs (22 September 1999)
- One Boy Saved!
- Second Person Saved!
- Rescue Teams divided into two Sections. Section 1 deployed at Golden Paris Condominium Estate, section 2 deployed at Wan Chau Area.



Fengyuan City Fire Station was the Operation Base for the Overseas Contingent. The team was immediately divided into two sections and were deployed to the cities of Fengyuan and Dali. To maximise efficient use of manpower, however, they were later re-deployed and based in Dali. Within 45 minutes, our brave men rescued an eight year old boy from a collapsed 12-storey building. Hours later, a second person was rescued. Our SCDF personnel and local Taiwanese fire fighters extricated the man who was trapped in a collapsed 5-storey golf clubhouse. The two rescue sections were then deployed to Golden Paris Condominium estate and Wan Chau Area.



### DAY 3 (23 September 99)

- Contingent deployed at Golden Paris Condominium Estate.

It was 0700 hrs in the morning. At Dali City, Taiwan, the SCDF Rescue Contingent was liaising with the local authorities on redeployment to other sectors. The contingent was deployed to Golden Paris Condominium Estate in Dali at 1300 hrs.

On the same day, a second team consisting of 17-strong medical specialists from the SAF was sent in as reinforcements.

Morale was high and the rescuers worked relentlessly in the hope of saving more victims.



### DAY 4 (24 September 99)

- Contingent conducts Search and Rescue Operations at Golden Paris Condominium Estate

Upon their arrival, the SCDF established a joint command post with the Dali City Fire Department. The incident site was divided into 2 sectors. Sector 1 was where a building had collapsed and was tilted. SCDF personnel, working in tandem with the Taiwanese rescuers, carried out a thorough search for survivors. Fighting against time and working in confined space, the rescuers searched through each and every area such as the lift shaft and the lift carriage. Deep penetration work was carried out at Sector 2. However, no survivors were found. The contingent experienced two minor aftershocks which occurred in the morning of 24 Sept 99. Fortunately, the team was unaffected.



### DAY 5 (25 September 99)

- Contingent is stationed in Dali City

Contingent continued to assist local rescuers while plans pertaining to their future deployment was formulated. Our heroes along with local rescuers had rescued 2 survivors and extricated 9 bodies from the debris and ruins of the various collapsed building sites. The contingent continued to assist the local authorities in search operations.



Cover Story

### DAY 6 (26 September 99)

- SCDF overseas contingent is based in Tai Chung County.

In response to an aftershock of magnitude 6.8 on the richter scale in the morning, SCDF conducted a recce at Nantou County to ascertain if further deployment of its rescue personnel was necessary.



### DAY 7 (27 September 99)

- SCDF overseas contingent is re-deployed to Golden Paris Condominium Estate.



Source: This article first appeared in Rescue 995 Volume 1 Number 7, Pgs 4 and 5.

Cover Story

Following the aftershock that hit Taiwan yesterday, the SCDF overseas rescue contingent continued rescue operations at the Golden Paris Condominium Estate since 0010hrs on 27th Sept 99. The public informed that there were distinct knocking noises heard from the 4th storey of the collapsed condominium. The SCDF rescuers used the "trapped persons locator" to confirm the fact. Deep penetration operations were carried out. Unfortunately, no live casualties were found, only three bodies were extricated.

**DAY 8 (28 September 99)**

- SCDF Overseas Contingent remains deployed at Golden Paris Condominium

Cut and lift operations were being performed by the local authorities at the Golden Paris Condominium in Dali City. The SCDF contingent was on standby, ready to be deployed upon locating any further casualties.



**DAY 9 (29 September 99) & DAY 10 (30 September 99)**

- SCDF Overseas contingent works closely with the Taiwanese authorities and awaits re-deployment.



**DAY 11(1 October 99) & DAY 12 (2 October 99)**

- SCDF and Taiwanese authorities conduct joint debriefing to the rescuers.

**DAY 13 (3 October 99) to DAY 16 (6 October 99)**

- SCDF and Taiwanese authorities conduct recovery operations.

**DAY 17 (7 October 99) to DAY 19 (9 October 99)**

- SCDF Overseas Contingent prepares for return to Singapore.

**DAY 20 (10 October 99)**

- Overseas Rescue Contingent Homecoming
- SCDF Overseas Rescue Contingent arrives at Paya Lebar Airbase at 10.10pm on 10 Oct 99.
- They were received by Comr James Tan, Commissioner SCDF, Mr Ow Yong Rui Xiong, Taiwan Trade Office Representative to Singapore and over 160 family members of the rescue contingent personnel and Taiwanese well wishers.



**Role of the Overseas Rescue Contingent**

- SCDF's duties for the Taiwan Earthquake rescue mission was specific i.e. to concentrate on rescuing victims trapped in the collapsed buildings.
- Duration of stay - 20 days.
- Officers are well trained, keen and confident.

**Death Toll**

Dead: over 2000 people dead  
Injured: over 8000 people injured  
Homeless: over 100000 people homeless  
Estimated Cost for Rebuilding: over \$552.56 billion

**Our Rescue Contingent**

**SCDF Contingent List**

**Contingent HQ / SCDF Officers Commanding:-**

- Major Christopher Tan (Contingent Commander)
- Captain Lim Lam Kwang (Engineering Officer)
- Captain Jee Su Giam (Engineering Officer)
- Lieutenant Alvin Tan (Operations Officer)
- Lieutenant Noor Azlan Musa (Operations Officer)
- Lieutenant Peh Kah Huat (Communications Officer)
- Corporal Muzafaruddin (Communications NCO)

**Rescue Unit Comprising:-**

**2 Rescue Sections and 1 Rescue Dog Section**

- Major Poon Siow Hai (Deputy Contingent Commander)
- Captain Winston Chang (Rescue Commander)
- Lieutenant Aian Toh (Section 1 Commander)

- Lieutenant Francis Tan Jit Yong (Rescue Officer)
- Staff Sergeant Kevin Li (Rescue NCO)
- Sergeant Md Ashari (Rescuer)
- Sergeant Chua Lai Sun (Rescuer)
- Sergeant Johan (Rescuer)
- Sergeant Lee Kian Fatt (Rescuer)
- Corporal Kasmin Tohid (Rescuer)
- Corporal Ronaizad Rahmat (Rescuer)
- Private Md Ashar (Rescuer)

- Captain Kadir Maideen (Section 2 Commander)
- Captain Cheah Kok Keong (Rescue Officer)
- Staff Sergeant Azlan Solamat (Rescue NCO)
- Sergeant Azmi Hasan (Rescue NCO)
- Sergeant Abd Latif (Rescuer)
- Sergeant Jilil Mohabai (Rescuer)
- Sergeant Michael Mogan (Rescuer)
- Corporal Irwan Juraimi (Rescuer)
- Corporal Md Sahlan (Rescuer)
- Corporal Christopher (Rescuer)

- Captain Tang Peng Seng (Rescue Dog Commander)
- Staff Sergeant Goh Kwee Seng (Rescue Dog

- Handler
- Sergeant Kelvin See Kwong Nam (Rescue Dog Handler)
- Corporal Chia Ai Fei (Rescue Dog Handler)

**Rescue Dogs**

- Tig, Winnie, Dundee, Qando

**Medical Support Personnel**

- Cpl (Dr) Francis Yeo (Medical Officer/Team IC)
- LtA (Dr) Wong Nam Yew (Medical Officer)
- Sergeant Md Abdul Fali (Paramedic 2IC)
- Corporal Sahron Topon (Paramedic)
- Corporal Zukifli Abul Bakar (Medic)

**Admin Support Personnel**

- Captain Thanalachum D/O Kanniah (Liaison Officer)
- Captain Neo Eng Kim (Logistic Team IC)
- Captain Ter Mong Kwee (Logistic Officer)
- Mr Roslan Yusoff (Mechanic/2IC)
- Mr Romi Ahmad (Technician)
- Private Dave Tan (Storeman)

Cover Story

**Throughout the 20 day Rescue Mission, SCDF maintained an internet website for the contingent members & their family back home to communicate with one another**

Here are some Well Wishes which were received for the Overseas Rescue Contingent during their operation in Taiwan

**Dear officers in the Overseas Rescue Contingent,**

For the past few days, we can see what happened in Taiwan by watching the news and yet we can't really do anything to help. You, from Overseas Rescue Contingent, represent us Singaporean, and do us proud in Taiwan by saving the trapped victims despite the dangerous situation.

I think all of you are tired after these few days of rescuing the victims. But please keep up the spirits and don't give up so easily. We may not be with you in person but we will be with you in spirit. Though time is running out, maybe all of you can still find trapped victims who are still alive. Hope is slim but nothing is impossible.

While saving the victims please take care of your own safety too. We really appreciate the effort you make, do take good care of yourself there and all the best in everything you do.

To the dog team, you are the best of the best. Hope Tig has already recovered and all the best too for the operation.

Warmest Wishing,  
Priscilla Kok Iyee  
Tamarik Joly

**To our heroes in blue,**

Keep up the great work and have a safe return! We are 10000 miles across the world and monitoring your progress via Internet! We are proud of you!

Students from Law Faculty of University College of London, Lincoln's Inn and Middle Temple (1999)

**To our great men in blue,**

Keep up in the good work. I have a safe return!

Best wishes from University of London (Art Faculty)

**To SCDF Lion Hearted**

When the task at hand is a mountain in front of you it may seem too hard to climb, but you don't have to climb it all at once - just one step at a time - take one small step... and one small step... then another... and you'll find... the task at hand that was a mountain in front of you.

Is now a mountain you have climbed.

From Mr & Mrs Chan Szeann

**Thank you, heroes!**

You heroes are great! The pupils of Clement Green secondary wishes you all the best in saving the lives of the trapped Taiwanese.

May you succeed,  
Pupils of Clement Green

'Father of DART.'

LTC (RET) Poon  
Siow Hai

**You are commonly known as the 'Fit Guy'. Share with us your interest for sports.**

As a child, I would always be seen running around, scaling walls and participating in all sorts of activities. I developed an interest in sports when I was serving my National Service with the Singapore Armed Forces then and it blossomed during my undergraduate days.

I was the President of the Taekwondo Club and Team Captain of Track and Field in Nanyang University from 1973 to 1976. I spent most of my days in the sports field and almost all of my evenings at taekwondo trainings.

When I first entered the working force, I joined the National Dragon Boat Team and was nominated to take on the role as Team Captain. In 1993, we won a Gold medal.

I attribute my enduring interest in sports to my determination to challenge myself physically. A great sense of satisfaction fills me each time I overcome my own limits.

**When did you join the SCDF?**

I was part of the Vigilante Corps (VC) that was established in 1964 in response to the Confrontation (Konfrontasi) in which I performed duties like patrolling to assist the police in identifying suspicious characters and activities. After the VC was disbanded, I was assigned to the Civil Defence Force in 1983.

**As the first Commander of the elite Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (DART), what were some of the challenges that you had to deal with?**

I was the Commander of the elite DART during its starting years. We saw the need to build up our Urban Search and Rescue capacity. In doing so, we looked into the strategic plans to transform the elite DART into an operationally ready unit.

