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## First batch SAF "Warriors" complete SMU postgraduate studies

Report by Benita Teo | Photos by Chai Sian Liang



The inaugural batch of graduates from the SWS. With them is Professor Zerrillo (front row, fifth from left), Professor Rajendra Srivastava (SMU Provost and Deputy President of Academic Affairs) and RADM Giam (front row, fifth and fourth from right respectively).

Retirement is usually the time to put one's feet up on the table and take a much-deserved break.

But not for former Helicopter Group Commander Colonel (COL) (Ret) Jeff Chin Pak Chuen.

Since retiring from the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) last November, the 46-year-old has completed a postgraduate degree and become a business owner!

As part of his Master of Science in Innovation (MI) studies at the Singapore Management University (SMU), COL (Ret) Chin, together with his course mates, had worked on DingGo, a mobile application that connects food and entertainment customers to the nearest last-minute available seats. The business idea won third place in the Asia Venture Challenge, an Asia-wide business plan competition fostering entrepreneurial spirit, in March this year.

As proud co-founders of this technology start-up, COL (Ret) Chin and his team are now in talks with the Restaurant Association of Singapore to bring food and beverage outlets onboard to collaborate and make use of the mobile application.

"I did not expect (to eventually become a start-up business owner). At the point of my retirement, I was still thinking about what I wanted to do, although I did wonder if I could start a business and do something on my own. The curriculum in the MI programme resonated very strongly with what I wanted to do with my life," COL (Ret) Chin explained, adding that the course of study provided a lot of useful guidance in helping him start his business.

COL (Ret) Chin was able to achieve this, thanks to the SMU Warriors Scholarship (SWS) programme. Officially launched in January 2014, the programme offers retiring SAF personnel bond-free scholarships in about 21 of SMU's postgraduate programmes. In line with the SAF's

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culture of lifelong learning, the SWS programme aims to prepare SAF personnel for careers beyond their retirement from the military.

On 15 Jul, COL (Ret) Chin, together with nine of his former SAF colleagues, became the inaugural batch of SWS scholars to be conferred their postgraduate degrees.

At the SMU Warriors Graduation and Conferral Celebration held ahead of the commencement ceremony, Commandant SAFTI Military Institute Rear Admiral (RADM) Giam Hock Koon thanked SMU for the opportunities made available to SAF personnel. He said: "We invest in the education of our people because we believe in developing them to their fullest potential.

"We are therefore very grateful to SMU for being a wonderful partner of the SAF in supporting our continuing education objectives."

Professor Philip Zerrillo, SMU Dean of Postgraduate Professional Programmes, commended the SAF officers "who brought with them their experiences, their past histories, their knowledge, their integrity, their discipline, their effort that ... provides a unique (and) magical experience."

"The one thing we've come to expect from this group is the integrity and the ethics and the morals that you brought to our group," said Professor Zerrillo.

## **New opportunities**

For the SWS scholars, transiting from military life back to academia was not without its challenges, especially since they had to juggle work with studies. But fellow SWS scholar COL (Ret) Yong Wui Chiang believes his experience in the SAF has helped ease him into the new lifestyle. He said: "A lot of the fundamental principles, (such as) the discipline of doing things, are actually the same. We also take to leadership roles quite naturally in bringing everybody together to focus on getting work done. The experience of being very task- and mission-focused is a great advantage."

In completing his Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) course, the former Army Chief Knowledge Officer found that his experience in overseas operations had also enhanced his appreciation for the role of business enterprises in society.

"It made me think about how business is important to society and bettering the lives of people," said the 50-year-old. "From my personal experience participating in international operations, especially those in Iraq and Afghanistan, we saw that, to build a nation from scratch, it's about working with the commercial, civil, and public sectors. Business has a role in society. It complements what I know from my military experience."

COL (Ret) Yong is currently the Director of Strategic Planning in the Ministry of Communications and Information.

As for COL (Ret) Chin, his experience in the SAF made the transition smoother and even enabled him to help his classmates: "The SAF has given me a strong foundation in my value system, for example, fighting spirit. If we are working on a difficult project and people are getting tired, we tell them, 'don't give up, carry on'. That zeal remains in us, whether we are in the SAF or not."