

FALL IN!

THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO SURVIVING
BASIC MILITARY TRAINING



MATTHEW CHEW
and **NICHOLAS U JIN**

FALL IN!

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ATTENTION

READ THIS FIRST!

Hello! And thank you for getting this book! Chances are, you've picked this book up because you're getting ready to enlist for NS. Or maybe you know someone who is going to do so. All Singaporean males have to do National Service, or NS.

National Service can be an intimidating prospect if you don't know what is in store. Sure, you can rely on stories from internet forums or from your older relatives who have been through it before. You can also get information from the Ministry of Defence's official website.

But NS has changed in 53 years. You want to know the inside scoop—what the daily routines really are like, the lifehacks, maybe even some of the secrets—don't you?

That's precisely why we wrote this book. See, we also experienced the same anxieties and concerns prior to our enlistments. Unsure of what would happen, we would constantly check the group chats on our phones.

“Keep your head low and accept whatever they might do to you,” one friend advised.

“Make sure you have good relations with those around you and don’t wayang (be melodramatic) or you’ll be lynched,” said another.

It wasn’t entirely helpful, but it was all we had the night before what we dramatically called the Day of Judgement.

Within these pages, we hope you find a useful guide to NS, as told by two young guys—that’s us—who’ve been through it. Having just finished our NS at the time of writing this introduction, the experience is still fresh in our minds. In fact, many of the sections here were written while we were still in camp.

Now, we were not regulars or even particularly outstanding NSFs (don’t worry, see the Glossary for all the ABCs and acronyms you’ll need to know). We were just corporals inspired to write down some of the things we’d learnt in the army to pass them on to the next generation. Fifty years from now, maybe they’ll read this book for a brief snapshot of what NS was like “in the old days”.

Like many NSFs, we desperately looked to ORD as quickly as possible. But through it all, NS has helped us grow. We met people from all backgrounds and forged stronger friendships than we thought possible. We became more independent and responsible. Although we can’t say we’d do it again if we were given the choice, we managed to find the most meaning possible in serving our country for two years, and we hope you will discover a meaningful experience too.

If not, too bad! Everybody serves their two years in the end.

The institution that is National Service is a broad one, so we’ve done our best to write a book that would be useful to most without being too long.

This is why we chose to focus on Basic Military Training, or BMT, something the large majority of National Servicemen—past, present and future—have gone, are going and will go through.

This book was written not only for the prospective recruit in mind but also for all the anxious parents and girlfriends, kaypoh siblings or anyone else, really, who wants to know what goes on in the early days of a recruit’s life.

We wanted to make this an effective guidebook so those reading it—yes, you—will have a thorough understanding on what to expect.

Within these pages are brief but important outlines of what exactly happens during BMT, ranging from your pre-enlistment medical check-up to what happens after your Passing Out Parade, or POP, when you are assigned your full-time military unit.

We hope the contents of this book can help you through BMT. We’ll tell you how to prepare for that first step, what the daily routine is like, as well as some tips that we found made our life a bit easier while in BMT.

Note: None of our methods are illegal or immoral. There, we just needed to get that out of the way. Now, let’s get you on yours.

NATIONAL SERVICE

A (VERY) BRIEF INTRODUCTION

What is National Service? It's a compulsory period of service for Singaporean males in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), the Singapore Police Force or the Singapore Civil Defence Force. Most will go through service in the SAF, which is the core focus of this book. The earliest you can be called up for National Service is 16.5 years of age, but others will enlist much later due to deferment for their studies.

Technically speaking, NS can be considered to include your full-time National Service and your time as an Operationally Ready National Serviceman, or a reservist. The former lasts up to two years, during which you're designated as an NSF. As a reservist, or NSman, you have to do 10 cycles of training, up until you turn 40.

NS can be broken down into these milestones:

- Basic Military Training, or BMT
- Passing Out Parade, or POP (marks the end of BMT)
- Assignment to an active military unit
- Operationally Ready Date, or ORD (when you finish your time as an NSF)
- NSman, or reservist period

Our focus is on the full-time National Service period. The duration of your service as an NSF can last from 1 year and 10 months to 2 years. This depends on your Physical Employment Standards (PES) grade and the results of your Individual Physical Proficiency Test (IPPT), which consists of push-ups, sit-ups and a 2.4 kilometre run.

And let's just say this now: taking the time to pass your IPPT with flying colours (that is, scoring more than 61 points) will be the best gift you can ever give yourself, as this means you qualify to do the shorter version of NS. A caveat though: this two-month "discount" is only for those who are certified as combat fit.

But that's all in the future. We said this would be a very brief introduction, didn't we? For now, let's just focus on getting ready for NS, which, coincidentally, is the title of the next chapter.

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GETTING READY FOR NS

National Service may start on the day you enlist, but its administrative process starts earlier. Way earlier.

It all begins when you turn 16.5 years old. Like Harry Potter receiving owls with letters saying he's ready to be enrolled in Hogwarts, you too will receive a letter informing you that you have reached the age to be called up for NS (minus the owl service).

THE MEDICAL CHECK-UP

Apart from telling you that you're now eligible for NS, the first letter will also inform you to book a medical check-up at the Central Manpower Base, or CMPB. You will have to book your medical check-up using your SingPass account, so make sure that it is set up beforehand.

In our experience, it's best to book your appointment as soon as possible, for the earliest opportunity available. Oh, and make sure you really are free to attend. You can

only change that date once, so avoid picking a date so far in the future that you cannot predict your schedule or are liable to forget (mark it down on your calendar in big, bright red, bold marker).

Before you go for your check-up, you'll need to make sure you do the following. (These are so important, we've **BOLDED** them so you'll remember. You can thank us later.)

1. Take your NRIC photo or identification.

This can be your passport, your student EZ-Link card or driving licence. For one, they need to identify you. You also need to exchange your identification for a visitor pass at the guardhouse before you can enter CMPB.

2. Take your medical questionnaire.

What medical questionnaire, you say? It's the one you have to download off the CMPB website, print out and complete. And yes, **TAKE IT**. It asks all about your family's medical history. Oh, and please make sure it's signed at the end.

3. Take any other medical documents.

If you have had any significant past injuries or serious medical conditions, take any medical reports or X-rays (if necessary). This will help the medical officer to accurately determine your PES grade, which can affect what you do in NS. Please do not, however, bring every MC you have obtained from a clinic throughout your life so far.

4. Take your education certificate and transcript.

This only applies if you have taken a course at a private university or studied overseas.

Apart from taking your height and weight during the medical check-up, the medical officer will do various tests, including:

- Blood/urine test
- Eyesight test
- Dental check-up
- X-ray of chest (to check lungs and heart)
- Ear, nose and throat checks
(to check for any hearing abnormalities)
- Electrocardiogram (ECG, for heart)
- Examination by medical officer

If you have any medical history, please tell your medical officer and show him the relevant documents. You know, the ones we told you to bring? You may be referred to a specialist for further testing. During this period, if they are unable to assign you a permanent PES grade, you will be considered PES D (refer to PES on page 7 for more information).

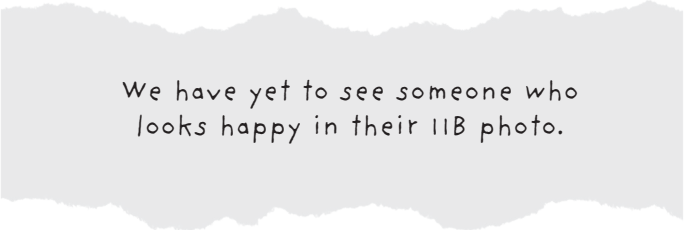
If you're here looking to "chao keng" or try to weasel out of it, here's what you should do: **DON'T BOTHER**. Just be honest with your medical history, because only combat fit soldiers are eligible for the two-month reduction in service.

THE PHOTO SESSION

During this time, they will also take your photo. This will be used for your SAF identity card (11B) and the SAF EZ-Link card (11C). Please ensure that:

- Your hair is neatly cut and not coloured.
- You shave in advance and not sport a beard.
- You wear your spectacles if you are short- or long-sighted. Avoid wearing contact lenses.

And this is probably the only time you will be required to wear T-shirt and shorts for an appointment (with sports shoes or sandals). But no singlets, long-sleeved shirts, formal shoes or jewellery, please.



We have yet to see someone who looks happy in their 11B photo.

THE PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENT

During your CMPB medical check-up, you will also be sent for a psychometric assessment. This is not to test whether you know the metric system. It's to assess things like your verbal reasoning and pattern recognition. Don't stress—this isn't a major exam. They use this to choose the vocation best suited to you, based on your answers to the test.

THE PES OF YOU

A few days after your medical check-up, you will receive a message informing you to check your PES grade online. (PS: you need your SingPass to find out your PES grade.)

The Mindef website says the PES grade is “assigned based on your medical condition... Should your PES change due to your medical conditions during your NS period, you may be reassigned to a different vocation or appointment accordingly”.

Basically, that means whatever you do in NS depends on your PES grade. Here is a brief translation of the bits that do matter.

PES A

Fit for all combat vocations. You have no previous medical conditions and relatively good eyesight. You're eligible for Command School and have a chance to get picked for infantry, combat engineers and signals vocations. You are eligible for the two-month reduction in your NS duration.

PES B1

Fit for most combat vocations. Technically the same as PES A, except for people who have experienced medical conditions in the past or have poor eyesight.

PES B2

Suitable for some combat vocations, and combat support vocations. Those in PES B2 are similar to those in PES B1, except that the former may be excused from static

stations (push-ups, sit-ups) in the IPPT. You probably won't be eligible for Command School, and common army vocations include transport operator, admin support assistant and supply assistant.

PES B3/B4

Suitable for some combat vocations, and combat support vocations. The PES B3 and B4 grades were only recently introduced, with the first batch of soldiers receiving them in 2018. You'll undergo modified BMT training and will not have to do some High Key activities such as the Standard Obstacle Course or IPPT. Your route marches are also modified—10 kilometres for PES B3, 4 kilometres for PES B4—and you'll go for a 5D/4N field camp. You won't be eligible for Command School. Common vocations include admin support assistant and supply assistant.

PES BP

Fit for Obese BMT. If your body mass index (BMI) is above 27, you're classified as PES BP, and your BMT will be 19 weeks long. You still can get posted to active combat units such as infantry, combat engineers and signals.

PES C

Suitable for some combat vocations and combat support vocations. This sounds the same as PES B3/B4, but PES C soldiers are those with medical conditions that do not allow them to go through physically strenuous training.

They will not have to do some High Key activities such as the SOC, IPPT or route march. Common vocations include admin support assistant, technician and supply assistant.

PES D

Temporarily unfit for grading and pending further review. This is applicable to pre-enlistees only, and it means that more time or tests are required to determine your medical fitness. This typically takes about two to three months, but it may be longer depending on your medical condition. You may be asked to attend further medical reviews as well.

PES E1, E9

Suitable for combat service support and service vocations. Chances are you'll be doing mostly administrative duties, as you probably have a condition that does not allow you to participate in most training activities.

PES F

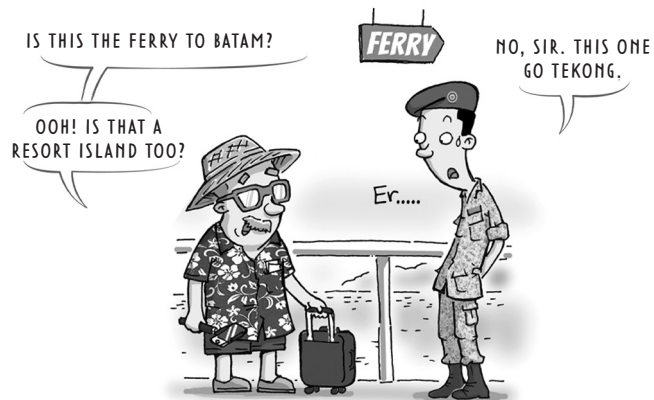
Medically unfit for any form of service. Reserved only for severe medical cases.

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BEFORE BMT

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Alright, we know you didn't get this book to learn about pre-enlistment administrative processes. We're here to talk about Basic Military Training. BMT is the start of your National Service. This is usually conducted on Pulau Tekong, located off the east coast of Singapore. You get accommodation, all meals provided, free clothes and loads of activities. There's even an Olympic-sized pool!