Since DART was at its nascent stage then, it was a challenge

for me to send our elite DART members to overseas' missions due to the inevitable lack of prior experience and exposure to varying terrains and weather conditions that differed from Singapore.

That said, our involvements in overseas' missions also became invaluable opportunities for us to acquire first-hand experience on how other countries carried out their search and rescue operations, while we continually assessed ours.

**Share with us your memorable experience in overseas humanitarian missions in the early years of DART.**

The 12-storey Highland Towers block collapsed in 1993 as a result of a landslide and this unfortunate event occurred when our elite DART was still considered to be very young and newly established. Yet, nothing stopped us from upholding our operational readiness and in fact, we were the first foreign team to arrive at scene. Together with our Malaysian counterpart, we worked tirelessly for a period of 10 days.

The wreckage of the 921 Earthquake in Taiwan in 1999 was unimaginable. Our elite DART members worked closely with the local rescue forces in Tai Chung under extremely challenging conditions. The cavities found at the affected site were a real risk as either of us could have been trapped within if we were not careful.

There are two occasions that I can still remember vividly till this day.

In one of our attempts to search for casualties from within the rubbles one night, we found ourselves trapped within a confined space due to the occurrence of an aftershock. Unless assistance was rendered to us, there was absolutely no way out. With little space to move about, the three DART rescuers and I remained calm as we waited for assistance. It felt like a near death experience!

On another occasion, we had to enter one of the semi-collapsed buildings with the hope of rescuing more casualties. It was about 18 storeys high and tilted as a result of the earthquake. It was leaning at a precarious angle against a neighbouring structure.

It was definitely a dangerous operation and thus, I asked for only two rescuers to proceed with the operation with me. Soon after as we ventured forth, we realised that the entire team had tagged along willingly.

The fearlessness and dedication of our rescuers moved me tremendously. Indeed, it is my privilege to be able to work with these courageous elites.

As a Commander, frankly through times like this, I knew deep down in my heart that while it was important for us to ensure a smooth operation, I must also ensure that each and every member of my team will return to the bosoms of their family whole and sound.

**Can you give us an insight into the DART Training during our early days?**

The first DART training curriculum was derived from a combination of training methodologies inherited from the

SFS and Civil Defence Force. We also incorporated several other useful and relevant learning components derived from our studies on search and rescue trainings with International special rescue forces.

Other than theoretical and psychomotor trainings, we also focused on inculcating mental and character resilience in our trainees too. It is not only crucial for the DART members to be physically fit but this line of work also requires them to be able to remain calm yet tough under extreme conditions.

The nature of the work by the elite DART is one that cannot be conquered through a one man's show. It is always a team effort. The challenge comes when we have to train individual elites who will be able to recognise the need to leverage on other elites.

None of this makes for easy training but what impressed me then - as now - was the "never-say-die" attitude of our pioneer batch of DART personnel. Our principle then was simple - Train Hard.

That principle is an enduring legacy that I see persist even in the current generation of DART. 🚒



*Ambulance*  
1948 to 1959



*Ambulance*  
1959 to 1984



*Picture (Left to Right): Ambulance Officer CPT (RET) Margaret Ho  
(in the Singapore Fire Service Uniform) and Paramedic SSG Kwa Pang Ling*



# DOCTOR BEHIND THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF SCDF



We faced a manpower shortage initially. I remember employing Filipinos as paramedics and we even had a Vietnamese doctor working with us.”

– Dr Tan Eng Hoe,  
First Chief Medical Officer of SCDF

## What inspired you to study medicine?

I was a science student at the Anglo Chinese School. Then, the curriculum was very different. If you think Biology is tough, Zoology is worst. My teacher made us dissect frogs, rabbits and even cockroaches during class. I remember going to the market to purchase dogfishes that look like sharks to dissect as part of my learning.

Apart from developing a love for Botany because of school, I also became very interested in the human anatomy. Well, during my time, most of my classmates chose to pursue a Medicine Degree and so did I. I went to the University of Singapore and it has been more than 40 years. Well, I have yet to regret my decision.

In fact, I went on to further my studies in Public Health during my career with the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

## How was your career with SAF different from SCDF?

I was a Senior Medical Officer with the SAF. Some of the projects that I worked on involved the prevention of diseases and the immunisation against Chicken Pox. I visited most of our overseas training camps and such exchanges gave me a fresh perspective on the challenges faced by other countries especially in their respective medical departments.

More often than not, our medical plans and policies are relevant to the training that our SAF officers undergo. It is important that they are in tip-top condition in order to excel physically.

I left the SAF in 1998 and joined the SCDF as its first Chief Medical Officer (CMO). Immediately, I noticed my new designation required me to devise plans and policies pertaining to life threatening incidents that occurred on a daily basis. It was no longer the platoons of trainees I had to take care of but the general public. It was definitely a bigger responsibility to shoulder.

## How was the medical department of SCDF like when you first joined?

Believe it or not, we had no paramedics. In fact, not a single one. We relied heavily on the services of nurses seconded from the public hospitals to the SCDF then.

These nurses were usually more specialised in hospital treatments as they always had the opportunity to seek second opinions from doctors who are also stationed at the hospital.

At incident sites, the medical personnel attending to the casualty do not have the luxury of time, advice from doctors or an abundant stockpile of medical equipment. The medical personnel was required to make timely and sound decisions on his own and provide critical medical assistance before the casualty is being conveyed to the hospital.

We needed people who were trained in this aspect, as we had none.

We saw the need to be self-sustaining and so we began training people to set up our own Emergency Medical Services. Then, it was considered radical especially in Singapore as people were already

used to the idea of having hospital nurses attending to casualties at incident sites.

During the initial phases, we were faced with two challenges. Firstly, we had to get members of the public accustomed to seeing paramedics attending to emergency cases instead of hospital nurses. We had to gain their confidence and earn their trust for our newfound specialisation. Secondly, we had to entice people to sign up with the SCDF as paramedics. Most people had little concept or impression of what they could expect from a career as a paramedic then.

We faced a manpower shortage initially. I remember employing Filipinos as paramedics and we even had a Vietnamese doctor working with us.

## How has the SCDF Medical Department evolved ever since?

Apart from just training our paramedics with the relevant Life Saving knowledge and skills, we also worked towards standardising our training and having it recognised by the local medical industry and then, internationally.

For a start, we engaged advisors from the Justice Institute of British Columbia, Canada's leading public safety educator. In due course, the SCDF Emergency Medical Service attained international standards. We started with no paramedics but today, we are sending them overseas to provide humanitarian assistance to those with needs at Operation Lionheart missions.

Today, not only are our ambulances well equipped, even our firebikers have with them Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) to attend to cardiac arrest cases.

## Share with us your experience as the CMO of SCDF.

If I could sum it up, I would say the SCDF was like a Big Family to me.

It was impossible for Medical Department to work alone. We had to work with the Logistics Department to ensure that the medical stockpiles were sufficient, Service Support Unit and Finance Department for the purchase of ambulances, Operations Department when our paramedics were sent to incident sites and the Public Affairs Department to instil confidence in members of the public towards our Emergency Medical Services.

It was also through all these working opportunities that we came to know each other better on a personal basis.

The atmosphere in SCDF was generally very friendly and open. We were always comfortable in throwing out our ideas even when they seemed radical. But we knew we would never be ridiculed, at least internally.

We supported each other because we knew deep down that our final objective was that of the Life Saving mission.

It may sound altruistic but believe me, it has been a very fulfilling career. 🚒

Source: This article first appeared in The Main Line Issue No. 7-96, Pg 1.



Ambulance  
1984 to 1992



# THE MAIN LINE

A Monthly Publication of The Singapore Civil Defence Force

Issue No. 7/96

**P**icture this scenario: A drunk motorist crashes into a roadside tree. The resulting impact sends him crashing through the windscreen. He sustains extensive chest injuries and breathes laboriously.

Soon, the ambulance arrives at the scene of the accident and out dashed two paramedics carrying a trauma bag. They work confidently, assessing and reassuring the victim, stabilising his spine and decide to drain blood from the victim's chest so that he can breathe more easily. After stabilising him, they rushed him to the hospital.

Actors from a scene of a "Rescue 911" episode? No, they are our very own paramedics - highly trained personnel who possess advanced life-saving skills to handle a wide range of trauma and medical emergencies. In this issue, we herald the emergence of a new breed of life-savers - **The SCDF Paramedics**.

The SCDF's Emergency Ambulance Service, has been providing a round-the-clock emergency service for the seriously ill or injured. The present manning of ambulances with highly trained staff nurses has been well received by the public.

However, with the gradual increase in the number of ambulance calls from 5,686 calls in 1991 to 60,000 calls in 1994, and the shortage of staff, there is an urgent need for the SCDF to re-evaluate its current manpower requirements to ensure that the growing number of ambulances are being effectively manned. The solution - To recruit and train its own core of paramedics.

The Paramedics will be primarily responsible for the provision of an effective Nationwide

Emergency Ambulance Service. Their tasks include the saving of lives during any fire and disaster. They may also be assigned to training



establishments for training of NSmen, other CD personnel and the civilian population.

The new scheme of service to be carried out in two phases will involve four levels of skills:

- Basic Level (Paramedic Level One)
- Intermediate Level (Paramedic Level Two)
- Qualification Level (Paramedic Level Three)
- Advanced Level (Paramedic Level Four).

The Paramedic Level Four skills include more advanced life support measures and indicates a professional level above that currently existing in the EAS.

The training of Paramedics will be centralised and conducted at the School of Military Medicine (SMM) so as to provide a more consistent approach towards emergency care. The training programme of our Paramedics will be similar to that of the SAF's. They will be required to undergo an intensive 18-month course where they will be taught life-saving techniques to enable them to perform a wide range of treatments. Promising paramedics who are able to acquire higher skills will undergo another six-month course to enable them to perform more advanced life-saving techniques. Among the techniques taught include the administering of a

wide range of emergency drugs, setting up and reading electrocardiograms, which monitors heart rhythms and performing chest decompression procedures when necessary.

Five of our junior officers together with 150 army medics are currently attending the first course which started on 24 June 96 at SMM. Two of our AOs and a senior Medical Training Officer

have already attended a two-month joint training with the SAF instructors at the Paramedic Academy in Canada. These officers form the core group of instructors and will assist to run the courses with the other SMM officers. The first batch of our paramedics will be operational by 1998.

The scheme was jointly launched by Assoc Prof Ho Peng Kee, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Home Affairs and Law) and Mr Mathias Yao, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Defence and National Development) at the SMM on 15 July 96.

Following this announcement, the recruitment drive for the second batch of paramedics was started on 16 Jul 96. Successful applicants will commence their training in Sep 96.

To apply for the Paramedic post, the SCDF welcomes both men and women who meet the following criteria:

- Be between 17 and 35 years of age
- Possess a minimum educational qualifications of 3 GCE 'O' levels
- Be physically and mentally fit

If you know of any of your relatives and friends who meet the above criterion and who display a strong desire to help the injured and sick, just inform him or her to call the SCDF's career hotline at 1800-382 0000 for further details or alternatively, to look out for the paramedics recruitment advertisement in the Classified Ads Section of The Straits Times and Lian He Zao Bao.



