



THE SINGAPORE POLICE FORCE MAGAZINE



**SIXTY YEARS
OF TACTICAL EXCELLENCE**

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"*Ang chia lai liao! Ang chia lai liao!*" (means, "red truck is here!" in Hokkien). I would hear this as my grandmother recounted the past and told me stories of the turbulent years in Singapore and how people were terrified at the sight of these "ang chias".

As a history student back in my secondary school days, I learnt about the Maria Hertogh riots and the chaos that resulted from it. I could relate to the stories that my grandmother told me. Little did I know back then that this incident had played an integral role in the formation of the Singapore Police Force's Reserve Unit in 1952, now known as the Special Operations Command (SOC).

The SOC is no longer just the riot squad that it was known to be. Today, the SOC consists of various components such as the Police K-9, the elite Special Tactics And Rescue unit and even stretches beyond our shores with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force.

As the SOC celebrated its Diamond Jubilee in 2013, *Police Life* takes you on a journey back in time to see the SOC's development from its humble beginnings to its current reputation as one of Singapore's elite tactical units.

Police Life also spoke to two of the longest-serving "Red Berets" to share their personal experiences and got them to give us an insider's point of view on the SOC.

This issue promises to be a nostalgic and exciting read for all!

I wish the SOC a very happy Diamond Jubilee and I salute you for keeping Singapore safe and secure.

SSgt Edwin Lim Jia Zhong
Journalist
Police Life

DOWN MEMORY LANE

*By DSP Kamil Ramley Jenaton, DSP Lim Ke Wei and Insp Eugene Ooi,
Special Operations Command*

It all started over the custody tussle of a little Dutch girl of local Malay upbringing, named Maria. The bloodshed from that bleak chapter in Singapore's history filled us all with remorse and tragedy, but it paved the way for the formation of what stands today as Singapore's centre for tactical excellence, capable of dealing with situations just like the Maria Hertogh Riot that broke out on the fateful days of 11 and 12 December 1950. The 18 deaths (including 1 Police Inspector) and 173 casualties that resulted from the Maria Hertogh Riots taught us a very important lesson and soon led to the recommendation of 3 specially trained riot squads in June 1952 to deal with similar incidents in the future.

The Special Operations Command, as we know it today, saw its humble beginnings in June 1952 when a single squad of 60 personnel from various racial origins was formed. Pakistanis, Punjabis and Mahrattas joined Chinese and Malay officers at Kampong Batak in Jalan Eunus where they underwent special training to become proficient in a new branch of policing. By December that year, under its Officer-in-Charge, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) J H Davies, the first Riot Squad of Singapore became operational. In October 1952, the Riot Squad was renamed as the Reserve Unit (RU) with a strength of three troops of 50 officers each. In December 1952, the RU of the Police, specifically trained for riot suppression led by ASP J H Davies, became operational. In August 1955, the RU shifted to its first permanent base in Mount Vernon from Kampong Batak. As time passed, it was also tasked with other roles such as flood rescue, the extrication of victims from traffic accidents, building collapses, and even crowd control at scenes of fires (notably the 3 major fires in Kampung Tiong Bahru, Kampong Henderson and Bukit Ho Swee). The RU also supplemented the Land Divisions in their patrol duties and conducted preventive patrols.

The 'baptism of fire' for the RU took place five years after the Maria Hertogh incident – during the Hock Lee Bus Riots on 12 and 13 May 1955. The local police were more prepared this time round and significantly helped in the suppression of public disorder with fewer casualties recorded in the two days. Though there were some fatalities (six dead, including two police officers) and 31 injured, the extent of the damage was much reduced and the RU also learnt many valuable lessons over the incident.

The RU was next tested in the Chinese

Student Riots that spread over two months in October and November 1956. In view of these incidents, many upgrades were introduced into the different aspects of the RU's operational capabilities as well as its training. Stocks of tear gas and smoke grenades were increased as well as locally designed and manufactured plastic-dye grenades that assisted in the identification of rioters. The RU also undertook the training for the rest of the police force in the use of anti-riot ordnance methods and tactics, a procedure that is still seen today with the

Special Operations Command. Not only did this unify anti-riot practices and tactics within the Force, it also acted as reinforcement in terms of trained manpower for the RU when needed.

As time passed and the overall environment changed, the RU transformed to ensure that they remained relevant and effective. As the regularity of strikes increased in the Central Business District, it was found necessary to raise a fourth troop in the RU. Commanded by the former Deputy Commissioner of





Police, Mr Michael Chai, who was then an ASP, this newly formed 'D' Troop was specially trained in dealing with illegal strikes and was based at the former Hill Street Police Station.

Shortly after the RU successfully quelled the infamous prison riots on Pulau Senang in July 1963, Singapore merged with the Federation of Malaya to become Malaysia on 16 September 1963. This saw a major expansion in strength of the RU from 4 to 15 troops with the addition of manpower from the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) of Malaysia. The FRU

was heavily deployed yet again for the Racial Riots that happened in July and September 1964 with the toll amounting to 36 dead and 560 injured. However, the wave that brought the increase in troops in 1963 receded two years later on 9 August in 1965 when Singapore separated from Malaysia. With the FRUs from Malaysia suddenly withdrawn, there was a void that needed to be filled. The RU was quickly renamed the Police Reserve Unit (PRU) and the mass training of officers kicked off right away. Within 8 months, there were a total of 10

troops and by late 1966, there were 5 PRUs totaling 15 troops.

The late 60s saw the occupying of 2 newly built bases at Jalan Bahar and Queensway by 3 PRUs. Also, it saw the first batch of National Servicemen (part-time) joining the ranks of the PRUs. With the part time troops, the size of the PRU expanded to a total of 20 troops, these troops were deployed between 7pm and 11pm on a rotational basis.

