

# A salute to the Eurasians' spirit of service



Librarian turned author Mary Anne Jansen (left), retired engineer John Geno-Oehlers and his wife Ann Ebert Oehlers researched and wrote the 412-page book *On Parade: Straits Settlements Eurasian Men Who Volunteered To Defend The Empire, 1862-1957*. ST PHOTOS: ARIFFIN JAHAR

## Book tells of men's role in S'pore's volunteer corps, and in internal security and defence

**Melody Zaccheus**  
Heritage and Community  
Correspondent

Riots fought on the streets and countryside between the Hokkien and Teochew communities in May 1854 resulted in the deaths of 500 people and the destruction of shops and more than 300 homes.

To tackle such lawlessness and outbreaks of rioting, the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps was formed in 1854. The Eurasians, already a settled community in Singapore, were the first non-Europeans to join the Corps, helping to take care of internal security and defence.

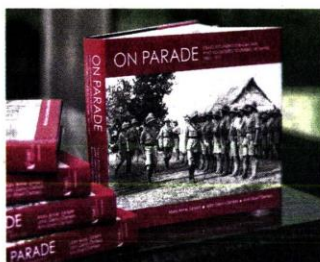
The earliest record of Eurasian volunteers in the Corps dates back to 1862, and by the 1870s, the Corps was made up predominantly of Eurasians and Europeans.

A heavily researched 412-page book launched yesterday chronicles the contributions of Straits Settlements Eurasian men, who took responsibility for the defence of the British Empire, both at home and abroad over nearly a century.

Some of them also served in the World Wars.

The Corps was the precursor of the post-independence People's Defence Force, which was involved in the training of part-time national servicemen when national service was introduced in 1967.

Speaking at the launch of *On Parade: Straits Settlements Eurasian Men Who Volunteered To Defend*



**Publication: The Straits Times, p B03**

**Date: 28 November 2018**

**Headline: A salute to the Eurasians' spirit of service**

The Empire, 1862-1957, Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean said the book celebrates an important core value of Singapore's Eurasian community – the spirit of service.

He said Eurasians played an integral role in the People's Defence Force, noting "a good number of our volunteers, including our Eurasian volunteers, were mobilised and formed the core of our fledgling armed forces".

The book, which is published by the Singapore Management University's Wee Kim Wee Centre, also details some of the struggles of the community, which included rejection by the British army.

For instance, during World War I, some Eurasian men sailed to Britain, at great personal sacrifice, in order to fight in the war, but a number were turned away – for reasons such as their "brown complexion". Meanwhile, there were regiments from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

A roster of more than 1,000 Eurasian volunteers who fought for the Empire is included in the book, which took about two years to complete. It was researched and written by librarian turned author Mary Anne Jansen, retired mechanical engineer John Geno-Oehlers and his wife Ann Ebert Oehlers, and supported by the National Heritage Board's Heritage Participation Grant.

Mr Geno-Oehlers, 69, said: "We feel there should be a written record somewhere to at least thank them for their service. It also helps families reconcile with their losses."

He noted that the Eurasians had chosen to volunteer because they believed the future was at stake. He said: "The decision to volunteer speaks of duty, loyalty and a long-term commitment to home. The only home the Eurasians had was the Straits Settlements and England was not home."

DPM Teo noted Singapore Eurasians could trace their family trees to distant lands like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Portugal and Germany, and their families have inter-married, integrated and settled here for generations. He said: "I believe the book will also help to raise greater understanding of our Eurasian community and their important contributions to nation building, and serve to strengthen the bond of all Singaporeans to our multiracial and multi-ethnic society."

---

[melodyz@sph.com.sg](mailto:melodyz@sph.com.sg)

**Source: The Straits Times @ Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction**