



**JOURNAL OF THE SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES**

[Home](#) [About Us](#) [Subscription](#) [Contribution](#) [Copyright/Reprints](#) [Journals](#) [Monographs](#) [Supplements](#) [CDF Essay](#) [Links](#)

**SEARCH**

**MINDEF:**

**Government websites:**

[Home](#) > [Back Issues \(Journal\)](#) > [Journal V28 N3 \(Jul - Sep 2002\)](#) > The Professional Soldier

[Back Issues](#) [Journal](#)

## The Professional Soldier

By CPT Lim Ann Nee

*"It is just another job. It is the same no matter where you work!"*

My mum

*I signed on the dotted line at the tender age of 19, to serve the country for a minimum contract of eight years, in exchange for four years of sponsored study in UK. Three and a half years after working in the SAF, I still get asked by people why I sign on. When expounded, this simple question implies greater underlining meaning that can be extended to SAF's manpower issues. Essentially, it can be translated to, "Who will serve?"*

*The Singapore Army and the volunteer People's Defence Force, a part-time reservist force, were established after Singapore's independence in 1965. Recognising the urgency of creating a credible and deterrent military defence, the government began to step up recruitment and recruit training, and in Nov 1976, introduced the concept of conscription. Today, the SAF commands a strength of 350,000, of which 20,000 are regular officers and WOEs, 30,000 conscripts and the rest NSmen.*

*As Singapore's economy strengthens over the years, the SAF has to face tougher and tougher competition for manpower resource from the private sector. Just like many Western counterparts, the reliance in recruiting and retaining regular service personnel is primarily based on monetary inducements guided by labour force realities. Unsurprisingly, the recruitment level of the SAF is negatively correlated to the condition of the economy higher recruitment during recession and vice versa. The manpower department faces the perennial problem of recruiting and retaining a sufficiently large number of regulars, particularly officers, to train and manage the SAF. In a bid to combat these problems, MINDEF attempts to offer its regulars increasingly attractive terms of service, including competitive salaries pegged to the "market rate". Manpower policies are also constantly reviewed to accommodate recruitment trends. Most recently, the SAVER plan, coupled with a better route-of-advancement scheme, was introduced to entice regular officers to serve longer in the SAF. As the recruitment and retention rate amongst the officers seemed to be driven more and more by extrinsic factors, the reasons for joining the service become obscured.*

*"I go anywhere in the world they tell me to go, any time they tell me to, to fight anybody they want me to fight. I move my family anywhere they tell me to move, on a day's notice, and live in whatever quarters they assign me. I work whenever they tell me to work And I like it. Maybe that's the difference."*

From "A Country Such as This"

The military organisation has always been viewed as an institution, where its members are assigned with the sacred task of protecting the country and her people. The organisation is normally state funded and military personnel, particularly officers, command a certain level of respect and authority from the general public. In some countries like Israel, veteran status is virtually a pre-requisite for achievement in the civil society (Gal, 1986). However, many fail to realise that a voluntary armed force in a modern, democratic society is one that maintains its autonomy but also refracts societal trends; it does not function in isolation from the society. Military sociologists identify the social structure of the military organisation as one that moves along a continuum of scale (Moskos, 1977). On one end of the scale is an organisation that is strictly bounded by institutional concepts and on the other extreme end is one that is entirely determined by occupational concepts. A modern military organisation is deemed to be moving along the continuum of scale, from the institutional end towards the occupational segment, though the extent of occupational influence on the armed forces varies from country to country.

According to Moskos(1988), an institution is legitimated in terms of values and norms. Members of an institution are often seen as following a calling captured in words like duty, honour, country. To a certain degree, the institutional membership is congruent with notions of self-sacrifice and identification with one's institutional role. In return, institutional members enjoy a certain authority over, and esteem from the larger society. Military service has many inherent institutional features, like fixed/minimum terms of enlistment, liability for 24-hour service, subjection to military discipline and law, inability to resign (before end of contracted term) or change working conditions. The members tend to be generalists who will perform any job as assigned, including a range of operational and staff appointments. In addition, there are the physical dangers inherent in combat training and operations. A paternalistic remuneration system is also characteristic of an institutional military. Much of compensation is non-cash such as food, housing, uniforms, and medical benefits. Notions of overtime pay are also non-existent. Furthermore, while civilian compensation system is one in which marketability determines reward, remuneration in the military is traditionally based on rank and seniority.