In March 1978, in response to high risk criminal incidents and the looming threat of terrorism around the world, the Police Tactical Team (PTT) was formed within the PRU. These brave men who volunteered their service were recruited from the PRUs and later other Units as well. This establishment also marked the commencement of the dual role¹ (public order and public security) that the unit would undertake in the decades to come.

In 1980, the PRU was renamed as the Police Task Force (PTF). In order to stay relevant with the changing times and the landscape of Singapore, a study team was sent to Hong Kong to study riot control methods from the Royal Hong Kong Police. A second team also visited the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland where they observed modern riot control techniques. With such knowledge in hand, recommendations were soon made to revamp and restructure the PTF into a modern, well-equipped, compact and hard-hitting force

¹ Formation of the full time Special Tactics and Rescue (STAR) unit on 9 November 1993 and commissioning of the new Anti Swarming Team (AST) capabilities in PTU on 16 July 2010. The ASTs are formed as a rapid response force to respond to any security incidents similar to the 2008 terrorist swarm attacks in Mumbai.

capable of combating riots in urban Singapore.

By May 1983, these changes were soon taking shape. Initial changes included the decommissioning of the PTF at Mount Vernon and also the restructuring of the troops from 63 to 46 men each. This wave of change also brought about the

Command (SOC) on 10 September 1992. The PTU then came under the command of this newly formed unit together with the Police Dog Unit (later renamed as Police K-9 unit in 2003). Subsequently in Nov 1993, the part time Police Tactical Team within the PTU was also reorganised as the current full time Special Tactics and Rescue (STAR) Unit.

areas of tactical operations, public order and weapon doctrine, the SOC has come a long way in its journey from that single Riot Squad that began all the way back in 1952.

Over the course of six decades, the Special Operations Command, the current custodian of the strategic tactical arm of the Singapore Police



formation of a PTF Training Unit, which ensured the standardisation of riot-control drills throughout the PTFs and Divisional Light Strike Forces (LSF). The LSF were teams of fully trained Divisional officers who were to be the intermediate force during public order incidents to mitigate the situation prior to the arrival of the PTF troops. The LSFs also augment the total responding force's presence and capability. On 23 Jun 1990, PTF 1 and 2 merged to form one PTF Division and was based at Queensway Base.

The PTF was renamed Police Tactical Unit (PTU) in early 1992, and subsequently reorganised and restructured as the Special Operations

More units were formed within the SOC in the years to come. The United Nations Peace Keeping Force secretariat (UNPKF) was formed in 1997. The Crisis Negotiation Unit (CNU), previously known as the Negotiation Team, and the former Police MRT Unit (PMU)² were subsequently absorbed by the SOC from the Operations Department in May 2002 and on 15 August 2005 respectively. Finally, the Special Women's Task Team (SWTT) came into being in 2007 as a formidable intermediate force made up of female officers from across the SPF. They are recallable to respond to public order incidents and were also introduced under this one umbrella of the SOC. Fully tasked with the responsibility in

Force, has constantly evolved with the changing environment and landscape of Singapore to remain relevant and effective. It will continue to do so in the years to come to ensure that it remains the best strategic tactical force for the nation. 🇸🇬

² PMU was commissioned as the Public Transport Security Command (TRANSCOM) on 15 August 2009 as an independent unit and shifted to its Base in Geylang in Dec 2009.

CHARTING THE TRANSFORMATION

By SAC (Retired) Noor Mohamed Aijuddin, former Commander SOC (July 2001 to January 2007)

My second posting in my Singapore Police Force (SPF) career spanning close to 40 years was to the then Police Reserve Unit (PRU) 1 based at Mount Vernon. I started off as Troop 2nd In-Charge (IC), moved up to Troop Officer-in-Charge and finally, Adjutant. This was in the early seventies. Some 30 years later in July 2001, I came full circle back to the Special Operations Command (SOC) as Commander, which was my last post before retirement in January 2007. It was like a homecoming and a welcome reprieve after having served more than five years as the Tanglin Police Division Commander.

However, this would not be the quiet pre-retirement posting I had anticipated as three major events changed the global security landscape. The first was the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America which caused wide-spread fear of terrorism. The second was the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings held in Singapore in 2006. The former exploded into a massive threat to public security, while the latter posed an unprecedented threat to public order. The third event was manpower cuts imposed on the SOC in 2001/2002. These three events had far-reaching implications.

The IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings were still some years down the road but it was already on the SOC's radar when I first took on the post. The 9-11 events, on the other hand, came out of the blue and prompted a shift in the SOC's focus to public security operations. When we were told of the subsequent manpower cuts, it came like a rude shock. Strangely enough, the latter turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It forced us to conduct a comprehensive internal review and this put us in good stead to meet evolving challenges.

The tasks ahead seemed quite overwhelming not just because of the workload but also due to time criticality. Many things had to be done concurrently. To their credit, everybody in the SOC worked as one closely-knit team and

stood up very well to those challenges. I recall the huge demands on the troops along with the Administration & Logistics, Manpower and Training Branches, which were all quite small then. The Special Tactics And Rescue (STAR) Unit, which was stretched working on its own developmental plans, pitched in too to provide specialist training to raise the troops' tactical proficiency. I look back with pride now at the way everyone worked so selflessly as one great team to achieve our goals.

Here are some of the key things undertaken that have transformed SOC into what it is today.

- **System Audit and Consultancy**

Before reorganising the SOC into its expanded roles, a system audit was conducted in Feb/Mar 2002 on the adequacy of the then training system and supporting documentation. This led to the Britam Consultancy Training from June to November 2002, the creation of the Police Tactical Team (PTT) and Tactical Command Course, Train-the-Trainers Course and some specialist courses.