# THE WOMAN WITH A BIG HEART AND PASSION



“ They worked so hard. No amount of words can accurately describe the way they have put the lives of others before theirs. It was there and then did I fully understand why people have been attributing firefighters as unsung heroes.

— Head Ambulance Officer,  
Mdm Alice Goh

## Why did you choose to be a nurse?

I was from a Girl Ranger with the Girl Guides during my secondary school years and it was then that I developed an interest towards first aid.

On my graduating year in secondary school, I was already interested to become a nurse when I grow up. My father's friend who was a nutritionist at a hospital then advised me to first write in to the Ministry of Health (MOH) to indicate my interest.

I followed suit and was eventually admitted to a nursing course. In fact, I was ecstatic when I was informed that I had been slated to attend a on-the-job training as a Junior Nurse!

## Nursing is definitely a challenging career. What makes you want to be one?

I would not deny that nursing is a challenging career but it is also not without its own rewards.

Whenever you witness the recovery journey of a patient who had been under your care for a period of time, you will definitely feel a sense of reward.

To me, it was not the legwork that was challenging but the circumstances faced by my patients that never failed to break my heart.

Once, I took care of a 4 year old patient diagnosed with cancer, as I was the only nurse that she could trust and connect with.

I remember having to bathe her and I would do so gently because her whole body was in constant pain. Over time, as we got closer, she also became sicker.

Eventually, she passed away and I was heartbroken for a while.

## How was it like being the Head Ambulance Officer with the Singapore Fire Service (SFS)?

The post allowed me the opportunity to capitalise on my pre-hospital emergency experiences.

In those days, there was no paramedic scheme. Ambulance Attendants ran the Ambulance Service. Like me, these ambulance attendants were nurses seconded from the hospitals to the SFS.

As the Head Ambulance Officer, I would be notified whenever there was a big fire and/or when the number of casualties was potentially high.

My first deployment to an emergency case was to a fire that broke out in Bugis and that was also my first time witnessing

firefighters at work. While I was on stand-by with the rest of my crew, I witnessed for myself the firefighters charging towards the big fire, when everyone else was running away from it.

They worked so hard. No amount of words can accurately describe the way they put the lives of others before theirs. It was there and then that I fully understood why people have been attributing firefighters as unsung heroes.

## Is there one advice that you always give to your ambulance attendants?

The nature of our job as ambulance attendants was an uncertain one. Whenever we received a call, we had little information on the condition of the patient until upon our arrival. Sometimes when we have reached the incident site, the patient may already have a severed limb or even a disfigured torso due to a fall from height.

Ambulance attendants are to attend to the casualties, deceased and next-of-kin with a heart. Even if the subject is unconscious, the ambulance attendant must approach him/her with care and feelings.

At all times, we must treat the sick and weak with respect. There is no two ways about it.

## Share with us your views on the Paramedic Scheme when it was first introduced.

I remember our ambulance attendants' team were celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> year in 1987. Then, I told myself that we must become better 10 years later. The institutionalisation of the paramedic scheme was one such improvement that we made.

The ambulance attendants seconded to the SFS then were getting older and soon, they no longer could handle the physical demands of their jobs. At the same time, the local hospitals were also going through a re-organisation and I reckoned that if the ambulance attendants were to continue with their stay at the SCDF, they may not be able to find suitable positions in the hospitals at the end of their secondment.

Having paramedics also meant that we were able to meet the demand for more nurses at the local hospitals then.

## What was it that kept you going?

Passion. Passion. Passion.

It was a life changing and enriching experience that no amount of money can buy.

If given a chance, I will still want to be a nurse all over again. 🚑

OUR PIONEERS  
OUR LEGACY



# SCDF VINTAGE CONTINGENT AT THE NATIONAL DAY PARADE 2015



Source: This article first appeared in The Main Line Issue No. 8-96, Pgs 2 and 3.



The SCDF's long awaited "dream" of having the most advanced, state-of-the-art training institution in the region will soon be realised. To be known as the Civil Defence Academy (CDA), it is expected to be completed by late 1998.

Tender for the construction of the CDA has been awarded to Koh Brothers & Civil Engineering Contractor (Pte) Ltd, a subsidiary of Koh Brothers Group Limited and construction works have already started.

To be developed on a 9 hectares site at Jalan Bahar, the \$84 million Academy will have the capacity to train a maximum of 650 residential and 250 non-residential trainees at any one time. The sprawling Academy which will have a total of 350 permanent training and administrative staff will be equipped with the following facilities :

- *Indoor facilities, including a fire demonstration room, tactical training rooms, laboratories, information technology rooms and a resource centre ;*

- *Outdoor facilities, including an obstacle training complex, a 10-storey high rescue and firefighting training tower where the different fire scenarios can be simulated and a complex specifically designed for the conduct of specialised training involving the use of the Breathing Apparatus ;*

- *Hot training facilities, including simulated Petroleum tanks, LPG Fire Simulators, Flashover Simulators and HAZMAT Training Simulators ;*

## CIVIL DEFENCE ACADEMY

READY BY YEAR

1998



- *Service facilities, including carparks for heavy vehicles mobilised during civil resources mobilisation exercises ;*

- *Offices and common facilities, including an auditorium and dormitories.*

A variety of courses ranging from the basic to the complex encompassing both theory and practical will be conducted by the CDA for the SCDF personnel, including regular officers, NSFs and CDNSmen. Among these courses include Commanders' Training (*ie. NCO Course, Advanced Officers' Course, Company Commander Course*), Firefighting & Rescue Training, Vocational Training for service vocationalists like signallers, medical orderlies and heavy plant operators and Unit Training for new CDNS units like the Rescue Battalions and Medical Companys.

Beside providing in-house training for the SCDF personnel, the CDA would also provide training for related government agencies, commercial and industrial establishments as well as the civilian population.

With the establishment of the Civil Defence Academy, the SCDF will be able to provide adequate as well as purpose-built facilities to meet its long-term training requirements. Not only will the Force be able to optimise its training resources but it will also enable the SCDF to pursue a synthesis between progress and quality, that is, to progress with the latest developments and to enhance the Force's operational capabilities through quality training.

— EFA Thanalochumi —  
CORE Dept, HQ SCDF





The CDA was established to train up confidence in our trainees to fulfil the mission of saving lives and property. It is impossible to train them on what to do for every incident simply because each is unique on its own.”

– Senior Assistant Commissioner (RET) Puniamorthy S/O Muthu Subramaniam Ramasamy

### Why did you join the SCDF?

As a young man, I was never attracted to join any of the uniformed organisations. Back in school, I used to laugh at my friends who joined the uniformed groups especially when I see them marched up and down the parade square. I felt happier playing football instead as I was able to run around freely! Little did I know that I would eventually end up in a uniformed organisation for 31 years.

I can still remember myself walking to the Public Service Commission at City Hall to attend an interview to join the SCDF then. The interviewers asked me a few questions and before I knew it, I was offered a position to be an instructor with the Vigilante Corps. It was a simple job. I was tasked to record the posting movements of our National Servicemen.

Those were my early years.

### Share with us your experience on the merger of the Singapore Fire Service (SFS) and the Civil Defence Force.

The Vigilante Corps was disbanded in 1981 and we were assigned to different units of the newly established Civil Defence Force. As Head of its Planning Department, I managed all the ongoing development projects such as the merger of the SFS and Civil Defence Force.

After the Hotel New World incident in 1986, the ministry realised that both the SFS and Civil Defence Force were working towards a similar mission of saving lives and property and thus, there was a need to reduce duplications of roles and functions between the two organisations.

In the 1980s, the two organisations were merged. During the initial phases of the merger, we were faced with negative ground sentiments. Despite the resistance, the merger took place but I have to emphasise that this decision was a logical and rational one.

The history of the SFS stretches back to a century ago and most of its firefighters saw the merger as a younger organisation devouring an organisation of rich traditions, history and achievements. To make things better, we included the word “Joint” in the name of our newly established organisation – the

Singapore Joint Civil Defence Force (SJCDF).

The manpower make up of both organisations was very different then. While mainly deskbound officers drove the Civil Defence Force, the SFS was dominated by firefighters who were always on the ground.

As a result of the merger, some of the senior firefighters were designated with office jobs so as to ensure that they would also be represented in decision-making processes. Most of them took a long time to get used to the less dynamic nature of deskbound jobs.

### Were there any differences in the way they functioned?

Of course! There was a stark cultural difference. After all, the working culture of the SFS had evolved over a century and it was impossible to change it overnight. As for the newly established Civil Defence Force, we had almost no established working culture in place. Everything had to be built from scratch.

I will always remember this conversation that I had with a colleague who was previously serving the SFS. He told me with a straight face that the SFS had trained their firefighters to perform a specific role of fighting fire that was modelled after the British System.

We had to introduce changes anyway in order to improve the organisation and ourselves and as you may already have guessed, it was a challenge to change their old ways while accommodating to their rich history and work culture.

Well, that is a story of the past.

Today, most of us have retired and we have become very good friends over time. It does not matter anymore if we were from the SFS or the Civil Defence Force.

### Share with us your experience on the establishment of the Civil Defence Academy (CDA).

I was only a Lieutenant when I was tasked with the project on the establishment of the CDA. A Development Project Committee (DPC) chaired by three then-ministers Mr Richard Hu, Mr Suppiah Dhanabalan and Prof S Jayakumar and then-Permanent Secretary Brigadier General (Ret.) Tan Chin Tiong was set up to oversee this establishment.

I remember I had to bring down the physical model of the artist’s impression of the CDA for one of my presentations. I also bought a laser pointer just for the presentation and it was so expensive then!

PowerPoint was not common then. We relied heavily on the use of transparencies and overhead projectors instead. During my presentation, I was questioned on the need for the installation of air-conditioners at the classrooms and auditorium as well as the need for a swimming pool. These were considered to be a form of luxury then.

After many rounds of presentations and discussions, we finally secured the idea and construction began.

Today, the Academy still brings me many great memories.

### How was it like being Director CDA then?

I always told my trainees that if there was one thing in common about all fires, it would be that there will never be a textbook solution to fighting fire. There will always be new lessons to be learnt after every incident because of the different permutations involved.

The CDA was established to train up confidence in our trainees to fulfil the mission of saving lives and property. It is impossible to train them to know what to do every for type of incident simply because each is unique on its own.

The CDA is an avenue for the SCDF to impart relevant skills and knowledge to our trainees but once they graduate, it is their duty as lifesavers to muster the courage required to go against a threat that puts them in danger.

To me, the most exciting and meaningful part of every emergency responder’s career is when he or she is part of the

operational work. An emergency responder is required to make decisions on the spot without the luxury of time and that is utterly challenging. More importantly, he/she cannot afford to shiver on his/her knees when running towards the vicinity that everyone else is running away from.

### How best would you describe a firefighter?

Over the years, I learned that there is something similar that is ingrained in firefighters from around the world.

