

SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES VETERANS' LEAGUE (SAFVL) COUNTRY REPORT 2018



BG (RET) Winston Toh
President
SAF Veterans' League



COL (RET) Lau Kee Siong
Vice President
SAF Veterans' League

As presented by BG (NS) WINSTON TOH

Honourable BRIG GEN (RET) Somphon Keomixay,
President VECONAC and
President of Lao National Veterans Federations (LNVF).

We thank you for the leadership as President of VECONAC for this 31th VECONAC Executive Board Meeting which was successfully completed and the 18th VECONAC General Assembly. SAFVL would like to thank you and LNVF for the kind hospitality and for organising this meeting.

Fellow Veterans, Ladies & Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. Singapore Armed Forces Veterans' League (SAFVL) started in 1990 and have been actively serving its members as well as providing a platform to educate students and young soldiers on national defence. The SAFVL management Committee felt that **this is insufficient and would like to bring us to a higher level of involvement and stature.** It will be covered more in detail below.
2. As in previous years we are currently focused on these five main areas:
 - a. Remain engaged, relevant and current to the Singapore Armed Forces.
 - b. Be a role model and ambassador for National Education.
 - c. Imbue in our members the concept of active ageing.
 - d. Be a responsible member of our international and regional veterans' community.
 - e. Care for our veterans.

REMAIN ENGAGED, RELEVANT AND CURRENT.

3. We continue to remain closely connected to the Singapore Armed Forces attending its parades, ceremonies, talks and other activities. Veteran members participate actively supporting our links to the SAF.

EDUCATING THE YOUNGER GENERATION ON NATIONAL DEFENCE.

4. SAFVL Veterans continue with our role actively as ambassadors educating our school students and new SAF enlistees on the need for national defence to protect our homeland. Up to October this year our veterans play the role of ambassadors/educators covering 71,542 students and young SAF personnel, an increase of 378% compared to last year's number of 18,894. We have plans to widen this scope which will be covered later
5. Besides schools and SAF units, the ambassadors continue to conduct talks and tours in Singapore's National Museum and National Heritage Board engaging the audience on tours at their premises, using museum artefacts to bring home the message on the need for national defence. We have started to include our national servicemen in our tours and talks and hope to reach out to the One Million personnel.
6. A study is being conducted to extend this education to national servicemen (reservists) who are doing their reservist in-camp-training. These are national servicemen who have completed two years full time military training, and they come back once a year to do their military refresher training for about 2 weeks. We are also exploring the possibility of reaching out to preschool children to kindle their minds on the military.
7. Our ongoing activities are active participation in memorial services at the Commonwealth War Cemetery during Remembrance Day, at the Singapore Civilian War Memorial in conjunction with our SAF Total Defence Day and at the Konfrantasi Memorial. We continue to bring students from the school uniform groups to battle sites to make them understand better the need to defend our country.

A RESPONSIBLE MEMBER OF OUR INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL VETERAN COMMUNITY.

8. SAF Veterans' League continues to attend World Veteran Federation and VECONAC annual assemblies and vouch to participate actively in the affairs of both organisations. At the 31st VECONAC Executive Board Meeting we provided the organisers a token assistance in the organisation of the 18th VECONAC General Assembly. We are also currently helping VECONAC to manage the website and would like to thank all member countries for your assistance, in keeping the website up to date.

9. Last year, in our bilateral ties with Veterans' Association of Malaysia Armed Forces (VAMAF) we brought them to our River Safari and Sea Aquarium as well as our National Museum. They also visited our Urban Development Authority, where they saw the physical transformation of Singapore over the last 50 years, and at the same time, had a good game of golf with 7 flights. Our guests enjoyed themselves very much. VAMAF will be inviting us over in Feb 2019.
10. On 21 Jul 2018, our two associations had an informal gathering in Johore, Malaysia for an afternoon of sumptuous lunch and the treat of the King of Fruits – Durian!

MULTI-RACIAL AND MULTI-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

11. As Singaporeans we are blessed with a good national philosophy of maintaining a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. SAFVL on our part continues to support this cause by organising activities for all the four racial and cultural groups, namely Chinese, Malay, Indians and Eurasians, where members of different ethnic groups come together and enjoy each other's festive occasions.

THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF SAFVL

12. Singapore prospered under the British and was colonised. We then came under the British administration and our fore fathers were British subjects. The British rightfully made Singapore the Fortress of the East and defended it strongly, as other European powers in the region also had keen interest in this strategic location. After World War I when the situation was bad back home, the British pulled back its best troops, best aircraft and battleships. They left behind 130,000 lowly trained troops and recruits from the Australian and Indian army. During World War II the 75,000 Japanese troops overran Singapore in 8 days. Life during the Japanese occupation was unbearable until the atomic bomb caused the Japanese to withdraw.
13. After World War II all other European powers also left the Asian scene leaving a vacuum. An idea sprang up to form Malaysia by merging four countries formerly under the British rule, to provide better stability. They were: Peninsula Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. Sabah and Sarawak are both in the northern strip of Borneo. In a referendum, Singaporeans voted in favour as it provides us a good hinterland as we do not have natural resources. Lo and behold after a short 3 years Singapore departed from Malaysia due to differences in ideology. It was a sad departure as our thought of a hinterland with plenty of natural resources went to the clouds overnight.
14. When the British defended Singapore, our fore fathers were contented mending their businesses as well as providing for the livelihood and infrastructure of the population. No one was keen to take up arms. When we were in Malaysia a few Singaporeans joined the army, navy and air force. When we left Malaysia we took over 2 infantry battalions with 200 Singaporeans who stayed behind loyally, 2 wooden haul patrol boats and no air force. What can this do when 130,000 troops under the British cannot withstand the advance of 75,000 Japanese troops.

15. Here we would like to salute our founding leaders for introducing national service and bring it to fruition. Today we are very proud that our national service is very well managed, well trained and is very well supported by the population at large. Even the ladies: the mothers, the grandmothers, wives and girlfriends are all in full support, as their boys at age of 18 years old are turned into matured men through SAF training when they finish their 2 years of national service.
16. Singaporean have not gone to war, and we do not have war veterans. By definition a veteran is a person who has had long service or experience in an occupation. We have more than a million men, senior in age, having long service and experience in our national service, some even serving as battalion and brigade commanders. There are many who continue to volunteer beyond their mandatory service.
17. It is therefore imperative that SAFVL open its doors not only to regular soldiers, but also to national servicemen in their senior years of life. As years go by regular soldiers' numbers will dwindle and will not sustain the growth of the Veterans' League, in the SAF.
18. We aspire to be an organisation that has a better standing. To do that we need a value proposition, that will be well accepted by the SAF as well as the country that will escalate our status, worthy of recognition. SAFVL management committee have recently held a retreat to look into the future of the SAFVL in this direction.

CONCLUSION

19. SAFVL though a young organisation has evolved, and we will continue to evolve. We will report the progress of this mission in the coming General Assemblies

BG (NS) Winston Toh
President
Singapore Armed Forces Veterans' League



LTC (RET) Swee Boon Chai
Honorary Secretary
SAF Veterans' League