

Assoc Prof BG (ret) Dr Lim Meng Kin (1950 – 2013)

When Meng Kin passed away on 31 January 2013, the Singapore medical profession lost one of its distinguished members and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Medical Corps, a most illustrious pioneer leader.

Brigadier-General (ret) Dr Lim Meng Kin joined the Singapore Armed Forces medical service in 1975. He chose a road less travelled as he would often say, but it was a road that provided him with numerous opportunities to implement new visions, systems, ideas and policies to build the SAF Medical Corps.

The Corps then was a fledgling ‘Cinderella’ organisation but Meng Kin’s dedication and leadership laid down the underpinnings that turned Singapore’s military medical service into a well-organised Corps, recognised today for its operational readiness and contribution to humanitarian and operational service. He made history as the first doctor in Singapore to reach the rank of Brigadier-General and the first Chief of Medical Corps (CMC).

When he retired from the SAF on 15 March 1995 after a 20-year career (the last 9 years as CMC) Meng Kin recalled, “I signed up with the SAF in August 1975, 3 months after the fall of Vietnam. My colleagues thought it unwise—giving up a promising and prestigious career with the University was silly enough, but joining the army at a time of great uncertainty and insecurity? I thought otherwise. My destiny was with my country. I remember telling my friends to die for one’s country was a good way to die. I honestly felt that the SAF needed people like me.”¹

It was this deep seated conviction of ‘duty, honour and country’ that saw Meng Kin promoting and participating in several humanitarian and rescue missions including medical relief mission to Bali in the aftermath of the earthquake in 1976, the Hotel New World collapse rescue of trapped victims in 1986 and sending a SAF medical team to Operation Desert Storm during the Gulf War in 1991.

Meng Kin was nationally recognised as one of the heroes in the Hotel New World collapse where he directed the medical rescue mission. During the 7-day rescue operations,



he crawled into very tight tunnels to help survivors trapped in the debris without any thought of personal risk. For his effort and bravery he was awarded the Public Service Star. The citation read, “Outstanding determination to save lives under hazardous working conditions ... and sustained the spirits and lives of trapped survivors until they are extricated.”

Always wanting to make a difference, in his military medical career, he founded the Republic of Singapore Air Force’s Aeromedical Centre in October 1982 and the Defence Medical Research Institute in April 1994.

BG (ret) Dr Lim Meng Kin led a successful career as a military doctor serving his country with distinction. In recognition of this outstanding service he was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Silver) (Military), the Public Service Star, SAF Overseas (non-operational) Medal, SAF Good Service Medal and the SAF Long Service Medal. He was also elected a Fellow of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore.

Following his retirement from the Army, Meng Kin was Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Health Corporation of Singapore (forerunner of Ministry of Health (MOH) Holdings) for a while before it was restructured. He then joined the University’s Department of Community, Occupational and Family Medicine (later known as the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health) as an Associate Professor in 1999, a position he held to the end. With his artistic skills, he was an engaging and very effective teacher, especially in the areas of Aviation Medicine and Health Policy and Management, a role that took him to many international programmes, including those under the World Health Organization and World Bank serving as trainer and consultant.

Joining the University was a sort of home-coming for him. He had as a medical student won the Bailey Memorial Prize for a distinction in the then subject of Social Medicine and Public Health in 1974. He obtained a Master of Science (Occupational Medicine) (MSc(OM)) National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1981, following a Diploma in Aviation Medicine from United Kingdom (UK) in 1977. His interest in Health Policy and Management took him to Harvard School of Public Health where he got a Master of Public Health (MPH) in 1989.

We remember Meng Kin as the ultimate professional—a military officer in service of his country, a doctor dedicated to humanitarian endeavours, a local hero who responded beyond his call of duty, an academic who taught with passion, and the man who loved his God, family and friends.

REFERENCES

1. MedLink, Newsletter of the SAF Medical Corps No. 17 March 1995.

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