



## PROFILE



## TEXT BY

**LTC (DR) ADRIAN TAN**

LTC (Dr) Adrian Tan holds the appointment of Head of Army Developmental Force Medical Group. An orthopaedic surgeon by training, he has a keen interest in medical humanitarian missions, having been trained by the United Nations in disaster assessment and coordination.

Singapore celebrates her 50th birthday this year. We owe much of our success to our political and economic stability. Yet, Singaporeans often forget how fortunate we are to be sheltered from the natural disasters that befall our neighbours. It is, therefore, important that Singapore extends her hand in friendship and assistance in their time of need.

While the purpose of the military forces is to avert violence and destruction, the SAF Medical Corps serves to alleviate and mitigate the suffering of mankind, whether in war or in peace.

I have had the privilege to serve on five medical missions with the SAF. Most recently, I was the Medical Team Commander of the SAF medical mission to Nepal. When we first set eyes on the devastation caused by the quake, our hearts sank; everywhere, we saw displaced people who had to camp out in open spaces to avoid collapsed buildings. We served the injured at our medical post in Gorkana and sent out mobile medical teams to remote villages to reach those who were unable to get help due to the inaccessibility of their villages.

The patients recounted stories of falling debris and caving roofs. Some

had fractures and infected wounds. Others suffered from poor sanitation or exposure to the cold. However, the most poignant stories were those about the loss of friends and relatives. Though they said little, we could see the emotions in their eyes, and there was little else we could do except to hold their hands and give them the best medical attention we could.

A medical mission of this scale involves a rigorous timetable. But I had to find time to sit down and reflect on the day in order to find the focus to carry out the mission. This was different from being a clinician in a hospital. On a mission, I had to think and make the right decisions; decisions that could affect the medical operations, our medical supply, and the safety and welfare of the medical team.

Despite the suffering I have witnessed in such medical missions, there is one common thread that runs through — we saw goodness in the people who laboured day and night, at the risk of their own health and safety, for those in need. After the Nepal quake, the locals showed great courage and resilience, rallying together to assist their fellow men.

I recall an elderly lady who had been treated by our team. A few days after her treatment, she returned with bags of food, prepared for us in gratitude. Despite her poverty, she gave all that she could, and it humbled us to accept her gift. While we go on a mission to render assistance, often, the mission leaves us richer from the experience. The very people we helped also taught us lessons in resilience, courage and generosity.

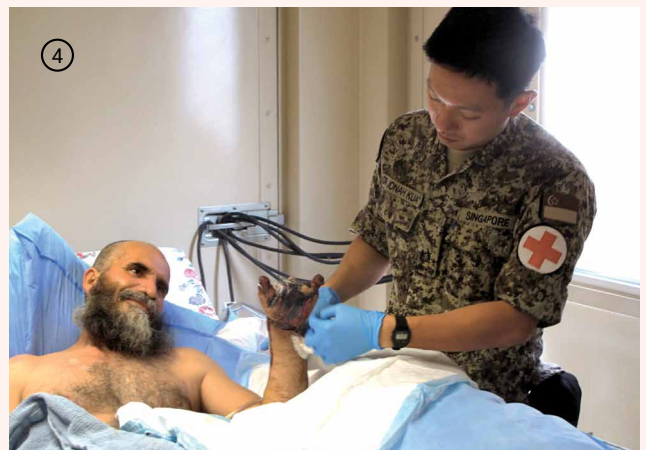
Therefore, we should always be proud and appreciative of our vocation as medical men and women. We should also consider ourselves fortunate to have had the opportunity to undergo medical training as well as to put our training and skills to use in the assistance of others.

We do not seek any other purpose; not for fame nor for glory. ♦



*Legend*

- 1.** One of the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief efforts by the SAF Medical Team in the 1990s.
- 2.** Evacuation during the mishap of Hotel New World.
- 3.** LTC (Dr) Adrian Tan providing medical treatment to a local during Operation Swift Lion (OSL) in Nepal.
- 4.** MAJ (Dr) Jonah Kua treating an Afghan patient with a crush injury to his hand.





*Legend*

- 5.** The SAF and Ministry of Health Teams were received at the reception ceremony after the OSL (Nepal) in 2015.
- 6.** LTC (Dr) Adrian Tan, second from left, leading the resuscitation of an Afghan boy, a victim of a bomb blast.
- 7.** BG (then COL) Tan Chuan-Jin led the Humanitarian Assistance Support Group to provide emergency relief to Meulaboh, Aceh in 2004.
- 8.** LTC (Dr) Adrian Tan (right) presenting the symbol of the Singapore team presence to Dutch colleagues in Uruzgan, Afghanistan.

