

## PART THREE

### INDARTO ISKANDAR PROVES HIS FAITH AND SHOWS HIS DEDICATION IN HIS LIFE

#### CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*I should set out my case to him, my mouth would not want for arguments. The I could learn his defence, every word of it, taking note of everything he said to me. Would he use all his strength in this debate with me? No, he would have to give me a hearing. (Psalm 23:4-6)*

*God is clothed in fearful splendour; he, Shaddai, is far beyond our reach. Supreme in power, in equity, excelling in justice, yet no oppressor – no wonder that men fear him, and thoughtful men hold him in awe. (Psalm 37:23-24)*

#### INDARTO'S CHILDHOOD AND SUBSEQUENT RECOLLECTIONS

I was born into a loving family of Handayani (Kwik Hian Nio) and Sunaryo Iskandar (Liem Soe Liang) on 13 November 1949 in *Jalan Lingga III* number 19, Semarang. In chronological order, I am their second child.

My father was then employed by *PT Rajawali Nusantara* (formerly *Oey Tiong Ham Concern*), where he worked himself up from the lowest level, and after completing *Bond A* and *Bond B* diplomas, was eventually promoted to be a bookkeeper. I remember him as a gentle and modest person, and sensitive to other people and his surroundings. In all my life I never recall him raising his voice in anger to any of us seven children.

My mother helped augment the family income by managing an essential household items shop. Endowed with strong character, she made an example of herself when she taught us children to be frugal and careful not to spend more than we had.

I lived a big chunk of my life in Semarang, where I went to school from primary to senior secondary levels. I enjoyed the love and protection of my parents and my eldest brother Hendra Lim Iskandar. Hendra was a serious and hardworking student who was accepted at the University of Diponegoro's Faculty of Technology, in Semarang. He was a good model for us, his younger siblings, Johnny (Liem Hing Djwan), Chandra (Liem Bing Tjwan), Handoyo (Liem Siong Kiem), Indriati (Liem Swan Ien), Ita Ratnasari (Liem Swan Giok), and myself.

## SUFFERING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

When I was young I sometimes had to contend with people's discriminative behaviour against me because of my Chinese ethnicity. It was discomfiting even hurtful. We cannot choose the locality and the ethnicity into which we want to be born.

I was aware that this behaviour was not widespread. It was only evident among a minority of the population. Nonetheless, it was not helpful in nurturing the national sentiment and national unity. However there has been evidence of institutionalised discrimination against us ethnic Chinese, such as in problems when dealing with government officials when applying for birth certificates for our children, in limited opportunity to study in national universities as it was the case with entering the civil service. The practice of discrimination still lingers until today. My son Steffie recounted his own experience being on the receiving end of the discrimination policy.

So, right from a young age I have had a strong desire to prove that not all ethnic Chinese are only interested in reaping financial benefit from the country. I wanted to represent the ethnic Chinese who are ready to devote themselves to the nation of Indonesia. I wanted to be part of the country's national military, Indonesian Armed Forces or *Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI)*.

## AIDED BY JUDO TRAINING

I began to be interested in judo as a sport when I was in senior secondary school. I joined a training group in *Jalan Pandanaran*, owned by a Dutch descent instructor, called H. Fink. I recall prominent names with whom I trained, such as Etek Sutikno (Tik Gie), and Bambang.

Since Semarang is close to Magelang, where the prestigious National Military Academy or *Akademi Militer Nasional (AMN)* is,

their cadets often came to train in our club. Seeing them, their whole bearing, the way they behave, made me quietly look up to them.

They were well-built with good physique, visibly strong and neat, their hair cut short, their rank-badges prominent on their sleeves. They were never beaten in competitions, even if they were smaller-built than their opponents. They really came across as the chosen few.

I was determined to be one of them. When I went to a retreat with Loyola School in Ungaran, during the silent moments, I tried to communicate with God, 'God, with your blessings and permission, I would like to join the Navy School of the Armed Forces Academy of the Republic of Indonesia, or *Akademi Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (AKABRI)*.

This ambition merged with my desire to prove that ethnic Chinese were happy to be an integral part of the Indonesian nation. What could be more integral than being part of its military?

So at graduation from secondary school, I registered at the University of Diponegoro's Medical School in Semarang and *AKABRI*'s Navy Department. The former was to comply with my parents' wishes. However it was *AKABRI* which accepted me. I was one of the two applicants accepted out of one hundred and sixty-eight aspiring cadets. The other successful applicant was Djoko Sarwono who became friends with me. I believe God had heard my prayers.

## TRAINING AT *AKABRI*

I was sent for further tests in Malang together with other cadets from all over Indonesia. I was among the hundred and seventy-two cadets who passed the tests to be accepted at the *AKABRI General* in Magelang. On 14 January 1968, together with my fellow classmates, I stepped into *AKABRI General* to the beat of the drumband *Can'ka Lokananta* from the National Military Academy, and we stayed in Magelang for a year.