Whenever we see a burning house, it is only innate of us to want to render our assistance. Whenever and wherever we hear the sirens of a fire engine, it is only natural for us to turn our heads to locate its origin. Wherever you may be in the world, as long you identify yourself as a firefighter to another firefighter, you will be treated with warmth and respect almost immediately. You would also start exchanging helmets and t-shirts with this stranger whom you probably will never meet again in your life.

To sum it all up in one word – Fraternity. 🚒



# STORIES FROM THE CENTRAL FIRE STATION





# “MR. PANADOL”

## Why did you choose to become a firefighter when your father and brothers were all Prison Wardens?

I can still remember the deliberation process vividly. I was very young then and I wanted to be different. I wanted to save lives.

I did not have any friends from the Singapore Fire Brigade then and to be honest, I knew nothing about the job then. I signed up anyway and I was called up for the selection and interview.

A selection process aimed at assessing our physical fitness was conducted before the face-to-face interview. With two roll of hoses that were 30 meters in length stacked on my shoulders, I ran 100 meters. The instructors told me that if I fell, I would fail the selection immediately.

I looked around me and spotted many other taller and stronger candidates. To be honest, I was frightened when witnessing the instructors’ stellar performance when they were demonstrating what was expected of us. I had no prior training because I did not know what to expect.

I thought to myself: “You have to pass the selection. Let there be at least one lifesaver in your family.” Those were also the exact same words I uttered to the interviewers that consisted of both British and local officers who granted me the ticket to become a Lifesaver.

## Share with us the experiences that you have acquired from your training days.

Back in those days, we did not have the luxury to leverage technologies like fire and rescue simulators nor did we own a firefighting protection suit like the current day bunker gear. There was little emphasis on theoretical learning and the entire training phase lasted only three months.

I must say those three months were also the best days of my life. As a recruit, we were introduced to the fundamentals of firefighting such as the storage and functions of equipment and we experienced real firefighting only during our final exercise assessment.

Before the assessment, the instructors had already built a wooden hut on the top storey of Alexandra Fire Station. They set it on fire and commanded us to put it out. I can still remember clearly the heat on my skin, sight of black smoke and fury of the fire. We charged towards it with all our might and despite it being our first attempt, we excelled and managed to graduate.

## How did you get the nickname Mr Panadol?

My late mother worked as a nurse at the Kandang Kerbau Hospital. As a young boy, I was physically very small as

compared to the rest of the firefighters. She was constantly worried that I would fall ill whenever I reported to work and so she would always pack a few tabs of Panadol in my bag. I had so many of those tabs that I was able to offer them to the other recruits who fell ill. Unlike how it is like today, we did not have a medical centre that we could go to then.

In those days, firefighters were addressed by a set of registered numbers that had been assigned to them upon joining the Singapore Fire Brigade. I was Fireman No. 28.

One day, Ah Tao my Section Leader called out to me.

Ah Tao: “No. 28! Mr Arthur Lim (Director of the Singapore Fire Service) is looking for you!”

I rushed up a flight of stairs and reported to Mr Lim’s at his office. He was curious when he first saw me and asked me what I was doing in his office. I told him that Ah Tao had conveyed the message that he was looking for me.

Mr Arthur Lim: “I wasn’t looking for you! I told Ah Tao to get me some Panadols because I am suffering from a headache!”

It was only after that did Ah Tao explained to Mr Lim that I was the “supplier of Panadols”. He nicknamed me Mr Panadol from that day onwards.

## Are you still addressed by your peers as Mr Panadol?

Most people in SCDF today know me as Mr Panadol instead of Rosly. Some even called my wife Mrs Aspirin! Haha!

“Living quarters were provided for fire fighters and together with my wife, we lived in the married quarters. A few years later, my first son was born and he grew up at the fire station.”

— WO (RET) Md Rosly Hussain

## Where were you posted to after the training phase?

I was posted to the Central Fire Station in 1971. On my first day of duty, I responded to a call at the former Tropicana Building at Scotts Road. A part of the building had collapsed and I was commanded by the senior firefighters to extricate a body from the rubble.

After the load bearing beam was lifted off the trapped body, I hurried forward and the body fell onto my chest. I fell ill after my first operation and did not turn up at work until four days later.

My first day at work was also the first time in my life in which I witnessed the smell and sight of death.

## Share with us your experience at the Robinson’s Department Store Fire.

This fire was massive! We could already feel the heat on our skin even before we arrived at the scene. We were not equipped with firefighting protective suits then. Dressed in just our khaki uniform and a helmet, we tried to identify the seat of the

▼ Central Fire Station at Hill Street.



### A heritage in red brick

The Central Fire Station in Hill Street is our oldest and most historic station. Dating back to 1909, it still serves the Central Business District.

In view of its historical value and its location within the Civic District, it has been earmarked for preservation.

The facade will be retained but renovations will be introduced to the interior to upgrade its operational efficiency.

In a sense, the renovation of Central Fire Station is symbolic of SJCDF's infrastructure development philosophy - it makes the best use of existing resources, augmenting these with the best new ideas and concepts thus ensuring a sense of continuity even as it marches towards the 21st century. □



*"Mrs. Aspirin" (WO (RET) Rosly's wife) and "Mr. Panadol"*

fire by pitching a jack ladder against the building; however the heat was so intense and we had to rely on defensive external firefighting instead.

The firefighting operations lasted for a few days and at the end of it, the underground carpark became a swimming pool and we had to manually pump out the water. When the fire was extinguished, I was one of the firemen who were deployed into the burnt Robinson's Department Store to extricate the deceased. I remember seeing the skulls of an adult and baby lying side by side in the burnt elevator.

There were also many people crowding outside the building and calling out to their loved ones who had perished in the fire.

### How do you think SCDF has changed?

When the British were still in power, most if not all decisions were made on our behalf. They were authoritative and regimented just like how a uniformed organisation should be. As such, I did not have many opportunities to speak my mind then.

It is really different today. When I was an instructor at the Civil Defence Academy, our recruits and cadets openly shared their ideas and some even questioned the rationale behind our teaching methodologies. In fact, it has evolved to become a two-way communication strategy today.

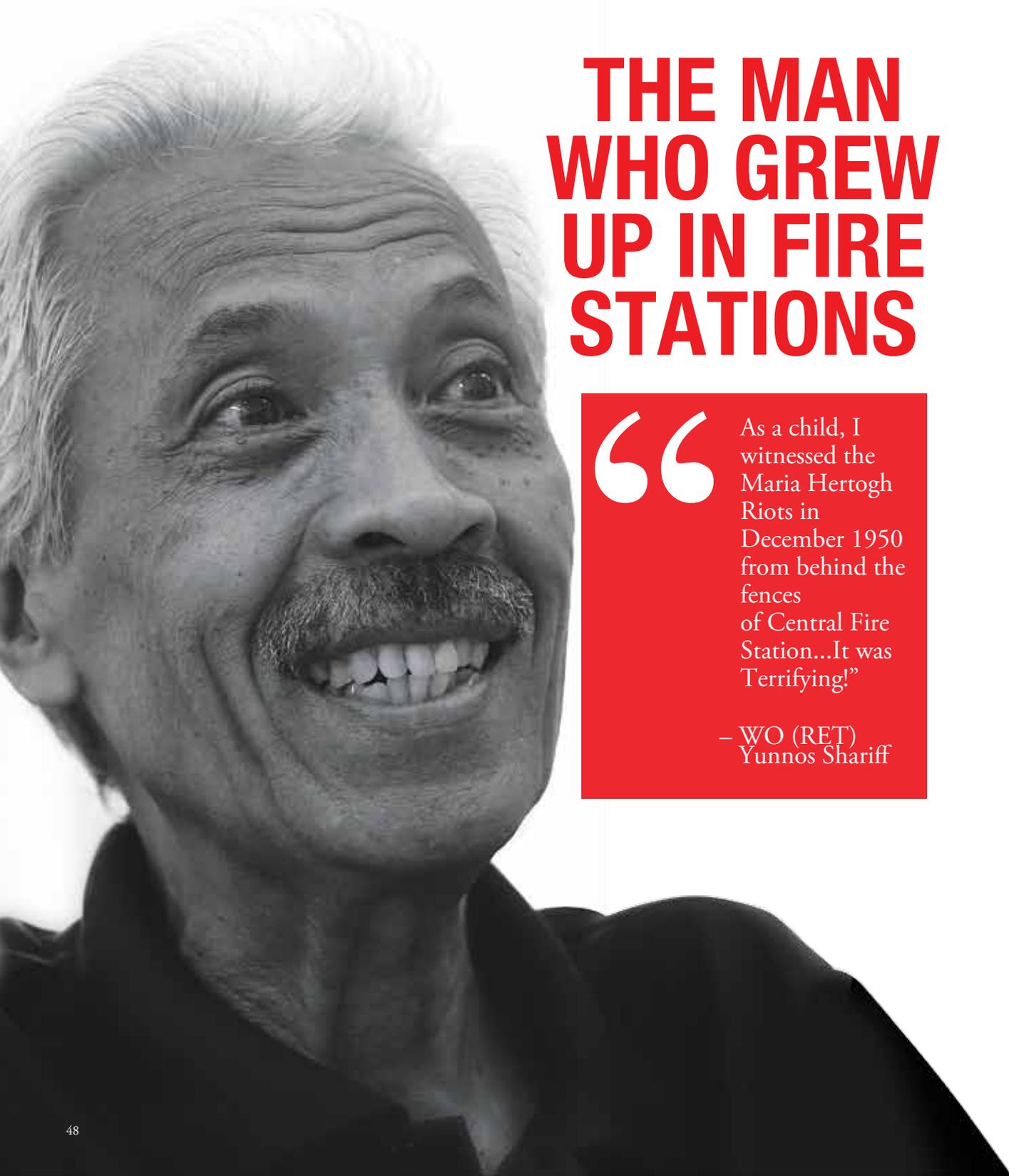
### Good memories?

The Central Fire Station is and will always be the place of fond memories.

Apart from it being the first fire station that I was posted to, my family had also lived in the fire station then.

Living quarters were provided for firefighters and together with my wife, we lived in the married quarters. A few years later, my first son was born and he grew up within the compounds of the Central Fire Station and was doted by many firefighters.

Well, I also retired at the very same fire station. 🚒



# THE MAN WHO GREW UP IN FIRE STATIONS

“

As a child, I witnessed the Maria Hertogh Riots in December 1950 from behind the fences of Central Fire Station...It was Terrifying!”

– WO (RET)  
Yunnos Shariff

## How was it like living in a Fire Station?

My father was a firefighter and together with my family, we lived in the married quarters. I remember having to change schools whenever my father was posted from one fire station to another.

When we were living in Central Fire Station, we were only given one room. Life was simple then and we never found it small. It was only when we moved in to the quarters at Alexandra Fire Station did the issue of “space” dawned on me. We were given a living room and a bedroom, and that was considered a massive space for me then.

Living in a fire station may not be as fun as you may have imagined it to be. It was ruled by regimentation in which even the children had to observe. As the fire station is an operational frontline unit, we were not allowed to “trespass” boundaries marked by white lines.

My father was also a very strict man. I was only allowed to play with the boys from the same fire station and those from the police quarters located next to us.

