Recruit, senang diri*!

This book’s for you

*at ease, in Malay

By Shree Ann Mathavan
shreeann@spn.com.sg

D
o the terms half left down, 5BX and fastcraft make any sense to you?

If not, you’ve obviously not been through Basic Military Training (BMT).

Half left down means to assume the push-up position, 5BX are five kinds of basic physical exercises and fastcraft is the ferry which takes national service men to and from Pulau Tekong.

Such BMT lingo is explained in a new book, From Boys To Men, an unofficial recruit’s guide to BMT in the Singapore Army.

Other topics covered include pre-NS procedures, rank structure, daily routine and proper dress code. There are even colourful lyrics of songs sung in camp.

The book is the work of Mr Lester Chee, 23, and Mr Teh Wei Cheng, 25, both studying business management at Singapore Management University, and Mr Tan Jun Da, 23, a dentistry student at the National University of Singapore.

They had taken time to get used to life in camp and felt such a book could help.

“Weekly, our book includes the more boring stuff and procedures as well as the fun stuff like the BMT lingo, the relationship between recruits and instructors and so on,” said Mr Teh.

Official resources available to recruits are the National Service Portal (www.ns.sg) and the Singapore Army website (www.army.gov.sg).

Mr Chee and Mr Tan, who have known each other since they were 15, thought of the book about four years ago.

The two created a manuscript and spent about a year meeting publishers. But publishers all wanted the students to cough up the printing and distribution costs.

Recalled Mr Chee: “Most of them didn’t believe in our work.”

Added Mr Tan: “That was the time when we really felt like giving up.”

Then, in June 2005, a mutual friend introduced both men to Mr Teh’s sister, Ms Alvinia Teh, 23, a director of publishing company MultiNine Corporation.

SIMILAR CONCEPT

And it turned out that Mr Teh had been working on a similar concept and had come up with his own manuscript on questions frequently asked by recruits. So they put their material together.

Information was culled from interviews with past recruits, personal experience and official websites.

Mr Teh said juggling the rigours of undergraduate life and their pet project wasn’t difficult. All it took was proper time management.

MultiNine agreed to print and distribute the books at no cost to the three writers.

It was agreed that 10 per cent of the proceeds would go to the writers and another 10 per cent to the publishers, with the remaining 80 per cent going to production and distribution.

The book, which had its first print run of 2,000 copies, retails at major bookstores for $6.50 each.

The Ministry of Defence wasn’t consulted during the writing of the book, but a copy has been sent to it.

The New Paper found that reactions to the book have been mixed.

Muhd Ayub Mohd Shari, 19, a Ngee Ann Polytechnic student, said: “I think you can’t really learn these things by reading. And I think learning from your mistakes is better.”

But Neo Kuan Liang, 19, another Ngee Ann Polytechnic student, said: “It’s $6.50 that would cover me for a two-year period, so I think it’s worth buying.”

Mr Jonathan Kwok, 22, an NUS undergraduate who completed his NS two years ago, also felt the book was a good idea.

He said: “I went through BMT feeling lost for the first few weeks – not knowing what to do or expect. “So I would have probably got the book if it had been out then.”

* Friends Mr Tan (left) and Mr Chee (right) teamed up with Mr Teh (centre), who was working on a similar book.