- **Trooper equipment**

Increased threat of terrorism following 9-11 forced the evolution of troops into a dual-purpose special force. They now had to also be deployed for anti-terrorism drills and operations and to deal with armed threats in close support of the STAR Unit. Public order protection gear and weapons were upgraded, revolvers were replaced with HK USP compact pistols, M16s were replaced with HK MP5 SMGs and every trooper was equipped with bio-chemical protective suits. In addition, an integrated communications system with audio accessories were acquired and implemented in 2003. All this meant a whole range of new skills and tactical training programmes for the troops, which fell squarely on the shoulders of both the Training Unit and the STAR Unit.

- ***Troop vehicles***

Ageing troop vehicles (traditional Command vehicle, long bus and land rover configuration) had to make way as they had outlived their relevance. This was not an easy decision to make as the Command vehicle with its imposing turret played a significant role in Singapore's turbulent years. The vehicles were mere troop transporters and rapid urbanisation in Singapore made them a liability rather than an asset. They were replaced with new purpose-built tactical vehicles (TAVs) which were designed to be much smaller so that the troops can be more nimble during operations. Each TAV comes fully equipped with a wide range of special features including protection against fire and projectiles, secured weapon storage, comfortable seats, reliable communications system, public warning system, gun ports, spotlight, floodlights and a powerful camera system with recording capability. The unique command vehicle turret was retained in the TAV because it still provides a useful vantage point.

- ***Two-tier public order force***

Public order operations are manpower intensive but in the Singapore context, it is not viable to maintain a large public order force. Since the sixties, the size of our public order force has been gradually reduced in tandem with the improving public order situation. However, a two-tier public order force concept was adopted in 2002, with the SOC being the Level 1 fulltime. Whenever the need arises, this force would be complemented by a Level 2 part-time public order force from the Neighbourhood Police Centres (NPCs) known as Divisional Tactical Teams (DTT). With the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings on the horizon, the SOC took on the task of building up, equipping and training one DTT for every NPC. This task, undertaken together with the Operations Department, included the development of a purpose-built tactical vehicle for each DTT.

- ***Troop organisation, formation and operational tactics***

In spite of manpower cuts, the four columns in each troop were retained for operational reasons. The manpower shortfall was compensated with better weapons and equipment, leveraging on technology and new tactical and support vehicles. The TAVs allowed each troop to deal with armed threats at multiple sites and regroup quickly whenever required. These changes necessitated the development of new operational tactics and rigorous training between SOC troops, the DTTs and the STAR Unit to ensure that they can collaborate with confidence. 'Cutting' Teams were

also formed in June 2005 to deal with specific protester tactics observed at previous World Bank meetings.

- ***Operational support***

To enhance troop effectiveness in operations, the SOC developed and acquired specialist support vehicles. Ageing water cannon vehicles, first acquired in Dec 1990, were replaced in 2002 with new ones. APCs with barricade removal capability were acquired for the first time in 2005. Field Logistics Support Vehicles (LSV) were purpose-built to provide troops with additional specialized equipment during major operations.

- ***The Training Unit***

To prepare for the enormous amount of training that was to come, the Training Unit was reorganised and strengthened with experienced officers from the STAR Unit and the troops.

- ***Training***

Work had to be done to enhance the SOC's anti-terrorism capabilities, to prepare for the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings and also because of new troop formations, new vehicles, equipment and weapons. However, facilities at that time were inadequate. In-principle approval for a new Police Tactical Training Centre (PTTC) was obtained with land set aside at Mandai for the project. Planning was at a very advanced stage when the project had to be shelved due to financial constraints in Financial Year 2006. Thankfully, the project is now back on track. It will bring immense benefits not only to the SOC but also to the other SPF specialist units. As a temporary measure to meet demands for tactical training, the former Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS) TV World at Tuas was acquired in 2002 and fitted with tactical training facilities such as the tactical maneuvering area, Force-On-Force House and Method of Entry House. Space was also provided to the Criminal Investigation Department for a forensic training facility.

- ***Transfer of CNU from Operations Department to SOC***

Before 2002, the Crisis Negotiation Unit (CNU) reported directly to the Operations Department (Ops). This was not ideal as the Ops Department, being a staff department, was not geared towards managing a line unit. In May 2002 the CNU was transferred to the SOC as a line unit reporting to Commander SOC. This is an ideal arrangement as SOC's PTU troops and the STAR Unit would also be deployed in hostage situations. This change allowed the SOC to take the



lead in organising joint exercises within the SOC for all three units. Following the transfer, SOC built up the CNU's capabilities and eventually supported it with a purpose-built vehicle which improved the CNU's response capabilities.

In the middle of all these developments, in June 2003, I was called upon to lead a pilot mission to Iraq at a time when there was still widespread shooting and bombings in Baghdad. On my return to the SOC a few months later, it was back to work with intense preparations for the September 2006 IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings.

This final posting in my career did not turn out to be the retirement post I had anticipated. It was the most hectic

and memorable part of my entire career. On hindsight, I enjoyed it all and I am very grateful for the experience. I am happy to have been able to contribute to the SOC's development and I am always mindful that what the SOC achieved on my watch, came from the effort of a great team that toiled with me. They made it all possible.

On this auspicious occasion of the Diamond Jubilee, I extend my heartiest congratulations and best wishes to the SOC and its entire staff. May you continue to grow from strength to strength and be a source of pride to the SPF. 🇬🇧

EVER READY



Source: The Sunday Times 17 March 2013 © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reproduced with permission

By Jalelah Abu Baker

Station Inspector Junaidi Rabian is trained to use lethal force to disarm a gunman, suppress a riot and tackle dangerous, volatile situations.

But the 10-year Police Tactical Unit (PTU) veteran says his most fulfilling moment to date was during a search-and-rescue operation two years ago, when he reunited two children with their parents after they went missing in a thick forested area in Clementi.

"The parents had been waiting and were worried but when we returned the kids to them, they had tears in their eyes. It was the best feeling," recounted the 35-year-old.



