

BG (Ret) A/Prof Lim Meng Kin

– *Soldier, Academic and Servant Leader*

(2 February 1950 - 31 January 2013)

By A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean

Meng Kin was awarded a distinction in Social Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) in his medical undergraduate days (MBBS Singapore 1974) and he made this arena of Medicine his life's work. His accomplishments in Military Medicine, and in health policy and management were stellar. His administrative and relating skills burnished the organisations he worked in. His caring personality endeared him to colleagues and friends.

The soldier: Military Medicine


Meng Kin joined the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) in 1975 specialising in Aviation Medicine and was the first doctor to attain the rank of Brigadier-General. He built up the SAF Medical Corps and was its Chief from 1986 to 1995. He led Military Medicine support in many overseas SAF operations, such as the Gulf War of 1990.

However, it was back home in the aftermath of the Hotel New World collapse in August 1986 that he showed his true mettle. The six-storey building had disintegrated in less than a minute, trapping many civilians inside. Meng Kin crawled through unstable "rat holes" bored into the concrete rubble, to rescue many injured civilians trapped within. He was awarded the Public Service Star later that year.

Meng Kin also nurtured the medical research capabilities of the SAF, founding the Defence Medical Research Institute and serving as its Director from 1994 to 1996. After relinquishing this position, he extended his leadership to restructure public health institutions as the Chief Executive Officer of the Health Corporation of Singapore (now known as MOH Holdings) for the next two years before joining academia.

The academic: health policy and management

Meng Kin was awarded the Diploma in Aviation Medicine (UK) in 1977, MSc Occupational Medicine (Singapore) in 1982, and

A portrait of A/Prof Lim Meng Kin, a middle-aged man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

A/Prof Lim Meng Kin

Master of Public Health in Health Policy and Management (Harvard) in 1990, and also conferred fellowship of many professional bodies. He joined the National University of Singapore (NUS) as an associate professor of health policy and management in 1999, and was put in charge of the Master of Medicine (Public Health) and the Master of Business Administration (Specialisation in Healthcare Management) programmes. He published numerous papers and editorials in august journals, including an editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

In recent years, he consulted with many international bodies such as the World Health Organization and the World Bank. One example was a commission to recommend the rebuilding of the healthcare system in West Bank and Gaza which had been devastated by war. Back home, he provided yeoman service to many institutions like the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore and the Ministry of Manpower. He served as a board member of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics & Professionalism since 2002.

The servant leader: leading and relating

NUS recognised Meng Kin's exceptional attributes as a servant leader and appointed him Director of its Office of Alumni Relations in 2010. Meng Kin epitomised the qualities of the servant leader. He led with humility, vision and example. At work, his motto was "to work as if I am staying and to plan as if I am leaving".

Military Medicine in Singapore owes its standing to his bold vision. The Hotel New World rescues in 1986 revealed Meng Kin's true servant spirit. He saved the lives of many trapped civilians by his acts of bravery and sacrifice even as his wife was then in hospital after delivering his second son a few days prior. These selfless attributes to serve were anchored on his steadfast Christian faith.

In an obituary published in the *Straits Times* on 2 February 2013, his classmates from the medical class of 1974 wrote: "Meng Kin, we will miss your friendship and hearing your hearty laughter." He had this disarming laughter from the heart that reached out to people. His concerns for his friends were legendary. He also related to others through his gift for drawing and caricature.

Meng Kin is survived by his wife Sook Cheng, two sons Kenneth and Derek, daughter-in-law Trina and grandson Michael. Meng Kin was loved and will be missed by his family, by his many friends, and by the many whose lives he touched. The medical profession is proud to have had the late A/Prof Lim Meng Kin, the soldier, academic and servant leader as its member. **SMA**



A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean was President of SMA from 1996 to 1999. He and A/Prof Lim Meng Kin were medical school classmates and friends.



Meng Kin (first from right) with then Minister for Health Dr Tony Tan (second from right) at the site of the Hotel New World disaster in 1986



Meng Kin (second from left) and a Red Cross team distributing aid in post-tsunami Meulaboh, Aceh in 2005



Meng Kin (second row, first from left) with fellow academics at the AWI (Association of Pacific Rim Universities [APRU] World Institute) meeting for Public Health in Stanford University in 2009



Meng Kin (first from left) received the NUS Excellence Award from NUS President Prof Tan Chorh Chuan (second from right) at the NUS Excellence Day in 2011