



In remembrance: *Wong Yue Sie* *(1960-2010)*

by LTC (Dr) Ng Yih Yng and LTC (Dr) Lionel Cheng

Wong Yue Sie touched and shaped innumerable lives in his career as a soldier and a doctor. Much has been shared about his work at Singapore General Hospital and SingHealth in the past four years, but Yue Sie's steadfast dedication in serving the nation for twenty years prior to 2006 is something that many may not know of as well. He inspired generations of military medical leaders, and drove the transformation of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Medical Corps into what it is today. His enduring legacy is felt in all areas of the third Generation SAF Medical Corps.

Wong Yue Sie was called up for national service and received the Sword of Honour in his medical officer cadet course in 1986 – the year of the Hotel New World collapse. As an NSF medical officer, he spent days at the site of collapse, helping to coordinate the medical resources mobilised. It was during crises like this, and in his daily NSF work as a medical staff officer when he realised that there was plenty of work to be done, and that good people needed to step forward. Not being one to sit back and complain, he decided it was his duty to stand up and be counted upon, and signed on as a regular medical officer. "Yue Sie dared the rest of us to sign on to do something about it", one of his

peers recalled. In fact, many of his peers did follow his lead, and subsequently formed an important generation of senior military medical leaders.

In 1991, when the first Gulf War broke out, he was the deputy team leader of a 30-man SAF medical team that aided coalition forces in treating war casualties. This was a major operational SAF deployment at that time and despite facing the constant threats of missile attacks, his resolve to contribute to the medical corps was unwavering.

As the Chief of the SAF Medical Corps from 2001 to 2006, his exemplary leadership guided us through the SARS crisis, H5N1 contingency planning, and

a number of disaster relief operations – the most memorable of which was the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004. He orchestrated the timely medical response, a manifestation of a well-practiced system of manpower, information, operations and resource management.

Yue Sie was also well known for his public health approach to quality improvements and bottom-up focus in problem-solving. He would organise fortnightly visits to medical centres see first-hand the problems unique to each centre, in order to understand the processes needed to solve them collectively. Those of us who had the privilege of accompanying him on such visits can attest to the amazingly detailed knowledge he had for the ground processes, and his deep concern for making things work better.

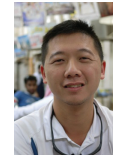
Yue Sie was one of those rare individuals who was able to look at things from both a strategic and ground perspective. His global view of what a quality healthcare system should be, and how healthcare delivery could be systematically managed allowed the emergence of the Military Medicine Institute as a key pillar of primary and specialist healthcare services in the SAF. Under his watch, the SAF Medical Corps completed an impressive gamut of ISO, OSHAS, PDS and SQC quality initiatives. Those of us who had a “taste” of JCI in hospitals can only imagine the commitment to quality required to make that happen.

At the same time, while charting the strategic course of the medical corps, Yue Sie never lost sight of the challenges of the frontline medic on the ground. During ground visits, he would often be spotted crouched on the floor, going through the medical stores of an operational deployment while engaged in animated conversation with a medic. It was during such times when he honed his detailed appreciation of whether the medical policies dictated from headquarters actually made sense in real life.

Above all his great achievements and accolades, we remember Yue Sie most for how he treated others. He was that special kind of officer who earned our respect not by the right of his rank, but by the content

of his character. He was tremendously busy, but always managed to spare a moment to listen to us and provide timely advice on personal or career decisions. He had no airs about him, and believed strongly that one should lead by example in all things. Speak to any military officer who has worked closely with him, and you will find a fiercely loyal colleague, willing to go beyond the call of duty for a leader who was deeply cherished and respected.

Yue Sie, we will remember you, always. **SMA**



Yih Yng is a military emergency medicine physician with an interest in public health and mobile technology; he dreams of hanging out at the junction where they all meet.



Lionel is a diagnostic radiologist and military physician. Between reading CT scans and dealing with military medical matters, he always carves out time for running because it keeps him sane.



► Dr Wong Yue Sie working at his station during the first Gulf War