For many, BMT will be an abrupt change from comfortable civilian life. The transition can be rough, because the military is trying to introduce you to a lifestyle of regimentation and discipline. Your superiors will be quite strict throughout the duration of BMT. (Don't worry, NS life gets better after BMT. Unless you're headed to Command School, in which case, suck it up; you're going to get an increase in pay and rank.)

Typically, you can expect to undergo the following training programmes and activities during the standard BMT:

- Weapon handling and presentation
- IPPT training
- Strength training
- Standard Obstacle Course
- Battle Inoculation Course
- Swimming
- Route marches
- Basic Trainfire Course
- Individual field craft
- Field camp
- Urban operations
- Grenade throwing
- National Education

But, as Jason Derulo sang, nothing lasts forever. And neither does BMT. How long your BMT lasts depends on your PES grade. To wit:

- PES A/B1 recruits undergo a nine-week BMT on Pulau Tekong. An additional eight weeks of physical training is required for those who did not achieve 61 points at their IPPT prior to enlistment.
- PES B2/B3/B4 recruits undergo a modified nine-week
- BMT on Pulau Tekong.
- PES BP recruits undergo a 19-week BMT on Pulau Tekong.
- PES C recruits undergo a nine-week BMT at Kranji Camp II.
- PES E recruits undergo a nine-week BMT at Kranji Camp II.

Here's the good news: preparing for BMT itself isn't very difficult. There are a few things that you can do now to get yourself physically and mentally ready. After all, the person responsible for what happens to you is...you. So, here are some things you can do to prep for BMT—if you haven't started already.

Learn how to wash, dry and fold your clothes. Really. You're old enough.

Learn how to communicate with others using your voice and not WhatsApp, Telegram, WeChat, etc. You'll be working in a team, so communication is important. Also, you won't want to bring your smartphone to the

jungle. And you'll not want to use your hands for anything but holding your weapon.

Start exercising. We didn't really need to say this, right? There are many physically strenuous tasks you'll be required to do. The fitter you are, the higher the chances of your being able to handle all that physical activity. Also, exercise helps to enhance your mental capabilities. Also, you'll probably get a better score for your IPPT.

Read this book.

HOW LONG DOES NS LAST?

National Service lasts from 1 year and 10 months to 2 years, depending on your Individual Physical Proficiency Test (IPPT) results. It comprises three main tests: push-ups, sit-ups and a 2.4 kilometre run. Your IPPT score determines your NS duration. While you can't alter your PES grade, you can work on your IPPT score. In total, your score should ideally exceed 61 points (with a minimum of 1 point per station). The reason? If you can achieve that score, your NS term is reduced by two months! That means you get to complete NS **EIGHT WHOLE WEEKS EARLIER** than others!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Matthew Chew lives his life looking for fascinating people with interesting stories. He served in the Singapore Armed Forces from 2016 to 2018. He is currently pursuing his dream of becoming a doctor at the National

University of Singapore, and you'll probably find him studying or complaining about how much he has to study.

Hopeless entrepreneur **Nicholas U Jin** can probably be found lying on the floor of a muay Thai gym thinking about his next big idea. During his National Service "career" (2016–2017), he was a recruit, an officer cadet and a clerk. He is currently learning jurisprudence at Merton College, University of Oxford.



“Actually accurate and clear. If SAF issued this to all recruits, maybe there wouldn’t be so many blur sotongs around.”

—Private Chan Bing En, currently in NS

“A concise, quirky guide... with nuggets of wisdom.”

—Teo Xue Shen, author of *18 Walls* who completed full-time NS in 2018

Fall In! pulls back the curtain on a rite of passage for every Singaporean male (and his worried parents and girlfriend). This easy-to-read, comprehensive guide goes beyond what Mindef will tell you and is the perfect companion to Basic Military Training (BMT).

You’ll find out:

- what to bring to make your life easier
- what happens exactly on Enlistment Day
- how to identify the MC King (and other typical characters you’ll meet)
- and so much more...



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