Very rarely were we allowed to play “teng teng” (hopscotch) with the girls at the badminton court that was once behind the fire station.

As we were under the British rule then, we also celebrated the Coronation Day. The British officers would throw a party for both the firefighters and their children. I remember seeing the adults throwing each other into the pond during the celebratory mood.

## Have you witnessed any major events as a child when living in the fire station?

As a child, I witnessed the Maria Hertogh Riots in December 1950 when I was living in the quarters at the Central Fire Station. It was about 5pm and the firefighters had already been deployed for an operation. No one had second thoughts about it as it was common for them to leave the fire station to attend to incidents.

All of a sudden, I heard a loud and long wailing sound of the siren and the firefighters who have returned to the fire station seemed worried and distressed. I was told that the court appeal by Aminah for Maria Hertogh, her adopted daughter was refused and a huge crowd had already begun rioting

outside the Supreme Court.

The crowd swelled and people started getting more violent. I remember the Major Pump 3 (a vintage fire engine today) attended to the incident. Broken bottles were thrown at every direction by the rioters and there were numerous wounded people who were trapped within the vicinity. Some of the firefighters were also wounded as a result. It was terrifying!

## Why did you choose to become a firefighter?

I always wanted to become a lecturer but my academic grades were just not good enough. I was an expert in photography and acting and I was also a good runner and football player.

I chose to the path of a firefighter instead because having grown up in fire stations, I knew the routine well. During one of the stowage drill I had to undergo during my training phase, the instructors tasked us to look for the spare Breathing Apparatus Cylinder that was stored in one of the compartments in the fire engine. None of the other recruits except me knew that it was stored under the cushion in the cabin. The instructors were pleasantly surprised by how familiar I was with the fire engines.

Having lived in the fire station, I have heard many heroic stories from my family members and fellow neighbours. We also knew where the different equipment was stored or how to put out a fire.

## How was your career with the SCDF like?

I have always been a call centre specialist who worked at the control room simply because I enjoyed the work. After my training phase, I was commissioned as a firefighter but I was only doing it for a good nine months. I attended to almost 60 fire calls before becoming a call centre specialist.

It was a difficult job. For a start, I joined only to become an observer. The newbie was not allowed to answer any phone calls. It was only after several weeks were the newbies given the authority to handle the phone calls.

The phones that we had were not as convenient for use as the ones we have these days. There were four different lines that I had to answer calls from and apart from fire calls, I also had to

transfer calls to the designated officers. I remember talking to many Chinese owners of *wayang* shows who required licenses before they were allowed to air their shows in public.

## In the past, how did the call centre specialists from the control room inform the firefighters of a fire call?

It was a very manual task. Once we received a call, we would write (sometimes, they would also draw a sketch of the place) down the details on a piece of paper, roll it up and throw it down a long hollow pole. As the paper travelled vertically down the pole, a loud twinkling sound was produced to trigger the attention of the firefighters. Another firefighter located at the ground level would then retrieve the note at the base of the pole and together with his fellow firefighters, they would rush off to the fire incident.

## Other than being a call centre specialist, were you posted to any other departments?

Before the outbreak of the fire at Robinson’s Department Stores, I was promoted to become a Dangerous Trade Inspector that is more commonly known as a Central Enforcement Officer in today’s context. I inspected premises like petrol stations, tankers and ships that carried dangerous cargo such as firecrackers. I remember stopping vehicles loaded with Liquefied Petroleum Gas cylinders by the roadside to ensure that they have conformed to the stipulated fire safety measures. I was also in-charge in the issuing of licenses for fireworks.

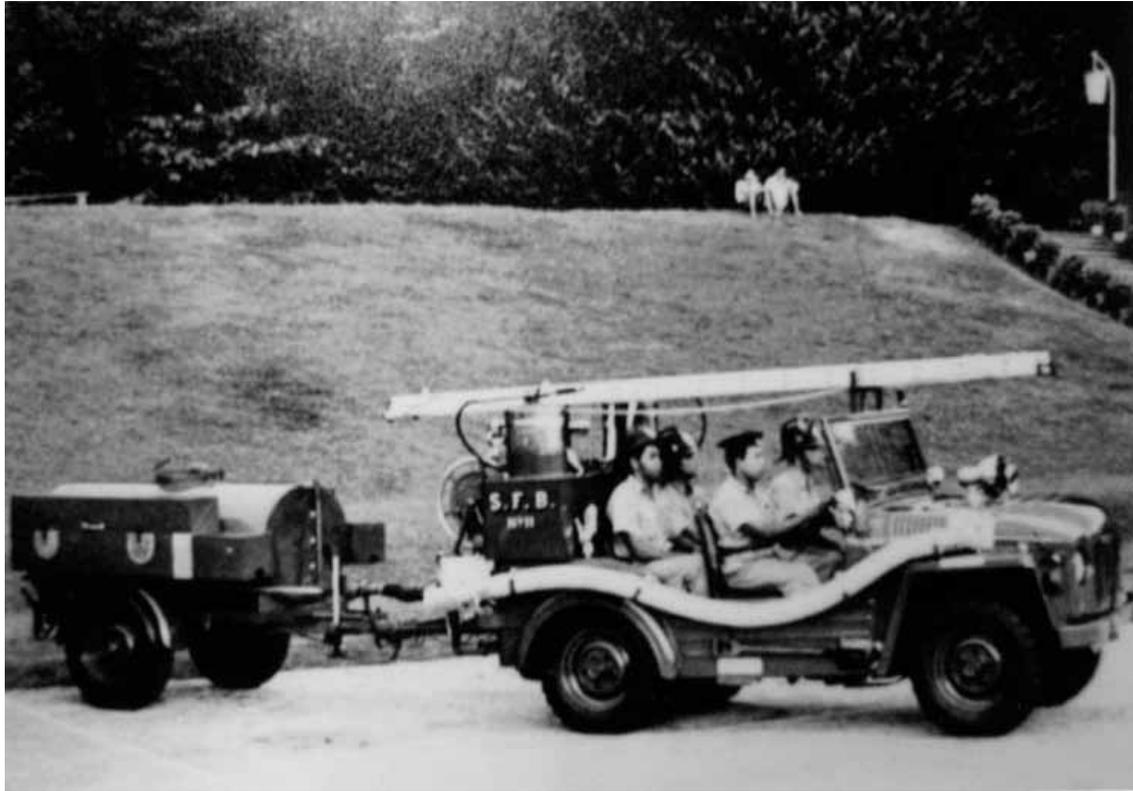
Those days, the people on the streets who saw us in our uniforms referred to us as “Toa Kao” which translates to Enforcement Officer.

## How have things changed?

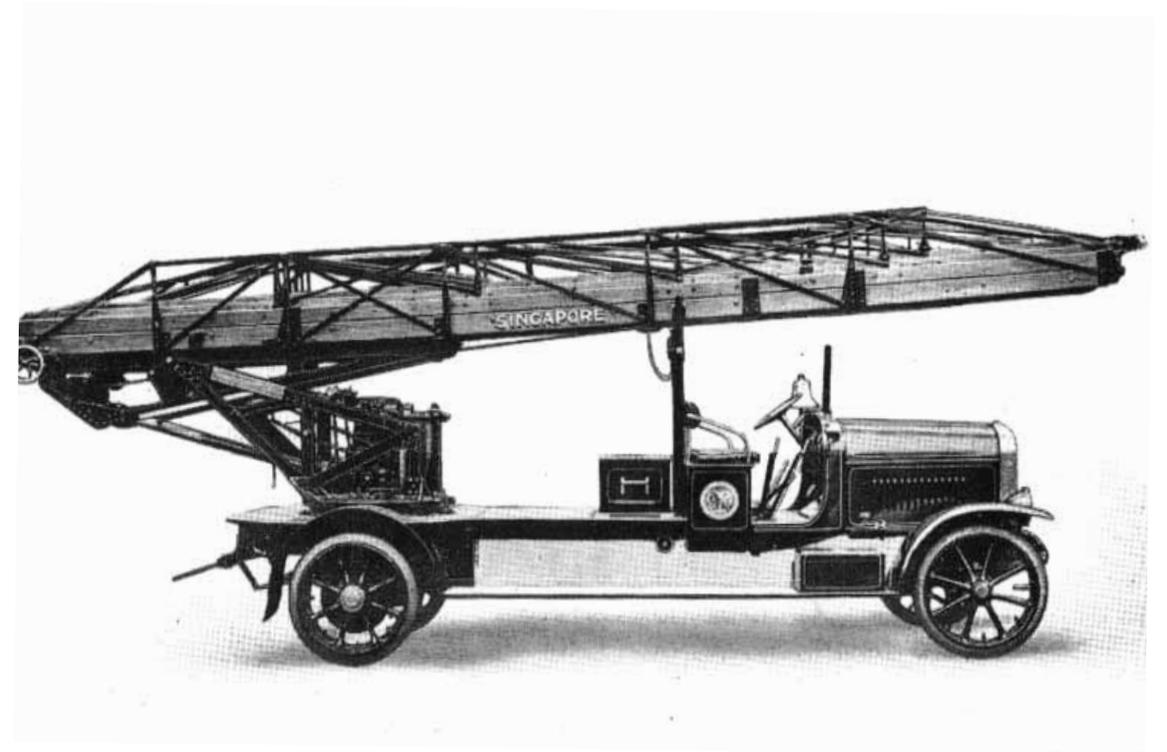
Many things have changed as Singapore progressed over time. So have the Central Fire Station and Alexandra Fire Station in terms of facilities.

There was a joint kitchen for every six units situated within Central Fire Station as well as a canteen and even a tailor. All these as well as the living quarters were all a thing of the past.

The stations are much more polished and sophisticated now but I still miss the good old ‘kampung’ spirit in the fire stations. 🚒



*Fire Engine with External Water Tank*  
1958



*Merryweather Turn Table Ladder*  
1923 to 1953





“

Bart-ji was diagnosed with seizure at the age of three and the vet recommended for him to be put to sleep. I was very sad and it felt as if I had lost a life partner.”

– WO (RET) Segar S/O Suppiah



Picture (above): First SCDF Rescue Dog Tender

### Share with us the experiences that you have acquired during the training phase.

I joined the Singapore Fire Service (SFS) in 1983 when I was in my early twenties. I have always wanted to know how it is like to be a frontline officer.

The six months training took place at the present Jurong Fire Station where it was once a training school of the SFS. The training was called the 'Fireman Course' then.

### I understand that you are part of the elite Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (DART)?

In my younger days, I enrolled myself for the Search and Rescue Squad Training with the elite DART and underwent a three months training at the Serangoon Fire Station. Today, this fire station is no longer in existence as it has been demolished.

Then, there was also a requirement for the elite DART personnel to qualify for the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Strike Force.

It was in 1997 that the organisation saw the need to introduce the use of search dogs for both our local and overseas rescue missions. It was then that we learned about the benefits of deploying dogs to expedite our search operations.

### You are a Pioneer from the SCDF K-9 unit then?

Yes. We attended a course at an Academy in Sweden for two and a half weeks where I acquired knowledge on the nature, breed and genetic compositions of dogs as well as their temperament and the training methods to adopt.

