'Food for the soul'

DSTA engineer Ong Chee Kiong enjoys harnessing creativity and cutting-edge technology to boost Singapore's defence

by teo kuan yee

MR ONG Chee Kiong was only 11 years old when he displayed a knack for engineering, using basic principles of electromagnetism to produce a battery-powered intruder alarm.

He recalls: "I used metal pieces that I dismantled from discarded items to mechanise the alarm such that the bell would be triggered whenever someone came into contact with it."

During national service, Mr Ong served as a Commando and understood better that the peace and security in Singapore should not be taken for granted.

After graduating from the National University of Singapore with a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering (Second Upper Honours), he started work in the private sector but did not feel a sense of fulfilment.

Mr Ong decided to join the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA) in 2008 as it satisfies his passion for engineering and his desire to contribute to national defence.

With a diverse pool of engineers and defence scientists, DSTA harnesses cutting-edge technology to meet Singapore's defence needs and national security.

3rd Generation armed forces

Mr Ong, 33, is a project lead in the Networked Systems Programme Centre in DSTA, which acquires and develops Integrated Knowledge-based Command and Control capabilities for the SAF (Singapore Armed Forces).

"The SAF is constantly looking to technology to transform itself into a formidable fighting force. Technology is an essential enabler for the SAF to realise a 3rd Generation fighting force," says Mr Ong.

"For a technology enthusiast, it is food for the soul to work with cutting-edge and advanced systems. DSTA has exceeded many of my expectations in terms of learning opportunities as well as career development. I find my work in DSTA enjoyable, fulfilling and enriching," he says.

Besides conducting market surveys and technical assessments of systems, he holds regular meetings with customers and performs on-site systems testing and evaluations.

He also travels occasionally to learn and exchange best practices with foreign counterparts.

Stimulating environment

There is never a dull moment in his job, given the technical challenges he faces and the dynamic nature of his work, which constantly requires creativity to come up with an effective solution.

"Innovation lies at the very core of what we do. Through innovative ideas, we aspire to shape the defence capability of Singapore and make a positive difference to the people who we are responsible to protect," he says.

Mr Ong relishes the rare opportunity to be part of the team responsible for the preparation work to design, implement and test the sound systems for the recent National Day Parade (NDP) 2013 where he chaired the Public Address and Sound Team and oversaw the audio systems.

Prior to each rehearsal, the team conducted stringent checks to test the performance and integrity of the entire sound system, and monitored for possible interference to their wireless devices.

"These tasks go beyond my daily job scope, which makes life at DSTA exciting and diverse in nature.

"Taking part in the NDP for the first time was certainly an eye opener for me. I am honoured to contribute to Singapore on yet another level," he says.

To excel in DSTA, apart from having a strong interest in engineering, it is important to have an open and inquisitive mind, be receptive to new ideas and always questions the conventional ways of doing things.

"It is only when one challenges the norm that a game-changing solution is born," explains Mr Ong.

A handle on time

It was also at DSTA that he met his wife. They married two years ago and had a baby boy this year.

He says: "I strive for work-life effectiveness rather than work-life balance. I see my job as an integral part of my life, rather than a separate and obligatory activity so that I can better align and prioritise my activities.

"I am thankful that the flexible work arrangements in DSTA that allows me greater flexibility in terms of time management, as long as project outcomes are met.

"At DSTA, I am exposed to diverse and classified projects. From the child tinkerer to the engineer that I am today, I am thankful for every opportunity to engineer and innovate. Engineering is definitely my calling in life."

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– Mr Ong Chee Kiong, project lead in Networked Systems Programme Centre, DSTA

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