An occupation, on the other hand, is legitimated in terms of the market place. The pay system is determined by the supply and demand of the market. Workers with equivalent skill levels and/or educational qualifications ought to receive approximately the same pay, regardless of the organisation. An occupation has also well-defined roles and the workers tend to be specialised in their jobs. Because the end-product of an occupational organisation is in the form of tangible profit, it is easy to determine a person's performance and thus, his salary, according to his productivity. In return, an individual's main motivation to work would generally be extrinsic factors, like his pay and promotion. The occupational model implies the priority of self-interest, rather than that of the

## PUBLICATIONS



[Journal](#)



[Supplement](#)



[Monograph](#)

organisation.

"The SAF is an armed force; it is not a civilian corporation. Its mission is to defeat its enemies, ruthlessly and completely."

*BG Lee Hsien Loong, Sep 1984*

While the military social structure is unique for every armed forces, it is evident that the SAF is gradually moving from an organisational format that is predominantly institutional to one that is becoming more and more occupational, either subconsciously with societal trends, or deliberately through manpower policies. Over the years, incremental developments slowly amount to profound changes. The volunteer armed forces is inevitably subjected to pressures for social change imposed by the societies in which they are immersed. The SAF must adapt and be flexible to remain relevant, especially if we want to continue to attract quality personnel from the market labour. Unfortunately, the tilt towards civilisation without re-enforcing institutional values may have undesirable effects on the service personnel and in turn affect our military effectiveness.

Firstly, there has been an increasing number of civilians working in MINDEF, filling up officer appointments that are non-operational in nature. These civilians, formerly known as NUSAF (Non-uniformed SAF), work in areas of finance, purchasing, logistics, personnel, policies, legal services and even intelligence analysis. NUSAF personnel are subjected to military law and the paternalistic remuneration system of the armed forces, but have more defined work roles and are not expected to uphold institutional values. In recent years, the NUSAF scheme has been replaced with the DXO (Defence Executive Officers) scheme in a bid to accommodate more occupational features of a free labour market.

The narrow definition of the work role among civilians can increase the workload of military personnel and create morale problems. For example, I recall an incident when a friend confided in me some manpower problems his department encountered. Due to unforeseen circumstances, his department was put on a 24-hour alert and all the officers (including civilians) were asked to do overnight duties. The civilians were upset as they did not think that the duties were within their workscope and requested to be exempted. However, the uniformed officers would need to do significantly more duties if the civilians did not share the workload and as officers, they could not reject the work. The incident created great morale problems within the department. Feelings of relative deprivation are unavoidable when the diffuse responsibilities of the military institution co-exist with the more limited work roles found in civilian occupations.

Another significant change in the military institution is seen in the more flexible manpower policies implemented. It is evident that manpower policies for the uniformed personnel are formulated based on *laissez-faire* principles. Monetary rewards are used as the main motivation to attract recruitment. The paternalistic remuneration system is also evolving from the non-cash benefits to cash compensation. For example, whereas the officers used to stay in SAF housings/compounds, most of them are now given housing aid in the form of subsidised loans. Various medical and dental schemes in the form of cash rebates are also available for the regulars. Attempts are also made to tie an officer's salary scheme to his/her educational qualifications (i.e. the three schemes of pay, A/B/C), the type of work he/she specialises in (i.e. vocational allowance) and his/her work performance (i.e. performance bonus). These policies aim to alleviate recruitment and retention problems by re-defining military remuneration as comparable, if not better than civilian remuneration.

While it is necessary to consider individual needs in manpower policies, organisational developments can be seriously hampered when intrinsic motivations are replaced by extrinsic motivation. Extensive psychological research (Staw, 1976) has shown that inducing members to perform tasks with strong extrinsic rewards may create behaviour that will not be repeated except for greater extrinsic rewards. Moreover, extrinsic rewards can weaken intrinsic motivation. While monetary remuneration is important, it cannot replace the personal values and commitments required for a member to serve the country. The military organisation requires certain behaviour from their members that can never be made to serve individual interests, at least not in a narrow economic sense. Military effectiveness can be seriously undermined if the service personnel will not do more than what they are paid for.

In an attempt to stay relevant and maintain its effectiveness, MINDEF has also been promoting a corporate culture advocated in the commercial arena. Business lingos and ideas are not uncommonly expressed in the management of the organisational structure. Work processes like ISO 9000 and Singapore Quality Class frequently used in the private sector have also been adopted as assessments of quality and effectiveness of the organisation. On top of that, many sectors, particularly the logistical, technological and administrative sectors, that are traditionally managed by MINDEF have been contracted or privatised.

Corporate values advocate work attitudes and processes that are highly focused and effective, and encourage the worker to be innovative and bold in his/her approach to work. While many of these values are applicable to the military, one must not forget that the main motivation behind corporate values is profits - profits to the organisation that may lead to higher pay for the individual. The success of the work process and the efficiency of the worker in a corporation can be easily assessed by the difference in the profit margin. However, cost-effectiveness should not be the principal concern in the business of defence. More often than not, the functions of our tasks cannot be weighed using monetary means. We must be cautious of assimilating occupational values into the military culture, and consciously make sure that the correct values are being cultivated to our service personnel.

The reliance on technologically advanced weaponry system necessarily equates to the requirement for highly skilled and trained operators. The operator, who is the soldier in this case, inevitably becomes more and more specialised, with more defined work scope as his/her job may not be easily substituted. The extensive use of technology renders the SAF susceptible to increasing specialisation and a diffused sense of purpose. In fact, Wood(1980) suggested that the airforce officer corps are most susceptible to occupational trends as they work with highly advanced weaponry and normally require relatively long training periods. Airforce officers, particularly pilots, seemed to identify increasingly with their civilian counterparts. The overall trend is away from those who identify themselves primarily as military officers and towards those who see themselves as specialists in uniforms, a movement from military professionals to professionals in the military.

*"If you get the values right, than the other things fall into place."*

*Peters and Waterman, "In Search of Excellence", 1984*

Although strategies for external integration is vital for the SAF to function effectively and essential to increase the numbers and quality of persons coming forward for military service, they fail to address

the meaning of military service and the need to develop a coherent value system for its regular service personnel. As a result, the traditional perception of the military as a calling to the nation by her citizens, legitimated by broadly based national values, seem to be giving way to a subjective definition of the military service as an occupation in the labour market. Such a trend is perturbing because the military profession demands more of a soldier than any other job in the market place; the demands which cannot always be compensated in monetary terms. It will be unfair and certainly erroneous for me to speculate that the SAF will not be able to maintain its combat readiness and to fight and win a war simply because we no longer operate in the conventional way. On the contrary, the SAF needs to constantly re-invent itself to stay on top of and relevant to changes and demands of the military organisation. However, it is also undeniable that institutional values critical to accomplishing missions are giving way to self-centred priorities, a phenomenon which is clearly manifested in our recruitment and retention problems.

The challenge for military leaders in the new millennium is to articulate a definition of military service and a core value system that will cushion the undesirable influence from the occupational sector and enhance our service to the nation. Whereas the SAF was an important tool to achieve our political wills and to deter any hostile intent in the past decades, its role seemed to have evolved in this new century. The SAF is not only developing its capabilities in conventional warfare, it is also exploring new frontier in confronting Low Intensity Conflict. The way we fight a threat may have changed, but the intent has not - we are protecting the sovereignty of our country. The traditional SAF core values must be inculcated in all service personnel and officers must lead by example in putting these values to practice. The move to promote soldiering as a profession must not neglect to specify the meaning of military service and set the scope and limits of role obligations for service members at all levels of the organisation. Most importantly, the SAF should emphasise the military career as one that is:

- nation-centred and not organisation-centred;
- mission-centred and not career-centred;
- group-centred and not individual-centred; and
- service-centred and not work-centred (Cotton, 1988).

The military profession is more than just a job. The professional soldier is one who puts the nation before oneself, and understands that his/her responsibilities cannot be entirely compensated by extrinsic rewards. He/She must be intrinsically motivated to serve the nation and her people, and must be willing to sacrifice himself/herself in times of necessity. The problems of recruitment and retention cannot be alleviated unless our soldiers understand the values behind military service.

*This essay won a Commendation Award in the CDF Essay Competition - 2001.*

## Bibliography

1. Barry M. Staw, *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation* Morristown NJ. : General Learning Press, 1976.
2. Charles A. Cotton, "The Institutional Organization Model and the Military," *The Military: More than Just a Job*, Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988.
3. Charles C. Moskos & Frank R. Wood, *The Military: More than just a job* Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988.
4. Charles C. Moskos, "From Institution to Occupation: Trends in Military Organisation", *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1977.
5. Frank R. Wood, "At the Cutting Edge of Institutional and Occupational Trends" *The Military: More than just a job*, Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988.
6. Reuven Gal, *A portrait of the Israeli Soldier*, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986.



CPT Lim Ann Nee is a Weapons Systems Officer (C3) by training and is currently a Staff Officer in HQ RSAF. She previously was a controller at an Air Force Brigade. She graduated with a BSc (1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours) in Psychology from University College London in 1997 and obtained a MSc Occupational Psychology from Nottingham University, UK in 1998. She won a Commendation Award in the 1999 CDF Essay Competition.

Last updated: 03-Jul-2006