We also had several exchange sessions with the Singapore Police Force to better understand how they maintained their training facilities and kennels.

### What about our first batch of dogs?

Our first six dogs were from Belgium and they were cherry picked by the group of personnel. One of them was a German Sheppard that was only 11 months old then and was put under my care. He was named Bart-ji, which means Bart Junior.

As part of the training routine, we spent two months bonding together. I would feed and walk him every day. Training began shortly after he turned one year old. We learnt during our training phase in Sweden that it is the best time to train puppies when they are one year old as their brains would already have been better developed at this stage of growth and this allows them to be more focused during training.

We were tasked to instil in the dogs a specific skill – the ability to search for a live casualty. We started off with obedience training where they learned the fundamental commands like 'sit' and 'stay'. Every time Bart-ji learned a new command successfully, a sense of accomplishment filled me.

Once they have mustered the fundamental commands, we began to play the game of 'hide and seek' with them to introduce to them the concept of search and rescue. Each time the dog was able to find its master, it would be rewarded with a tennis ball or rolled up towel. In a way, we were training them to look for a human through their excellent scenting ability.

Bart-ji was a slow learner but he passed the test anyway and he was eventually deployed for a couple of exercises. I found out from our Swedish counterparts that Bart-ji and his canine family grew up at a farm and its parents were trained in bird hunting. I noticed that Bart-ji also had the tendency to pounce on unwary birds when he was still a puppy. That sense of wilderness was still deeply entrenched in his genetic compositions. In fact, his hobby was to chase after birds and

basically, he was just curious about moving objects.

Unfortunately, Bart-ji was diagnosed with seizure at the age of three and the vet recommended for him to be put to sleep. I was very sad and it felt as if I had lost a life partner.

I remember telling my colleagues and the vet that I preferred not to be present during the euthanasia procedure. Nonetheless, I bid him goodbye the day before and it seemed like he knew that was our final farewell.

### Were you attached to another dog after the passing of Bart-ji?

Yes. I became the dog handler of a Border Collie named Tog. Tog was just a few months to his one year old birthday when we first met.

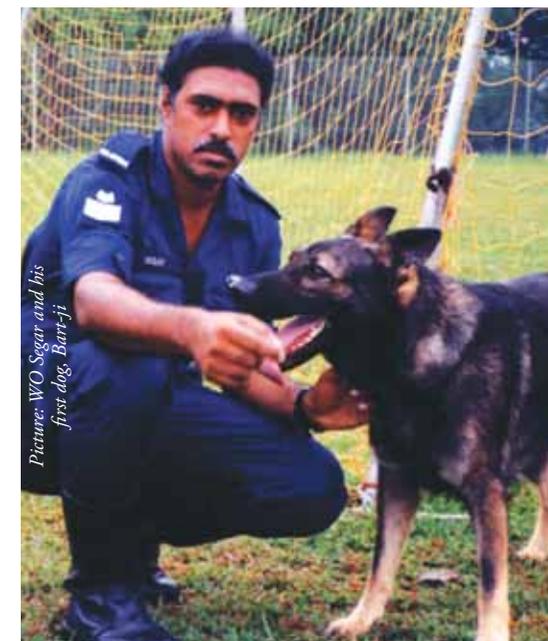
We bonded very quickly and our training went on smoothly.

Tog lived a colourful life.

He was deployed for the overseas mission at Banda Ache and Taiwan to perform search and rescue work. Most if not all of us were impressed by his level of dedication to the Life Saving mission.

Once, he got badly injured after he jumped into a collapsed building in Taiwan. It was unfortunate that he landed on a glass panel and hurt his paw as a result. Fortunately, there was a makeshift hospital nearby where he received medical attention.

He retired when he was nearly 10 years old and was adopted by a loving family. 🐕



Picture: WO Segar and his first dog, Bart-ji



Picture: WO Segar training his second dog, Tog



# Angels from the Singapore Police Force

## Why did you join the Singapore Police Force (SPF) upon graduation?

**CPT Gan:** I was a member of the National Police Cadet Corps (NPCC) and joining the SPF was a natural progression for me.

**CPT Lee:** I have always enjoyed sports and I wanted a job that required me to be physically active. I was also a member of the NPCC and thus, the SPF was also naturally my top choice.

**CPT Rosnah:** Like CPT Lee, I also saw it as the only job that would allow me to remain physically active and to continue my love for sports.



**Pictures:**  
(Left)  
Women Firefighters  
doing a Foot Drill

(Middle)  
Female Firefighters preparing for  
Fire Extinguisher Training

(Right)  
The change of the SDCF uniform was  
featured on the local Chinese newspaper  
(Source: A personal collection  
of CPT Lee Chui Leng)

**All of you were the first batch of female officers to be transferred to the SCDF. Share with us the history.**

**CPT Gan:** My superiors informed me that SCDF had rolled out a new scheme. Like CPT Lee and CPT Rosnah, I joined the SPF as a Junior Officer and it was the only scheme available for female officers then anyway.

**CPT Rosnah:** We were briefed that should the transfer be successful, we would be promoted to become Senior Officers and more importantly, it was an opportunity for us to be exposed to staff work as well.

**CPT Lee:** I was told that the SCDF had openings for Instructresses. Since I had an interest in teaching, I went for the interview and to be honest, I was pleasantly surprised to be accepted by the Life Saving Force.

**What were some of the differences in the nature of your job after the transfer?**

**CPT Gan:** Police officers were trained in the use of arms like guns and batons. Civil Defence officers were trained in the use of an array of equipment and hoses to save lives.

**CPT Rosnah:** Police officers were also trained with self-defence tactics. Civil Defence officers were trained to defend those in need.

**CPT Lee:** I would say that our job in the SPF involved a lot of law enforcement duties as well as investigation work. In the SCDF, we were given the responsibility to rescue and save lives instead. I must say that it was a whole new dimension.



**CPT Lee, you were the model for the new uniform of the Singapore Joint Civil Defence Force (SJCDF). Share with us your experience on the merger of the Singapore Fire Service (SFS) and SCDF.**

**CPT Lee:** The SFS and SCDF had their own respective uniforms then. The introduction of the new uniform was definitely a good move as it blurred the lines of the fact that the SJCDF was a makeup of officers from two different organisations in one.

Most of us were excited about it and the media did a brief coverage on the change too.

# 民防部队新制服

我国民防部队将从明天起换上新制服,并采用武装部队的军阶。新制服带来新的形象,上衣是浅灰色,裤和裙子是深灰色,以取代目前的浅棕与深棕色。

据民防总监黄锦春说:灰色是国际许多民防部队通用的颜色,如瑞士,因此我们也采用这一颜色。

在今天的记者会上,他特别强调,换新制服将不会带来额外的花费,因为每一套制服穿上两年都要换新的,所以目前是先存着用,像武装部队在几年前换新制服一样,逐步淘

汰旧的,以免浪费。换新制服将分阶段进行,最先是由正规人员开始,全部完成要好几年的时间。

民防部队目前共有1万3000名正规与服役人员,至于后备人员的阵容有3万人。

除了制服外,民防部队的工装裤,也将换上深灰色。制服是办公穿的,工装裤是在训练与到灾场进行拯救工作时穿的。

民防总监黄锦春说,经过多次演习后,加上最近参与新世界酒店塌楼惨祸的拯救工作,我们觉得有必要有一套能代表民防部队的工装裤。

他也说:随着建设队的基本训练延长到3个月,今后他们也将发予这一类制服。

不过,他表示,工装裤要到换制服的进入另一阶段才配备。换制服与采用军阶的新结构,将从6月1日开始。

提到军阶,他说,民防部队将采用武装部队的军阶肩章,由少尉、中尉至上尉,是采用条章,至于少校、中校与上校,则采用冠章。民防部队这一次换新制服与采用新军阶,是方便于识别,以便给人一个新的形象。

(FP9)

穿上新制服的男女民防部队官员,给人一个新的形象,肩章上的条章是新的军阶。这两人是:李翠玲中尉(民防)与梁世仁上尉(民防)。通常在军阶的称呼后加括弧指明民防,与军队有别。



The rescue aspect of the job inculcated in me the beauty of patience and the need to serve with Pride and Care.

**CPT Lee:** The one skill I had acquired and am thankful for is the Heimlich Manoeuvre. Once, my son choked on a slice of bread and as he felt immense discomfort, he collapsed on the floor. He panicked and to my greatest fear, fits acted up.

I dashed towards him and did what I could and should to clear his airway. For a moment, everyone in the family thought that was it. If not for the skill that I have acquired, I may have lost my little one. This experience certainly gave meaning to my work especially now that I am a Public Education Officer for the Community. 🚒

**How has the transfer of service changed your life?**

**CPT Rosnah:** I am glad I applied for the transfer of service as it had presented me with the opportunity to acquire clerical skills. More importantly, I found new friendships with other members of the Life Saving Force.

**CPT Gan:** I had very simple aspirations for my life when I was young. All I wanted to do was to find a job and travel the world. Like CPT Rosnah, I am glad I applied for the transfer of service too. My job with the Life Saving Force has taught me to become more analytical because the responsibility required of a Senior Officer is inevitably higher.

*Our First  
Female  
Senior Officers*



### Why did you join the Civil Defence Force?

**AC Chin:** To be honest, I did not apply for a post specifically with the then Civil Defence Force. Instead, I had intentions of working with the Civil Service. It was only until the actual interview that they proposed to me to take up a job offer from the Civil Defence Force.

All these happened during the period of an economic recession and when the job market was scarce. With an academic background in Business Administration, I took up the job offer and frankly there had been no regrets since.

**LTC Suguna:** I was awed by the bravery of the firefighters and rescuers from both the Singapore Fire Service (SFS) and Civil Defence Force when I watched them work through the rubble at the collapse of the Lian Yak Building (commonly known as Hotel New World) on television.

At that time, I was still in my last semester with the National University of Singapore, studying Political Science and Geography. Naturally, I thought to myself that the Civil Defence Force would be a place for me to transit to after graduation as I was deeply inspired by the noble Life Saving mission.

In fact, some of the emergency responders that I saw on television eventually became my instructors! You could just imagine how excited I was when I first saw them in real life at the then Nee Soon Training Camp. I looked up to them as role models almost immediately.

### As the first batch of Female Senior Officers recruited by the Civil Defence Force, how did you find the training?

**AC Chin:** As I was actively involved in the National Cadet Corps as a student then, I did not face many problems during the training provided. I was well versed with the regimentation required of a uniformed group officer.

**LTC Suguna:** As I was from the Track and Field Team in school then, I adapted to the physical requirements of the three months training quickly.

### Were you aware that you belonged to the first batch of Female Senior Officers to be recruited?

**AC Chin:** To be honest, I did not. We were not treated differently and in fact, the training we had to undergo was similar to the one that male officers went through.

**LTC Suguna:** Neither did I. Thinking back, it was definitely a privilege.

### Were your first few years in service challenging?

**AC Chin:** Like LTC Suguna, I was posted to the Manpower Department. Apart from having to write numerous paper submissions, I also had to handle ad hoc requests very frequently.