While PTU troopers ensure a strong police presence is felt in areas considered “soft targets” frequented by tourists and shoppers, most of their time is spent training.

Hours of physical exertion every day make them so fit that older officers, in their 40s, sometimes run as fast as those half their age.

In combat gear weighing more than 10kg, they climb stairs and run in the rain.

Physical strength alone, however, is not enough to pass muster even with the emphasis on fitness.

Troopers face dilemmas in which they must make split-second decisions. In one training scenario, they have to decide which paper target – usually with an image of a man – to shoot among several targets of the same guy in similar poses. In one, he holds nothing, in another, a can – and in another, a gun.

Sergeant Mark Ooi, 25, who has been with the PTU for about three years, called on this type of training when he prevented the suicide of an armed man who had locked himself in a room.

“Every second I was processing data, looking for windows of opportunity to react,” he said.

A regular police officer who wants to join the PTU has to accept the stresses of intense training, said the unit’s operations officer, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Willy Ng, 33.

“He must understand why we are always training, and appreciate why we exist. We always have to be prepared,” he said in a rare media interview with *The Sunday Times*.

While there has not been a mass riot in Singapore since the 1960s, training to handle such incidents is crucial.

Such is their attention to detail that officers are exposed to non-lethal tear gas so they understand the panic and chaos it could cause if sprayed on a large crowd.

“Whatever we may have to do to protesters, we do to ourselves to help us react better, while keeping the protesters safe,” said DSP Ng.

They also have a water cannon vehicle which can shoot a stream of water up to 50m to disperse a crowd – it can dye the water blue to distinguish a particularly violent group in a riot.

But before this is called on, an announcement would be made telling the crowd to disperse – available in 11 languages, including Vietnamese, Cambodian and Korean.



Troopers from the PTU told The Sunday Times that while they are often heavily armed; their emphasis is on life-saving, not life-taking.

They are also called on for search-and-rescue operations and manhunts.

Station Insp Junaidi and his fellow officers remain the most visible of the various units under the Police Special Operations Command.

Since the Sept 11, 2001 attacks, PTU officers – wearing the distinctive red beret – are often seen patrolling high-risk areas such as Holland Village, Clarke Quay and Orchard Road, due to the large presence of affluent Westerners who remain terror targets.

DSP Lim Ke Wei, 33, who has been with the PTU for four years, gives the assurance that they are not there to stop merry-making.

"Everyone is out to enjoy, we just want to make sure that the environment remains safe," he said.




When officers are out on patrol, sometimes just their presence alone is enough to keep order, particularly in their imposing red vehicles better known as ang chia, or “red trucks” in Hokkien.

But to the unfamiliar, it can be worrying.

“Sometimes tourists ask whether something is going to happen. We explain to them that it is safe to hang out,” said DSP Lim.

It can be a challenging lifestyle for officers, who are deployed for major events like the National Day Parade and New Year countdowns.

They work 24-hour shifts, can be called in on their days off and have to keep their daily work a secret from friends and family for operational security.

Sergeant Ooi takes it as a silver lining. “It’s good in a way. I don’t talk about work to my girlfriend, I talk about life,” he said. 



FROM RIOT SQUAD TO ELITE TACTICAL UNIT

1952: The Riot Squad is formed with 60 policemen of different races, in the aftermath of the 1950 Maria Hertogh inter-racial riots, which lasted three days and caused the deaths of 18 people.

1953: The Reserve Unit, consisting of three riot squads made up of 50 men each, is commissioned. Their functions include flood rescue, extrication of victims from car crashes and collapsed buildings, and crowd control.

1955: Officers in the unit are called upon 283 times in what is later dubbed the “Year of Labour Unrest”. Among the calls it responded to was the Hock Lee bus riots in May that year, where six people, including two police officers, died.

2005: Known as the Police Task Force (PTF), the unit replaces its old ang chia, or red troop carriers, with smaller yet more potent troop tactical vehicles. PTF troopers appear in public donning red berets – identical to those worn by the army’s commandos – for the first time at the Police Day Parade that year.

2006: The Police Task Force becomes known as the Police Tactical Unit and is often seen patrolling high-risk areas such as Holland Village, Clarke Quay and Orchard Road, because of the large presence of affluent Westerners, who remain targets of terror groups after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

QUIET PROFESSIONALS

By Jalelah Abu Baker & Tham Yuen-C,
The Straits Times

Source: The Sunday Times, 24 February 2013 © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reproduced with permission



Hell Week – that is just one of many tests any policeman brave enough to volunteer for the Special Tactics And Rescue (Star) unit will have to pass.


Selection for the unit, which deals with the most dangerous operations in law enforcement here, is a closely guarded secret.

The process is said to involve a myriad of physical and mental challenges designed to push candidates to their limits, and then some.

"I don't know why they call it Hell Week when it is actually a 12-day non-stop process," said a former member of the unit who declined to be named. "But to be part of Star, we just had to endure."

He said it is "hell" for candidates because they are constantly on the move as they are put through a gamut of exercises, including push-ups, pull-ups, running with rucksacks and long-distance swimming, with few or no breaks in between.

In this phase, candidates are deliberately deprived of rest to



The 37-year-old, who has headed the unit since 2011, is the only operator who can be named. His men cannot be identified due to operational security reasons.

He and his men declined to go into the exact details of Hell Week, but Supt Chua said they typically get only a few hours of sleep during that phase.

"After the first day of Hell Week, the entire sole of my foot was just one big blister," he said. "But I just peeled the skin off and carried on."

Volunteers for selection should already be experienced police officers in top physical condition.

Most are athletic and are marksmen or even experts in martial arts.

Still, only about one in 10 who pass Hell Week will complete the training and qualify as a Star unit operator.

The stringent selection process and high attrition rate are not just to separate the weak from the strong. Those who have been through it say it also helps to instil in them the realisation that their body and mind can be pushed far beyond their expectations.

