

Flexi-terms for SAF Volunteer Corps

Recruits can fit training around their commitments, drop out at any time

By JERMYN CHOW
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REGISTRATION for the new Singapore Armed Forces Volunteer Corps (SAFVC) begins today – and with it, the chance for recruits to decide how they want to serve their stints and contribute to the country's defence.

Women, first-generation permanent residents and new citizens aged between 18 and 45, who are not liable for national service, will be able to sign up to serve from March next year.

The SAFVC will match their skills and job expertise to their military role. Details of the unit were announced last Friday by Colonel Mike Tan who will command the new set-up. It was created following a year-long review into how

to boost support for national service.

Volunteers can choose to stay in camp and undergo a four-week course that will familiarise them with the military's modus operandi. If this does not fit around their commitments, they can also spread out their training sessions over several weekends.

They will have to serve just seven days a year, but can drop out at any time when they feel they can no longer serve – though they must give three months' notice.

Early plans for the new corps had specified up to 14 days of annual service and a minimum three-year enrolment.

However, Col Tan, who will also head a newly formed SAF Volunteers Affairs Department, said this more flexible arrangement



Colonel Mike Tan, who will command the new Singapore Armed Forces Volunteer Corps, said the more flexible arrangement does not mean the commitment to serve is taken any less seriously. ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH

does not "take away the seriousness of the commitment".

"You are not likely to give your best if you feel you are being tied down," he said.

"If the volunteer is not able to keep pace with training and found to be unable to follow the training, then maybe it's in everybody's interest to allow the volunteer to leave."

Volunteers will get to choose from 17 vocations during their stints. They include roles such as defence psychologists, medical trainers and airbase civil engineers, who can share their area of

expertise with their military counterparts.

The volunteers will serve alongside career soldiers and national servicemen in roles such as patrolling key installations like Changi Airport and sailing with the Republic of Singapore Navy's ships.

If one role does not work out, the volunteers will be able to switch to another.

Candidates will undergo pre-enlistment screening and face an interview panel headed by Col Tan, who is on the lookout for volunteers with the "correct motivations, mainly the desire to serve".

"It's an important commitment... I will want to make sure that the person is coming in with genuine intentions," said Col Tan.

Those who complete their training will wear one of four new ranks on their uniforms – SV1 to SV4.

They will also receive benefits, including an allowance or make-up pay during their in-camp stints.

Employers will be required to release staff for the voluntary stints, while volunteers who skip their call-ups will be penalised under military law.

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RIGHT PEOPLE FOR THE JOB
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– Col Mike Tan, who said the aim is to pick volunteers who have the 'correct motivation'

Col Tan said: "The moment you put on a uniform and proclaim that you are ready to be deployed... we will expect you to uphold our ethos and our military professionalism. For any reason, if you are negligent in your duties... military discipline will be administered."

Defence analyst Ho Shu Huang backed the move not to impose a minimum term of service, saying similar volunteer schemes in other countries do not have one.

He said: "If people want to help, the SAF should not turn them away, but if they need to leave for whatever reason, the SAF should just allow them to go."

About 100 to 150 volunteers are expected to be enlisted in three batches next year.

The volunteer corps was one of 30 recommendations made by the Committee to Strengthen National Service.

It is one of several schemes already in place for people who wish to volunteer or extend their services to the SAF.

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S'pore PRs plan to sign up to fulfil aspirations

AFTER hanging up his army boots a decade ago, Mr Calven Bland is thirsting for another spell in the military.

The New Zealand-born Singapore permanent resident (PR), who was a logistician with the New Zealand Army for 12 years before coming to Singapore in 2005, plans to sign up with the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Volunteer Corps as a security trooper.

The 42-year-old, and others who are interested in getting a "stint" in the military, can sign up as military volunteers today.

Mr Bland, who is married to a Singaporean, said he is stepping up to be a volunteer as he admires the common bond that Singaporean males share as national servicemen.

"I get a little jealous when they have something common to talk about... after 10 years in Singapore, I would want to be part of the brotherhood," said the business development manager in a marine construction firm.

The father-to-be added: "If I expect my son to serve, as his father, I have to do something that is similar in nature... it's as close as I'm going to get to defending the country."

Vietnam-born PR Dao Tuan Son, 30, who has also been in Singapore for 10 years, said he want-



Mr Jeremy Wong Weng Joon is keen to join the corps as a medical trainer, while Mr Calven Bland plans to sign up as a security trooper. ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

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– Mr Calven Bland, a New Zealand-born Singapore permanent resident

to go beyond the day-to-day acts of volunteerism to serve the country that has groomed him into what he is today.

The commercial analyst at General Electric Oil and Gas, who is also keen to sign up as a security trooper, said: "Everybody can do-

nate but not everyone can be an SAF volunteer... it's a challenge that is well worth it."

While people like Mr Bland and Mr Son are stepping forward as volunteers to fulfil their personal aspirations, the SAF also benefits from the sharing of their expertise.

Major Alvin Phua, who heads the Air Force National Servicemen Branch in the Air Manpower Department, said volunteers with engineering expertise can act as

consultants and share their industries' best practices to "improve work processes" in the air force.

Pharmacist and part-time polytechnic lecturer Jeremy Wong Weng Joon, 29, a Malaysia-born PR, said he is keen to sign up as a medical trainer.

Although he has yet to inform his employer about his intentions, he is confident that he will get the go-ahead. "If they support NS-men, why not volunteers?"

JERMYN CHOW

About the corps

Who can volunteer?

■ Women, first-generation permanent residents and new citizens who are not liable for national service, aged between 18 and 45.

What can volunteers serve as?

- C-4 expert
- Airbase civil engineer, naval safety engineer or naval combat/platform systems engineer
- Infomedia staff
- Legal specialist staff
- Merchant ship operations trainer or merchant ship engineering trainer
- Doctor, nurse, dentist, radiographer or medical technologist
- Bridge watchkeeper or deck operator (seamanship)
- Defence psychologist
- Auxiliary security trooper

What will the training entail?

- Continuous stay-in-camp training or training sessions spread over several weekends.
- Two weeks of basic training to pick up basic soldiering skills.
- A week of qualification training to prepare volunteers for their specific roles.
- A week of advanced training for volunteers in more demanding roles to learn about close combat training and live firing.

Where to sign up?

■ Singapore Armed Forces Volunteer Corps website at www.mindf.gov.sg/safvc or via forms from the Central Manpower Base.