I remember clearly that I was instructed to conduct training for our Operationally Ready National Servicemen during my first week at work.

The most challenging phase of my early years would be the time when I was posted to the Commissioner's office as the Principle Staff Officer (PSO). The job was very demanding. I was tasked to assist then Commissioner Chng Teow Hua to read all the paper submissions that required his attention and to take notes of all the meetings he attended.

He had high expectations of his staff. I was required to prepare a report based on my ground sensing from the visits that I had attended with him on the very same day. The report would include information on the possible gaps, mistakes and areas done well based on my observations. As I was only one year into my job with the Life Saving Force, it was really, really a challenge for me.

There was one occasion when I was tasked to attend a corporate function with him in the evening. He was supposed to deliver a speech that had already been drafted for him. However, it was only given to him during the last hour.

He was not pleased with how it was written and I was expected to craft a new speech for him instead from scratch! No doubt, I was anxious as I raced against time. Half an hour after, he came in and asked if the speech was ready. I looked at him speechless. He then sat down beside me to work on the speech together.

Without experience, I was tasked to shoulder great responsibilities. While it was gruelling, I have to say that it was through such exposure that I gained an array of competencies over my years of work with the Life Saving Force.

**LTC Suguna:** I was a Public Information Officer with the Community Relations Department during my early years. It was considered a new post then and my core functions included the crafting of public warning messages and communication plans and deciphering the tone of messages, etc. It was a new area to me altogether and I had to read up on my own accord in order to muster the skills required to devise a National Emergency Plan. I also had to actively talk to other officers to better understand the organisation.

The biggest challenge was when I had to craft the public warning messages that were disseminated on a National level and to coordinate the translations from English to Malay, Mandarin and Tamil.

### Were there any differences in the recruitment requirements then?

**AC Chin:** We were required to acquire skills related to rescue work instead of firefighting. We were also not required to pass the Individual Physical Proficiency Test (IPPT). It was only later in my career that these requirements were introduced.

Instead, the focus then was to polish our skills in the area of clerical work.

Oh! And if I were to apply now, I would not be able to meet the height criteria too (chuckles)!

### How was it like during the integration of the SFS and Civil Defence Force?

**AC Chin:** I remember that some firefighters from the SFS actually resigned as a result of the integration. They took pride in the history of the SFS and most of them felt that the integration would dilute or even eradicate the legacy of their good work.

Some who stayed on also found it difficult to deal with the fact that they now have to wear a new set of uniform that looked different. They saw it as a loss of identity. While some had resigned, the rest stayed on to pursue their love for this job.

Senior Assistant Commissioner Christopher Tan was one of them.

He was one of my instructors who showed no preferences to trainees from the SFS and Civil Defence Force.

Over time, we managed to iron out the differences and began to see eye to eye.

**LTC Suguna:** There was also an equal representation of officers from both the SFS and Civil Defence Force in the newly integrated SJCDF then. That was very helpful. One thing for sure is that once we started working together, none of us looked back ever since.

### Is there someone whom you have been inspired by throughout your career?

**LTC Suguna:** Major Oliverio was my supervisor when I first joined the Life Saving Force. He was very strict but he also knew when to let his hair down.

On our birthdays, he would chase us home if he sees us in office and on Valentine's Day, he would also buy roses for all his staff. He took good care of the well being of his staff.

Under his leadership, we also learned many different skill sets.

In the later stages of my career when I became a supervisor, I practiced his leadership skills that I was deeply inspired by as a young officer then. I have learned through working with him that while it is important for us to prioritise our tasks and responsibilities, we must always take care of the well being of our staff too. As supervisors, we have to play our part in motivating and nurturing our staff to help them play a part in the shared mission of the Life Saving Force. No matter how minor their role, each and every one of them matters.

An occasional pat on their shoulders would go a long, long way.

I also look up to Commissioner (RET) James Tan and I would always remember his advice for everyone in the Life Saving Force – *“Find reasons to do and solutions to resolve a challenging task instead of giving up even before you try. Think big and stay focused always”*.

**AC Chin:** Like LTC Suguna, I also respect Commissioner (RET) James Tan for his 'Never-Say-Die' attitude. He is a leader who led by example and resilience with no end to it.

Whenever we were met with hurdles along the way, he would always remind us to push ahead despite the obstacles and to try again and again even when faced with failure. While several processes and systems in place may stop us from achieving our goals, it should never be a reason to stop us from exercising flexibility in our thoughts to ensure that things will work out eventually.

While he can be quite stern at times, he was also a very positive individual.

Another role model of mine is Colonel (RET) Yong Leng Ti, who taught me the need to have clarity in my thoughts and to be very focused on any task at hand. I learned from him the importance of communicating my ideas in a coherent and convincing manner. These were definitely essential skills relevant for younger officers like me then.

### Share with us your 'Biggest Achievement' while in this line of duty.

**AC Chin:** I was a very young officer then. My boss informed me at 7pm that I was required to present to then Permanent

Secretary Mr Tan Chin Teong on an in-house training system.

Then, we relied on the use of transparencies. I worked throughout the night to complete my 'slides'. During the 30 minutes presentation, I was questioned many times by the board members and even scolded on a few occasions.

When my proposed plan was ultimately endorsed, I immediately forgot about the fear and sadness that filled me then. I was only a Lieutenant and till today, it still stands as a proud moment for me.

**LTC Suguna:** I was also a young officer then when I was tasked to draw up a framework for our Public Information System. As the framework of the system was tightly relevant to national security, the completion of every task became a big achievement for a young officer like me then.

While the current framework is of little resemblance to what I had drafted then, the thought of it never fails to put a smile on me.

### How did your children view you as a Uniformed Officer?

**AC Chin:** When my children were younger, they were always excited to see me dressed in my uniform. They used to ask me a lot of questions about my job and if he they should also join the SCDF when they grow up one day.

I have always been very frank with them. I shared with them many times that they should join the SCDF only if they have a passion in saving lives and property. If not, find a different job.

**LTC Suguna:** When I was posted to the 4<sup>th</sup> SCDF Division, I was required to be present at incident sites where a big fire had occurred. As such, I placed the telephone beside my pillow every night, as I did not want to miss any calls for such ad hoc deployments. My children were still toddlers then.

Each time that happened, I would also awake my entire family. As I make my way to the incident site, my husband would ferry our children to my parents-in-law's house in the middle of the night.

Strangely, my children actually found my career to be an exciting one despite all that trouble. As they grew older, they began to see it as a respectable job that keeps Singapore safe and secure.

### AC Chin, you are the first SCDF female officer to be promoted to the rank of Assistant Commissioner. How did you feel about it?

**AC Chin:** As we joined the SCDF during its infant years of establishment, we were entrusted with the responsibility to draw up numerous Standard Operating Procedures from scratch. I cannot deny that the process was gruelling and tedious but I am also grateful for this opportunity to be part of a very fulfilling journey.

It would not have been possible without the continuous support that my colleagues have shown me since the start of my career. As I have shared with you, it had not been a smooth-sailing journey altogether. I have been scolded, questioned and tasked to complete work within tight timelines.

I can only say that I owe this achievement to everyone who had inspired me throughout my career with the Life Saving Force. 🚒

# Mr Amerasinghe, Former Director of Civil Defence

Home Team  
celebrates

SG  
50

Mr Selwyn Terrance Amerasinghe who is 83 years of age attended the Home Team SG50 Exhibition held at the Home Team Academy on 28 May 2015 as a Pioneer Officer from the Singapore Police Force. During the event, he shared with a few officers from the SCDF Senior Management on his days as Director of Civil Defence during the late 1970s.

This exclusive interview is the first time in which Mr Amerasinghe shared his personal experiences from the Japanese Occupation of Singapore and his contribution towards the establishment of the National Civil Defence Plan of 1982, a Plan that gave birth to the modern Civil Defence movement in Singapore.

*Picture: Mr Selwyn Terrance Amerasinghe, Former Director Civil Defence*

## **You grew up during the Japanese Occupation. Share with us your experiences.**

Before the war, my father worked with an architect and earned a pretty decent income. It was not until the Japanese Occupation that everything took a dive.

As a result of the war, I lost both my parents. My father was sent overseas by the Japanese Imperial Army to work. For the first six months, my mother received remittances from him. After that, a representative from the Japanese Imperial Army informed her that my father had stopped working for them and she would no longer receive any money as a result. Over time, my dear mother passed on because of diabetes. I was only about 10 years old then.

In order to survive, my siblings and I became child labourers. As we earned very little income, we could not even afford to rent a room and had to live under makeshift sheds along the railway tracks.

## **What is one thing that you would always remember about the Japanese Occupation, what would it be?**

I would always remember the bombings and residual shrapnel shells. For countless of times, I heard the bomb raids but was just unsure where they would hit and explode at. All I could do was to run and 'take cover' by jumping into the nearest drain as a means of protection against the explosion.

## **Did things become better after the Japanese Occupation?**

After the Japanese Occupation, Singapore once again became part of the British colony. Things changed for the better. Several institutions were built from scratch and this included the Civil Defence Force.

By the time Singapore gained independence, I was already a young adult working for the Singapore Police Force.

## **As a police officer, how did you end up as the Director of Civil Defence?**

That is a long story.

I became aware of the Singapore Civil Defence organisation in 1951 while undergoing training as a Cadet Probationary Inspector with the Singapore Police Force. The training syllabus of a Cadet Probationary Inspector then included a few weeks of Civil Defence training that was conducted at the then Civil Defence Headquarters located at Jalan Kolam Ayer. The training was administered by Colonel LT Firbank of the British Military Administration and the syllabus included topics on performing CPR and First Aid, the use of ladders and ropes as a means of ascending and descending from heights and rescuing 'casualties' buried under debris.

I also recall that part of the training required the police cadets like me to don on breathing apparatus sets and crawl inside mock tunnels to rescue 'victims'. This was an ordeal as the breathing apparatus sets then were not as sophisticated as the one used by SCDF currently. Each breathing apparatus

set was nothing more than a gas mask that was attached to a long hose which measured about two inches in diameter! Those were my early encounters with the Singapore Civil Defence organisation.

Then in 1976, I was appointed Commander of the Police National Service Command, and concurrently, the Director of Civil Defence. At that time, the Civil Defence organisation comprised predominantly members of the Vigilante Corps.

## **The Civil Defence Plan was established during your stint as Director of Civil Defence. Can you give us some insights into this?**

One day, months after my appointment as Director Civil Defence, I chanced upon a booklet in my office that turned out to be a draft of the National Civil Defence Plan authored by then Singapore's Civil Defence Commissioner Colonel L.T. Firbank.

When I was going through this document, I realised that while it was comprehensive, however, it was also in dire need of revision as the situation in Singapore had changed drastically over the years.

As I was planning to update the Civil Defence Plan, the different scenarios in which the Civil Defence Command would be expected to respond to kept racing through my mind. I realised that dealing with one scenario at a time would be an inappropriate piece-meal approach. I decided that the right approach was to plan for the worst-case scenarios during wartime.