Member of Parliament for Nee Soon GRC Patrick Tay, who commanded the unit from 2000 to 2002, said operators are expected to be highly professional, mentally and physically fit, and strong team players.

Supt Chua added that those seeking personal glory need not apply.

Aside from hostage rescue and arrests involving armed and dangerous criminals, the Star unit is the Home Team's main counter-terrorism force. It is equally adept at mounting assaults by air, land and sea.

The unit lifted its veil last month for The Sunday Times to observe how it trains, often with live ammunition, explosives and elements of real-world mission risks.

In one exercise played out at sea, a team of operators surfaced from underwater and scaled a wire-ladder to infiltrate a 6m-high vessel.

Once on deck, they regrouped and started their assault, swiftly moving into position despite lugging 30kg of gear.

They also simulated a hostage situation at a tactical training camp in Mandai, in which they first used a ladder system mounted on an Armoured Personnel Carrier to reach a second-floor unit where a "hostage" was held. Once there,

simulate real-world operations, where they will be expected to perform at a high level while under extreme physical and mental stress.

"We go through all sorts of deprivation during selection, even those that you wouldn't think of," said a 37-year-old senior staff sergeant who has been with the unit for eight years.

The unit's commanding officer, Superintendent Desmond Chua, spoke to The Sunday Times last month in a rare media interview.

the black-clad masked operators threw diversionary devices called flashbangs – which produce deafening sounds and blinding flashes – into the unit.

That left the “hostage-taker” in disarray long enough to give the unit’s operators an element of surprise and the vital seconds needed to take out the suspect with their submachine guns. The “crisis” was over within seconds.

It was a convincing display of how the Star unit can be masters of chaos, yet capable of using controlled aggression to defuse a crisis.

“It’s not that we don’t have fear,” said Supt Chua. “We just know how to think straight even in the midst of chaos.”

Shooting, especially in close quarters, is a vital skill. Operators must be “so precise, it is surgical”, added Supt Chua.

The Star unit has taken honours at shooting competitions both locally and abroad. But it holds an equally impressive record: Its men have never had to fire a shot outside of training since it was formed in 1993.

Like their counterparts in other elite military and police units, both here and abroad, Star unit operators are often referred to as quiet professionals who take on high-risk tasks without ever seeking any fame or recognition.

“We are all aware that something untoward might happen to us but that is something we are all prepared for,” said Supt Chua, who is married.

He added that his greatest satisfaction after any successful operation is when his men are all safe and accounted for.

“My job is to make sure they go back to their families at the end of the day.”





DAY I WAS TAKEN 'HOSTAGE' AND RESCUED

The room was small, with no window and no furniture, and once the door was shut, not a sliver of light.

There I was, held hostage in a corner by a man with a gun. It was real, but his intention to kill me was not.

The "terrorist" was really a 17-year veteran of the Special Tactics And Rescue (Star) unit, playing hostage-taker in a training simulation at a police tactical training camp somewhere in Mandai.

I had read that Queen Elizabeth – and more recently Prince William and his wife Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge – had escaped unscathed after similar drills with Britain's Special Air Service (SAS) regiment.

With that, I thought no harm could possibly come to me. But even then, it was nerve-racking to be locked up in a dark and stuffy room, not knowing how or exactly when I would be rescued.

I tried to calm my nerves by telling myself that in a real hostage situation, I would have been violently snatched, gagged, bound and manhandled, maybe even tortured, infinitely worse than how I had been literally ushered into the room earlier.

It must have been only a few minutes later when I heard a loud bang, and within seconds black-clad men, armed with assault rifles, were storming through the room door, which I later learnt they had broken through with a ram.

The next thing I remembered was gunshots, with training pellets rather

than bullets flying over my head, and the body of my hostage-taker slamming down on the ground, purportedly shot "dead" by my rescuers.

It was unclear how many shots were fired. My rescue was over so fast, I didn't manage to register everything that had happened. And before I knew it, I was being pulled to safety by a masked man, who shouted for me to keep my head down as he rushed me out of the room and into a corridor.

Outside, I saw what was the remnants of the main door to the unit, which had been blown to pieces by explosives designed to breach locked entrances.

How I managed to escape without a scratch during the raid – with real explosions and gunshots fired in such quick succession within the enclosed environment over a matter of seconds – was all down to the training Star unit operators undergo.

They told me later that in such operations, the entire mission initiative can change in a matter of seconds, which was why they plan and train for every contingency.

Surprisingly, they said that their wish during any operation is to not have to fire a single round, and that their teammates and hostages get to go home unharmed.

Unlike what is dramatised in movies and television, groups like the Star unit are life-saving organisations, not life-taking ones, they said. I'm just glad we have them on our side.

Shining Bright Like A Diamond

*By SC Muhammad Idaffi Othman
Photos by SC Muhammad Idaffi Othman & SSgt Edwin Lim Jia Zhong*





Held on 11 October 2013, the Special Operations Command (SOC) of the Singapore Police Force celebrated its 60th anniversary since its founding. Held at the SOC's Queenstown base, the audience of the Diamond Jubilee Parade and Gala Dinner was treated to a plethora of action-packed demonstrations by the various units of SOC, namely the K9, Special Tactics And Rescue team, Police Tactical Unit, Crisis Negotiation Unit and Special Women's Task Team. *Police Life* brings you the highlights of the celebrations with these pictures. [F](#)



A Day with Commander of Special Operations Command (SOC)

By AC Anthony Ng, Commander SOC

How do you feel about SOC celebrating its Diamond Jubilee this year?

I feel very honoured that this historical event happened during my watch. The SOC may be commemorating its 60th year, but we have certainly aged well. We have come a long way to what we are today – One Unit with Diverse Capabilities. All this is due to the efforts, dedication, contributions and personal sacrifices of both former and current officers of the SOC.

