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ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MR HOWE YOON CHONG, AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF THE COASTAL PATROL CRAFT AT PULAU BRANI NAVAL BASE ON TUESDAY, 20 OCTOBER 1981 AT 4.00 PM

Over the years RSN has developed and improved with more ships being added and more officers and men trained. Today's commissioning is another step forward in building up the Navy.

These 12 CPCs are small ships, only 22 metres in length with three officers and 10 men on board. They are specially designed for a wide range of duties. Their peacetime roles are those that every ship of the Navy has to perform and these include normal defence and security functions as well as patrolling and training.

Defence and security functions involve the safeguarding of vital installations both military and civilian, particularly those in the outer islands and coastal areas whose security can be threatened from the seaward approaches.

Patrolling duties include surveillance of seaward approaches to deter intrusion and infiltration, safeguarding of shipping lanes, prevention of piracy, discouragement of illegal immigrants, and the protection of fishing boats in our territorial waters. The Navy's fast patrol boats and missile gunboats have been designed to be efficient at fast speeds and do not perform slow patrolling very well. They are not ideal for anti-refugee type of work. However, a difficult job has to be done and these fast patrol boats and missile gunboats have been doing it efficiently for many years often under harrowing circumstances. The CPCs on the other hand are designed to perform this type of work. They will be welcomed additions to the Navy and will release the fast patrol boats and missile gunboats for defence and security duties, training, and the wide ranging fast patrols for which they were specially designed. Thus with the 12 CPCs the capabilities of RSN is vastly enhanced.

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Training enables officers and men to be skilled in different types of work, in servicing and maintenance of ships, equipment, and weapons. Officers and men learn to operate sophisticated weapons and equipment systems to become highly skilled in technical and management matters and to be thoroughly disciplined. Navy officers are trained in planning and staff matters and to deal with operational doctrine and tactics. Training includes exercises and manoeuvres which may involve many ships. The Navy must constantly stress that whatever other duties its officers and men at all levels perform, training remains their preoccupation in peacetime. Proper training improves skills and discipline to permit RSN to make better use of its ships, equipment, and weapons.

Training lessons and exercises must be well planned and be made interesting to stir the curiosity and enthusiasm of instructor and trainee alike. Each training lesson must aim at advancing the skills, knowledge, and discipline of the trainees. After each lesson there must be a proper debrief so that the next lesson will be an improvement on the earlier one. RSN must not permit training lessons and exercises to degenerate into routine chores. The quality of training determines the Navy's effectiveness and efficiency, as well as its survivability in combat or against the elements. Please take your training duties seriously. Put maximum emphasis on training and keep stressing its importance for officers and men at all levels and in all vocations.

Few military organisations take training as seriously as they should when hostilities are not imminent. Larger and more experienced navies have discovered to their dismay that the longer the lapse of time from combat, the less realistic the training becomes. RSN has no previous combat experience, it must consciously fight against the inclination to slacken training or to lower training standards. Every member of RSN should be convinced that the more realistic and intensive the training, the more skilled and disciplined they become. Training, exercises, and manoeuvres increase the capability of RSN ships to fight as a team, to be versatile and flexible, and to react quickly under different circumstances. Train as you will fight. Bring home the lesson that the more you sweat in training the less you will bleed in war.

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Constant exhortations notwithstanding, the human inclination is to permit training to degenerate into routine performance of tasks. When any task becomes routine the outward appearance is that all is well. The daily routine is carried on mechanically. No one pays any attention to it until something goes wrong. RSN must do away with meaningless repetitions of the same routine. Routine can lull the Navy into self-deception and complacency, believing that all is well. Constant changes can eliminate meaningless routine, and regular upgrading exercises and interesting new training lessons can generate enthusiasm and prevent complacency.

Whatever the equipment, weapons, and armaments that are installed and however good the ships, in the final analysis the efficiency and effectiveness of the Navy boils down to its officers and men. Today's ships, equipment, weapons, and armaments though highly sophisticated and complex are as good as the men who service, maintain, and operate them. Without intelligent officers in command and highly skilled technical men to service, maintain, and make use of them to maximum advantage, all the marvels of modern electronics and computer technology will be of little significance. Superior intelligence is needed to work out the operational systems, doctrine, and tactics to get the best out of these ships, equipment, and weaponry. It is because of this that we have posted so many bright young officers to RSN.

These 12 CPCs are specially designed ships to operate efficiently in our waters to do defence, patrolling, and anti-refugee duties that have for so long been performed by the larger ships. They may not be very powerful or sophisticated but they are well armed, fast and manoeuvrable. Under the command of intelligent officers and with skilled crews they can be a threat to bigger ships, especially when equipped with precision guided missiles or when they operate jointly with other RSN ships.

The Ministry of Defence is aware that the RSN, particularly the younger officers, would feel happier with bigger and more sophisticated ships. The case for larger and more sophisticated ships depends on the role of the Navy in war. With no clear definition of our potential aggressors, their invasion fleets, or their strengths and capabilities, and with no definite knowledge of the conditions and circumstances

under which RSN will engage the invading forces in combat, it may be difficult to justify huge expenditures of scarce financial and manpower resources to build a large and powerful navy. Though the threat may be ambiguous and the details regarding the potential aggressors may contain many imponderables, yet prudent and balanced strategy dictates that the Navy should prepare plans to meet various contingencies. Such plans should enable the Navy to decide where and how best it should fight in defence of Singapore and how it can stop the forces of the aggressors and defeat them with the available ships, equipment, and weapons at its disposal.

The challenge therefore is for our officer cadre not to keep expecting to have larger ships with more modern and sophisticated armaments and equipment and then to think of what role the Navy should play or what tasks it should accomplish, but rather to concentrate on how best to get the maximum out of the ships, weapons, and equipment they now have and how to use them with the greatest lethality and effectiveness. Intelligent planning and logical operational doctrine, translated into excellent tactics and combat techniques with courageous commanders and skilled crews can enable RSN to accomplish wonders even with small ships like these CPCs.

The problems and difficulties that confront our young officer cadre are by no means simple. But the Navy should accept that nothing worthwhile is easy. Over the next few years as more efforts are put in to improve the quality and combat efficiency of the Navy, you will find that your intellectual capacity, logical thinking, initiative, and originality will be taxed to the maximum. Only those with superior intelligence can define the different scenarios, devise various alternative strategies, and evolve suitable tactics and counter measures to meet a wide range of assumed or possible situations under which RSN will have to fight to defend Singapore. The tactics so evolved will have to be tried, tested, practised, and exercised by RSN ships, commanders, and men so that when the emergency comes they are ready.

The younger officer cadre in RSN must shoulder very heavy responsibilities and I am confident that they will rise to the challenge and work hard with dedication and determination to build RSN.