Drawing from my personal experience from the World War II as well as similar experiences from the other Vigilante Corps and Civil Defence officers, the Civil Defence Plan was ultimately revised. Some of my contributions included encouraging the civilian populations to use sandbags as an effective shield for shrapnel and to utilise the drains as improvised covers when seeking protection against aerial bombardment.

I must stress that the revised National Civil Defence Plan was a result of teamwork rather than my efforts alone.

## **How have things changed?**

As Director of Civil Defence then, I remember making a request for the installation of a few fans in our office. The objective of doing so was to help the firefighters cool down after each operation. This was deemed as a luxurious request then and after numerous questions posed to me by my superiors, the request was also turned down.

We were not at all well equipped then. For example, we did not have any aerial appliances to allow our personnel to conduct height rescue operations effectively.

Today, things have definitely changed for the better. I mean just look at the modern and purpose-built SCDF establishments that we have these days, such as the SCDF Headquarters that I am at right now for this interview! It is surely a far cry from the small, non-conductive offices that once formed the Civil Defence Headquarters at Bendeemer Road. 🚒

Picture: CPT Chua Kok Sin was an instructor with the VC before he was transferred to the SCDF

# VIGILANTE CORPS

Home Team celebrates

SG 50

The year was 1963 and the Federation of Malaysia was formed by bringing Singapore together with Malaysia, North Borneo and Sarawak. While the British backed the merger favourably, Indonesia however retaliated with a hostile and militant response. This gave rise to the Konfrontasi conflict (or better known as Confrontation) that lasted from 1963 to 1966. Till today, the saboteurs are still remembered for some of their largest attacks locally such as the bombing of the 10-storey Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Building on 10 March 1965. The building, more commonly known as the MacDonald House, was bombarded by an 11kg bomb and the inferno was put out by firefighters from the Singapore Fire Service, deployed on the Turn Table Ladder (a vintage Fire Engine that is still preserved by the SCDF). The MacDonald House bombing incident saw three fatalities and 33 injured.

Fortunately, the ruthless attacks failed to destroy the social cohesion of Singaporeans then. Instead, it paved the way for patriotism to reign during the time of uncertainties with the establishment of the Vigilante Corps (VC).

Captain Chua Kok Sin who is currently an SCDF officer shares his sweet memories of the VC and how it was weaved in to the early history of the SCDF.

Picture: CPT Chua Kok Sin is currently serving with the Provost Unit at the SCDF National Service Training Institute



## Tell us more about the VC.

In 1963, the VC was established for the purpose of mobilising manpower to counter the Konfrontasi and its campaign of bomb attacks in Singapore. Within two months of its establishment, more than 10,000 men between the ages of 21 and 29 years old came forward voluntarily to defend the safety and security of the Federation. What made it so special was that every voluntary enrolment was spurred on by a sense of patriotism for the nation.

Even with Singapore's eventual separation from the Federation of Malaya on 9 August 1965, the attacks did not stop and members of the VC were equally persistent and resilient in countering these attacks. It was not until later when our founding Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew began to establish diplomatic relations with former President Suharto of Indonesia who took over power in 1967 from President Sukarno that the tensed local situation became better.

National Service (NS) was introduced during the post-independence days of Singapore in 1967. In that same year, the VC part-time service was considered as a form of the national conscription option. Unlike those who had opted to serve and complete their Full-Time NS within a two-year period, part-time NSmen served the VC for a maximum duration of 12 years in which they were required to report for duty at night. Depending on the years in which they had served VC, the required number of duties ranged from twice weekly to once a month.

## Why was there a need for a part-time NS scheme?

When the NS policy was first introduced, not everyone was able to serve because of family and work commitments. So the VC part-time scheme was aimed at this group of people to help them juggle their commitments and NS obligations. We must remember that the situation was very different then and this was specifically because we were still in the post-independence days.

Singapore had a humble beginning.

At that time, I worked as an instructor with the VC and I

had the opportunity to meet some of the NSmen who served the VC on a part-time basis. They consisted of people from all walks of life - rich tow-kays (business entrepreneurs), lawyers, hawkers and lowly educated workers to even gangsters from the secret societies. Each of them had personal reasons for enrolling into the VC part-time scheme.

## Did you say gangsters from the secret societies?

Yes, that's right. During the early days, there were gangsters from secret societies living amongst us. I can still remember an encounter that I had with a gangster who was serving with the VC as a NSman.

During one of the night lectures, a VC part-time NSmen who also belonged to a secret society, behaved very unruly by deliberately speaking loudly in an attempt to interrupt my lecture. A few weeks later, he became a completely different person. He kept very quiet during lesson time and I noticed that he did not even establish any eye contact with me. I was curious with his sudden change of behaviour.

Then one day, I found out that a big time gangster who had also attended the same night lecture was offended by the unruly behaviour of the said NSman. The former confronted the latter in the washroom and warned him to stop behaving rudely in class and to respect me!

## Why did you join the VC as an instructor?

As I have said, things were very different during the nation's post-independence days. As Singapore was still in its nascent years of economic development, there was little room for us to have career aspirations as like the current generation. We hardly had the luxury of a job market where we could choose from and would simply grab any available job that came our way.

After completing my NS with the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), I applied for a job with the Public Service. During my interview session with the Chairman of Public Service, he asked if I was interested to take on a deskbound job. I declined and I told him that I have always been interested in the uniformed service. That was how I ended up as an instructor with the VC. It was as simple as that.

I was issued a white shirt and a pair of blue pants on my first day at work. That was the uniform of the VC. For a start, I had to undergo a training program comprising of theoretical and practical sessions. The practical sessions included civil defence related topics like firefighting and rescue work training and were held at a camp located within the Kent Ridge Park while the theoretical sessions were conducted at the former SCDF Headquarters located at Bendeemer camp. Once I graduated from the course, I was appointed as an instructor who was responsible in imbuing the same knowledge and skills to those serving their NS.

**Share with us more about the Civil Defence Command?**

Before the formal establishment of the SCDF, the Civil Defence Command was once under the jurisdiction of the Singapore Police Force (SPF). Through the Civil Defence Command, courses on firefighting, rescue work and first aid were conducted for the Full-Time NSmen and Operationally Ready NSmen from both the SAF and SPF.

It was not until 1986 when the Civil Defence Act was enacted that the SCDF became an independent organisation. The disbandment of the VC took place about two months before the Civil Defence Act in 1986 was enacted. During those two months, we continued going to work although we knew little about the future of the VC.

Some of the staff including the ORNSmen from the VC and myself was eventually transferred to the SCDF.

**What is one thing that you would always remember about the VC?**

It would be the strong sense of Patriotism and Loyalty to safeguard the Safety and Security of Singapore. 🚒



**GRANDFATHER:**

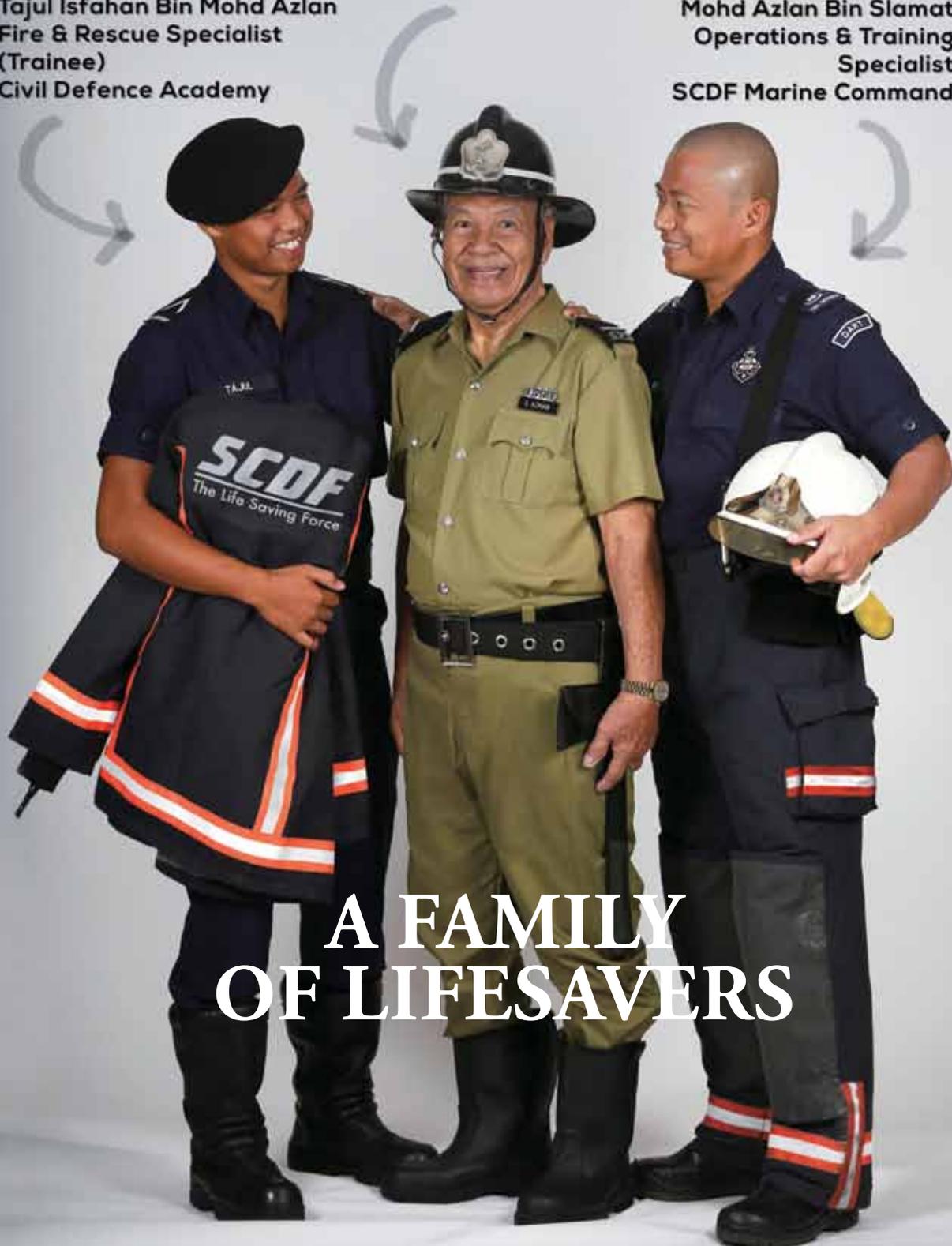
Slamat Bin Matnawi  
Junior Section Leader  
Retired Firefighter

**FATHER:**

Mohd Azlan Bin Slammat  
Operations & Training  
Specialist  
SCDF Marine Command

**SON:**

Tajul Isfahan Bin Mohd Azlan  
Fire & Rescue Specialist  
(Trainee)  
Civil Defence Academy



# A FAMILY OF LIFESAVERS



**SCDF**  
The Life Saving Force

*Picture (Left to Right):  
Section Commander SGT  
Sallehudin Bin Nordin and  
Fire Officer WO (RET)  
Yunos Shariff  
(in the Singapore Fire  
Service Uniform)*





***SCDF***  
The Life Saving Force