Forty years have passed, but I will never forget my year in the cool city of Magelang with its Mount Tidar.

I recall when we were made to crawl wearing only our outer steel helmets which, without the inner linings, would become extremely hot under the afternoon sun. We were panting, thirsty, with perspiration drenching, yet we still had to contend with the senior cadets' staff hitting the sides of our helmets. The blood on our elbows had not even dried up, we had to sing *Hymne Taruna*

on the peak of Mount Tidar. I can never forget the moments and feelings when we belted out the verse, 'We will keep fighting until our bodies break into pieces!'

Then we went through training for Infantry Fighting Techniques, side offensives, pistol firing, rifle firing, and mortar throwing, which eventually became our daily routines. The motto drilled into us was, 'It is better to be drenched in perspiration on the training fields than covered in blood in the real battles'. For one whole year, each time we completed six steps, we would have to run all the while carrying our weapons. We had to do this from the time we woke up till nine o'clock at night, before doing our run around the complex, be it on our way to have our meals, after our meals, on our way to lectures, or after our lectures. When we sat down, we had to sit upright, we were not allowed to lean back. Here we were introduced to *camaraderie* and *esprit de corps*. If one made a mistake, everyone was punished.

After three months, when we were finally officiated to become soldiers, I went home on leave for the first time to our parents' home. I was thin, suffering from beri-beri, came across as uncouth, and couldn't stay away from food. My father was so affected that he said, 'If the training is too hard for you, why don't you leave? I will cover the costs of reimbursement.'

I found my father's reactions very touching. However it was my decision to do it, and it was obvious to me that God had approved of the decision, so I was determined to stick with it.

Back in *AKABRI*, we were trained and conditioned to feel an integral part of our class, regardless of whether your father was a general, a poor farmer or a rickshaw puller. We would live the same life, and experience the same experiences. We would be purged of our personal baggage to the last speck of dignity, to the extent that a domestic helper would fare better than we did.

We were continuously punished without having done anything significantly wrong, for instance if you met a senior cadet who asked you to say his name and you didn't know (how could you know when you had only just met him?), we would be made to drink dirty laundry water or dirty dishwater spiked with chilli and flavoured with banana skin. Sometimes we were asked to massage a senior cadet to sleep. When we thought he had fallen asleep and prepared to go, he would groan, and we would have to continue and continue. Whenever we were all ready for an outing, we would be asked to polish our senior cadets' shoes or brasses, often we'd end up cancelling the outing. If there was a soldier cadet ex elite squad, he would be made to climb a tree, then jump

down while yelling, 'Command!' over and over until he'd drop from exhaustion.

I guess it was all meant to have an equalizing effect on everybody and to strengthen you mentally. We were no longer sons of high-ranking officials, wealthy businessmen, or street-hawkers. We were no longer Javanese, Batak, Irianese, Ambonese, Balinese or Chinese, we were simply the class of 1971 – the year we graduated from the Academy. These are the values I appreciated, values I would not have gained from any other kind of education.

## TRAINING AT NAVY *AKABRI* IN SURABAYA

Only when we had graduated did we gradually given space to become leaders ourselves, such as company commanders, camp commanders, battalion commanders, division commanders and so on, right up to the highest, the rank of generals.

After completing the general training for a year in Magelang, those of us with Navy cadetships were moved to Surabaya to undergo naval training for three years in Bumi Moro, at the Navy *AKABRI*, formerly known as the Navy Academy or *Akademi Angkatan Laut (AAL)*. Here we felt the searing heat of Surabaya.

The Navy's three-part ideology – discipline, hierarchy and military honour -, was implemented in everyday life, comparable to the *duty, honor and Code*, of the US Marine.

## GRADUATION AND FIELD ASSIGNMENTS

After completing the training, we began to receive field assignments. On 1 December I graduated from the *Navy AKABRI* (Class 2) or the Navy Academy (class 17), and was officiated by President Suharto at *Parkir Timur Senayan*, Jakarta, as First Officer, with the rank of Navy Second Lieutenant. My first assignment was on the navy ship *KRI Teluk Bayur* or *Teluk Bayur* – 502, a Landing Ship Tank. I was Assistant Officer for Engines. Here for the first time I was given the opportunity to lead subordinates.

I called the morning roll-calls, gave instructions for things to be done for the day, to change for the morning run and to lead group sports, from Monday to Friday. This was my routines when the ship was docked. When we were sailing, every day we were occupied with activities in the engine room. When the ship arrived at a port we were able to step out on to the quay. And we visited ports all over Indonesia, from Sabang to Merauke. It was on this

ship that I was promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant on 1 April 1974.

## MARRYING AND SETTING UP HOME WITH LONGTIME SWEETHEART

In 1975 I married a girl I had known since had been a cadet. Her name is Francisca Frida Widjaja. Her father is Ignatius Harry Widjaja (Tan Sing Tjay) and her mother Handiyani (Han Gien Loan Nio).