What were some of the challenges that you faced when you first took over as Commander?

One of the major challenges that I faced was the *identity of the SOC* - Who are we? Many people have very different understanding of us. This is complicated by the diverse

nature of the SOC, further compounded by the strong identities of each individual unit within the SOC – all of them can virtually run on their own.

Thus, when I first took over as Commander, I figured that I had to do three things. Firstly, I re-casted the SOC Mission to help units see that we share a common mission under the larger SOC family. Secondly, we reached out to the rest of the Singapore Police Force (SPF), the Home Team, government agencies, the public domains and even our officers' families through various avenues to help them understand who we are and what we do. We held the first SOC Open House cum family day in 2012. We took pains to educate other SPF units on our functions and capabilities. We regularly engaged trainees from the Training Command, Team Leaders from the Neighbourhood Police Centres etcetera. Lastly, I wanted my key officers to wear the SOC hat and identify ourselves as the SOC rather than as individual sub-units when we engage foreign agencies/forces. We also buttress this effort through strong internal communications.

Next, the Police Tactical Unit (PTU) is probably one of the few, if not the only unit in the world that has *dual roles* – a public disorder management role in maintaining public order, as well as a public security role in neutralising situations involving active gunmen. So, while I have to maintain our public order capability readiness, I also have to allocate more resources and time to build up the new counter active-gunmen capability. Apart from acquiring



new resources, our PTU officers have to take on more training & deployments. You can say that it has been a challenging time for us. Fortunately, with our close knit bonding and a “Never Say Die” spirit to fall back on, I am happy to say that our officers have risen admirably to meet that challenge.

In addition, the Commissioner of Police further challenged the SOC to take the lead in Specialist tactical training within the SPF. While it is clear that the higher intent is to facilitate inter-operability between specialist units, it is certainly a tall order given the diversity of standards, operating procedures and also equipping among the various specialist units at that point in time. In order to make this goal a reality, I formalised the Specialist Tactics Advisory Team (STAT) to standardise the common core competencies across the various units. STAT works closely with the training branch in the SOC to come up with training packages such as Close Quarters Battle, Tactical Firearms and Methods-of-Entry. The SOC training branch was also restructured into the Special Operations Training Centre (SOTC). Trainers of various specialist units were then trained by the SOTC and accredited by STAT. In turn, they trained the other officers in their respective units. In doing so, we are ensuring that some cardinal safety issues are looked at and can be better assured that the various specialist units have some common basis to train or operate together.

The growth in the SOC’s reputation and credibility as a *Centre for Tactical Excellence* corresponded with a sudden surge of interests from both internal and external security-related forces globally. Within a short span of two years, requests of visits to the SOC increased by several folds. Although resource-intensive, we took it as an opportunity for us to develop strategic relationships with our foreign counterparts and learn from them concurrently. For example, in the realm of public disorder, our counterparts from South Korea and France are both well-versed in managing sporadic processions and riots. In the public security domain, our counterparts from the United States of America constantly face perils from rampaging gunmen in school shootouts and drive-by killings. Such real-life encounters experienced by their officers, though unfortunate, present an invaluable learning opportunity for the SOC.

What are some of the more memorable developments you’ve seen or initiated in SOC?

This is really a tough question as I feel deeply connected with each and every development within the SOC. It would not do justice to the developments if I fail to mention them here as they are equally important. Nonetheless, I will list just a few to let our readers have a feel of the SOC pulse:

- Re-initiating our leadership development programme to groom promising SOC officers to aid them in their career development and advancement.
- Enhancing Inter-Operations capabilities within SOC, such as cross training K9 & PTU (Public Order dogs exploration project), cross training K9 & STAR (Tactical K9 project).
- Enhancing Maritime Assault Operations capability for STAR unit.
- Greatly increasing the involvement of officers’ families in various unit social events.
- Proudly overseeing the final batch of United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF) contingent returning from Timor Leste to Singapore safely.

Looking forward, what are your plans for the SOC?

One of my longer term plans for the SOC is our continued commitment in enhancing situational awareness. In this digital information age, we are often overwhelmed by information. My vision is to embark on a (CSI²)^[1] platform that will allow us to harness better situation picture to enhance the capabilities of our officers on the ground. For the near future, we have charted a master plan for the SOC to meet the challenges of the next 5 to 8 years, starting with the South East Asian Games in 2015.


When the Mumbai terror attack shook the globe in 2008, we went full swing into the development and enhancement of our Public Security capabilities - namely Anti Swarming Capabilities - to deal with a multi site concurrent terror attacks. Five years down, after many rounds of fine tuning our tactics and strategies, equipping and armament procuring, we are entering a more stable phase of this development. So we can put our focus back into Public Order (PO), our traditional domain. New challenges have risen over the past years, like the swarm PO scenarios from the London riots and the ever expanding foreign worker dormitories, both in terms of population as well as dimensions. The new challenges force us to embark on a holistic review on every single fibre & thread in how we have always tackled PO threats as traditional methods are fast becoming less effective in this new environment.

No plans are operational without the correct manpower to run the show. Our officers are our most valuable assets and we spare no efforts to recruit the right people and the

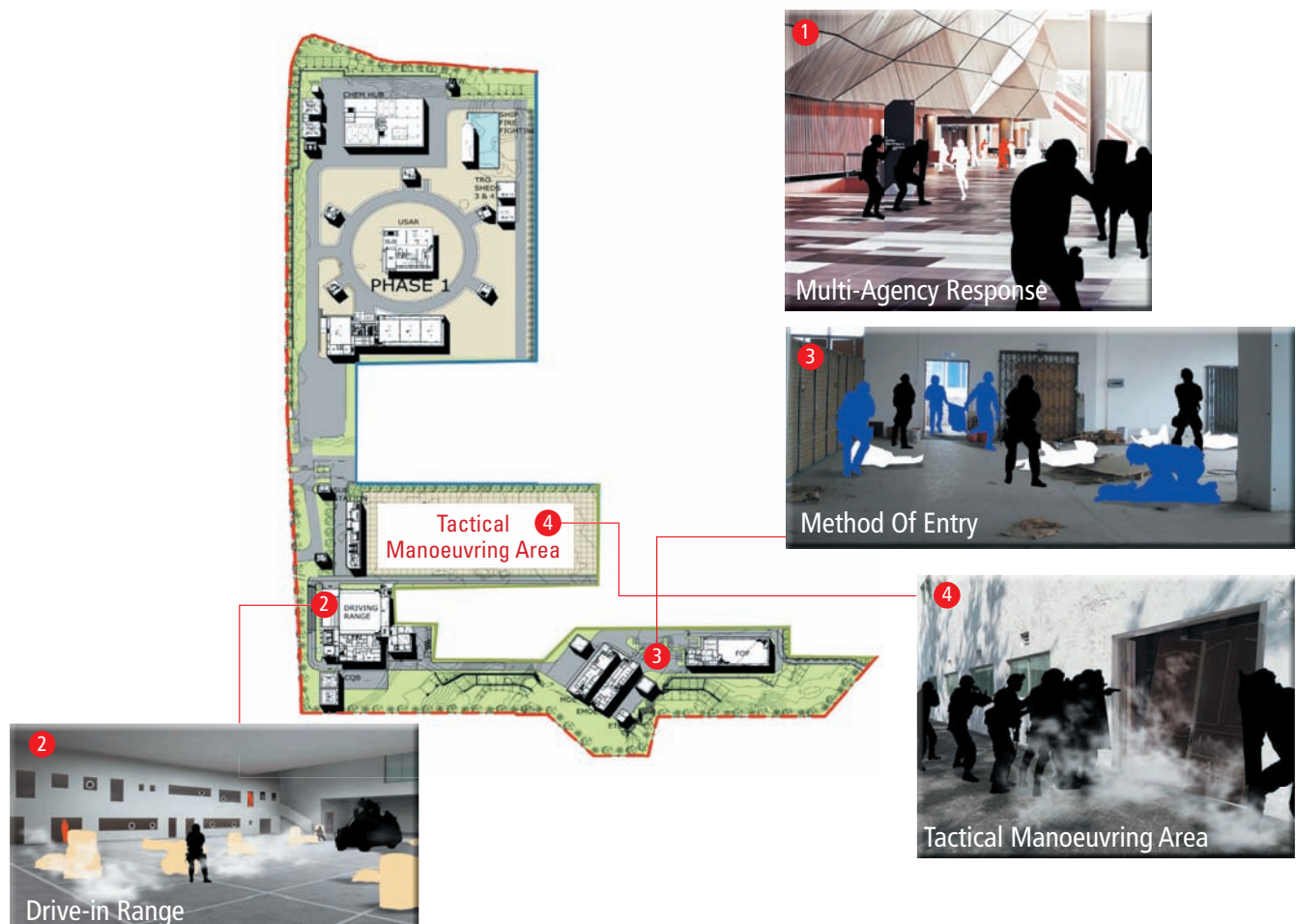
1 [1] (CSI²) platform refers to a network made up of Communication Alternatives, Shot Detection system, Individual Tracking, CCTV, Surveillance Tools & Interactive Maps.

numbers required. All over the globe, there is a shortage in tactical force specialists and we aim to change this trend, starting with the direct recruitment for our most elite Special Tactics And Rescue (STAR) unit. In conjunction with this, we are relooking the career development and advancement of our SOC officers. It is equally important to give them a purposeful job and help them serve with pride in order to retain our best talents. We have also observed over the years that our officers have become increasingly favoured by other specialist units when they apply for their subsequent postings. We believe that this is largely due to the highly-honed tactical skills, fitness and variety of experiences that we have equipped our officers with. Though this would undoubtedly be a 'brain-drain' for the SOC, it is definitely a positive development for the SPF as a whole and we intend to continue down this line.

How do you think the operation of SOC will be enhanced with the setting up of the new Home Team Tactical Training Centre (HTTC)?

Much has changed over the past 6 decades in the global environment and security climate. Especially over the last 10 years, the SOC has dramatically re-invented ourselves and constantly updated our capabilities to keep pace with the ever changing trends in the world. The demands on our capabilities are ever increasing. The full spectrum of training required by SOC forces can only be fully realised through the cutting edge facilities which we will be building in the HTTC. The success of our mission also depends greatly on the synergies with other units and Home Team agencies. The HTTC will significantly increase our capacity to train not only SOC forces, but also other SPF tactical forces. It will also increase the level of inter-operability with other Home Team agencies such as the Singapore Civil Defence Force and allow more interactions to foster better understanding and camaraderie within the Home Team agencies, a spirit which is critical to our continued success in preserving the integrity of Singapore's security. 

HTTC Master Plan (Phase 1)



From the Lips of the Red Beret Officers

By: SC Muhammad Idaffi Othman
Photos By: SSgt Edwin Lim Jia Zhong

The red beret and red truck are synonymous to these officers from the Special Operations Command (SOC). Known for their high level of fitness and their unique duties, those from this specialist unit add to the diversity in the Singapore Police Force (SPF). *Police Life* sat down with two of the longest-serving officers from SOC to dig out the perks and hidden gems within this fierce-looking unit.

Name: Deputy Superintendent of
Police Vijayamohan S/O
Subramaniam

Age: 54

Length of service: 36 years

Years in SOC: 17

Previous departments:

Orchard Road Police Station & Security
Branch (currently known as Security
Command)

Having served SPF for more than three decades, what are some of the factors that made you stay?

