New military courses for SAF officers

Regulars to take lessons offering a stronger foundation during their university term holidays

BY JERMYN CHOW

COMMISSIONED officers of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) doing their undergraduate studies here or abroad must now go through a new military education programme.

Regulars, including those under the newly created Military Domain Experts Scheme, have to read courses in military history, military technology and leadership, taking them during their term holidays from May to August at the end of each academic year.

Each course, run jointly by the SAF and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), lasts six weeks and ends in a written examination.

By the time they graduate in three or four years, but before they start work in the army, navy or air force, they would have completed all three.

This means that officers studying overseas will have to come back here to attend them.

How well they fare in these courses will have some bearing on their advancement or promotion prospects in their eventual careers in the military.

Previously, basic military education was offered only to officer cadets before their commissioning and to regulars who had served for about 10 years.

But Lieutenant-Colonel Ng Hock Seng, who heads the SAF's continuing education programme, said more needed to be done to give these junior officers a "stronger foundation" on which to build their combat knowledge and expertise.

"Better to expose them earlier so they'll be better prepared to deal with the added demands that come with the different staff or command appointments as they rise through the ranks."

The three courses cover warfare theories and security trends in South-east Asia and how these affect the SAF's operations, how the SAF uses technology, and leadership strategies.

The classes include dialogues with senior officers, which Military Expert 4 Yu Min Khi, 23, has found useful.

The naval engineer, who is formerly from a polytechnic, and thus exempted from the first year of his university course, will start his course in mechanical engineering at NTU from the second year this August.

He said of the military education courses he has begun attending: "It's not just a case of us sitting through history lessons... We learn from the mistakes and successes of previous commanders and apply them when making decisions in our jobs."

The SAF has about 4,000 commissioned officers currently in service.

Those undergoing the courses are required to be in uniform during classes and when they take the examinations, which ended last week at the SAF Military Institute in Jurong.

Associate research fellow Ho Shu Huang from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, who teaches military studies in the programme, said having to be in uniform will strengthen the officers' ties to the SAF, even as they study in a civilian institution.

He added: "These young officers will also better understand why they're serving in the military, and why every action and decision made, even at their level, will have an impact on their men."