I enjoy how the Force gives pressure to officers to keep fit for optimum duty fulfilment. Serving in the SPF gives me opportunities to keep fit. One of my hobbies is shooting and being in the Force allows me to participate in shooting activities very often. For example, I have represented SPF at the Johor Shield Shooting Competition for ten years. Another thing you can never get outside the Force is the exposure to different kinds of crime cases. I remember when I started as young as 18 years old, I even had to give advice to people way above my age. This definitely made me more mature!

What has been satisfying about your experience serving in the SOC?

Serving in SOC has made me stronger in so many ways. One of them is to be emotionally stronger every day. This came about as I had dealt with members of the public who were involved in strikes, public unrest, as well as unruly behaviour. I find it satisfying knowing that I could remain calm throughout such incidents.

What are some of your specific duties /roles during your service in SOC?

I have been an Officer In-Charge (OC) of a troop throughout my tenure in SOC. I never get bored in this post as we are constantly changing, and striving to improve ourselves professionally. I also played a part in several significant changes within SOC. For example, I combined the old Spring Board formation with the new Box formation which is currently used for Public Order situation.

What are some of the memories you have while serving in the Force?

I vividly recall one incident on 8 May 1998 when I led a team of troopers to track a drug abuser who previously grabbed an officer's gun and shot the officer's thigh. To me, it was like being in a movie, trying to nab the armed drug abuser as fast as possible as he still had four live rounds that could kill innocent people. We searched more than 25 HDB blocks and multi-storey car parks in the Woodlands vicinity. With a sincere mission to protect lives and the successful operation, it was certainly one of our biggest achievements that I will never forget.



Of all the various postings, which one has left the greatest impact in your life or taught you the most?

I love being in SOC as I have had the opportunity to be involved in many transformations that took place in SOC, including the drill formations that the troopers had to learn, prior to the International Monetary Fund meeting in 2006 under the leadership of former SOC Commander, Senior Assistant Commissioner of Police Noor Mohamed. Such involvement gave me a sense of ownership and belonging towards this specialist unit.

Having been in the SOC for many years, what are some transformations you saw in SOC?

During my early days, we had pretty basic gear. Now, we have three different gears, depending on the situation that we are responding to. One of the interesting features in our uniform now is the integrated helmet which is equipped with communications set for reporting purposes. In terms of public security, we now have an anti-swarming team specially tasked to deal with terrorist attacks in line with the exponential growth of transnational terrorist attacks. We are even launching new vehicles and gear very soon. So, keep a look out!

How do you feel about SOC celebrating its Diamond Jubilee (60th anniversary) this year?

I feel very grateful to see how far the SOC has come. I dislike hearing people saying that SOC officers only do stand-by duties and not real policing work. While the number of public unrest cases in Singapore is small, we still carry out and undergo many different kinds of situational training to be prepared for what may come our way. Training in SOC does not stop; we prepare ourselves for the worst of situations. My message to all, in or out of the Force, is that we do not know when the country might need our services, and hence, we will need to be physically and mentally prepared at all times.

Name: Senior Station Inspector 2
Jamil Bin Nawin

Age: 55

Length of service: 37

Years in SOC: 34

Previous departments:

Radio Division & Marine Police (currently known as Police Coast Guard (PCG))

Having served SPF for more than three decades, what are some of the factors that made you stay?

The SPF has given me abundant opportunities to improve, in terms of education and career prospects, to work my way up. One of the things I might not be able to achieve elsewhere is the ability for me to directly serve the people while making a living. I am loyal to the Police (the SPF) for providing me this opportunity.

What has been satisfying about your experience serving in the SOC?

Accomplishing every mission my team and I are tasked to do is a huge joy. That is when you feel that all your efforts during the tough SOC training have not gone to waste. For instance, during the 'Ah Huat' (Lim Keng Peng) incident in 1988, we hunted him down for close to 30 months, and when we finally managed to nab him, the sense of satisfaction was indescribable.

What are some of your specific duties/roles during your service in SOC?

I was recruited as a member of the Police Tactical Team (known as Special Tactics And Rescue (STAR) unit now) when I first joined SOC, when it was known as the Police Reserve Unit. Whenever there was a gunman situation, we would strategise as a team and respond to the situation. In 1994, I took over the role as a Deputy Officer-in-Charge of a troop, before being promoted to Officer-in-Charge of a troop. Currently holding the role of a column leader, I lead a group of seven men to respond to public unrest incidents.

What are some of the memories you have while serving in the Force?

The most memorable mission I was involved in was the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Cambodia in 1993. Spending nine months there taught me many things that I could never learn elsewhere. I was part of the advance party to prepare for the arrival of the main team of officers. I witnessed how cheap lives were there, as there was no arms restriction and everyone was carrying weapons. I even witnessed a murder in front of my own eyes!

Of all the various postings, which one has left the greatest impact in your life or taught you the most?

Every posting has undeniably left an impact in my life. When I was in the Police Coast Guard, for example, I was given a \$100,000 bribe by a group of liquor smugglers. Despite it being about 500 times my salary at that time, I rejected it. To me, no value is high enough to break my honour.

Having been in the SOC for many years, what are some transformations you saw in SOC?

In terms of equipment and uniform, there have been many changes. In the past, we were only armed with a normal baton. Now, SOC troopers are more protected with better gear and more comfortable boots. We even have a Research & Development team that carries out studies abroad to enhance our capabilities. In terms of training, we are also much more prepared for any situation that we need to respond to, unlike in the past where we were only trained with basic response techniques.

How do you feel about SOC celebrating its Diamond Jubilee (60th anniversary) this year?

SOC officers not only have a high fitness level, we are also mentally resilient. It makes me feel very proud when I look back at my journey as a Police officer and specifically, an SOC officer. As long as I am fit enough, I will serve the Police Force as this is my source of happiness. I cannot thank the Force enough for all the opportunities it has provided me with. 🇸🇬





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