On 2 September 1975, our first son Stephanus Alexander Steffie Iskandar, was born with God's blessings.

We lived in the Navy Officers' complex in *Jalan Supiyandi* number 5, Kenjeran, Surabaya, close to the coast of Kenjeran. Steffie was delivered by a midwife, Tjok Darma Putra in Kenjeran Midwifery Centre. I recall we paid eight thousand rupiahs.

Our next-door neighbour asked, 'When Steffie grows up, where will you send him to university?' Frida then replied, 'It is not easy for us to be accepted in a state university, and private universities would be very expensive. So if we can afford it, we might send just him overseas.'

Years later, young Steffie would step off a minibus and come across the neighbour who would ask him, 'Stef, I hear you are going to study overseas.' To which Steffie would say, 'I didn't know that. Who told you?' And the neighbour would reply, 'Your mother.'

Steffie would then go to ask Frida if she had told the neighbour about sending him to study overseas, and Friday would say, 'Yes, I did.'

In the meantime, on 7 July 1978 I went to the Netherlands to take possession of a new ship, a Korvet, the pride of the Indonesian Navy, built at Wilton Fijenoord, Rotterdam dockyard. It is 85 metre long and 11 metre wide. Steffie was not quite three years old, and it was the first time I left my family in the course of duty, for fifteen months. They were often on their own without a domestic helper. I was acutely aware of a debt of honour to my wife and my young son for their sacrifice. I made a pledge to God and to myself, that I would make it up to Frida and Steffie who had always been loyal to me through thick and thin.

When I returned to Indonesia on 1 October 1979, Steffie cried when I picked him up, probably he had forgotten his father.

## SERVING ON SHIPS AND MOVING UP CAREER PATH

On the ship *KRI FTH*, I was Deputy Head of Engine Room. I served three years on the ship.

In 1982, I began serving on my third ship, *KRI RLI (Ratulangi)*, a Russian-made submarine in the category of Escort Ships Unit. Here my rank was Second Engine Division Officer or *Perwira Divisi Mesin 2 (Padiv M-2)*.

Then in 1985 I was moved to *KRI Patimura (PTM)*, a Korvet from Italy which Marine Commodore Yos Sudarso once commanded. I was the Head of the Engine Room. I managed to render this ship, which had not sailed since 1980, sail again. We sailed from east to west, from Surabaya non-stop to Makasar, then straight to Miangas in North Sulawesi. From Miangas we sailed west to Batam island. I served with a commander from Padang, Marine Lieutenant-Colonel Imron Harun, whom I have respected and admired until today. It was also on this ship that I began my career as Middle Officer or *Perwira Menengah (Pamen)* when I was promoted to the rank of Mayor on 1 April 1985. During my term of service on this ship I sat for the entrance tests for the Navy Institute of Technology, or *Sekolah Tinggi Teknologi Angkatan Laut (STTAL)*, as I had begun to feel that I wanted to move beyond being a marine officer with qualifications from the Academy.

One Sunday morning at the Catholic church complex in Kenjeran, I came across Marine Captain Basmiarto, one of my junior officers who also happened to have sat for the tests for *STTAL*. He congratulated me. He had just completed a duty round at the Navy Headquarters, where he had seen my name included in the list of officers accepted at *STTAL*.

I was very pleased. But the excitement did not last, because when the list was announced, my name was no longer there. I was mentioned instead, as a ticket holder to try the following year. However the following year, my name was on the list of the accepted for *DIKLAPA 2*. This only meant that I was not accepted at *STTAL*. Though *DIKLAPA 2* was equivalent to *STTAL*, graduates of *DIKLAPA* receive non-degree diplomas, while those of *STTAL* receive degrees.

No doubt I was disappointed, but my faith stopped me from feeling angry or frustrated. I was still dedicated to my work. I enrolled at Open University instead, to study Development Studies Economics, where I was accepted. So from 1986 on, I studied while working.

And in 1987 I began studies at *DIKLAPA 2*, a level of education necessary for all officers who aspire to move up to the

highest education level at the Indonesian Navy, which is the School for Navy Staff and Command, or *Sekolah Staf dan Komando Angkatan Laut (SESKOAL)*.

At graduation from *DIKLAPA 2*, I began serving on the ship *KRI KDA (Ki Hajar Dewantara) No 364*. My rank there was Main Engine Division Officer, or *Perwira Divisi Motor Pokok (Padiv MPK)*. My commander was Marine Captain Widodo AS, the current Coordinating Minister for Police, Law and Security, or *Menko Polhukam*. My Executive Officer was Marine Lieutenant Colonel Frits Mantiri, who would later become my commander on the ship *KKM KRI MLH (Malahayati)*. His position before retiring was Governor of the Navy Academy, with the rank of Junior Admiral, with two stars.

## NEAR-BATTLE EXPERIENCE

On 14 July 1988 I was assigned to *KRI MLH* as Head Engine Room Officer of *KRI MLH*, a Korvet, the same variety as *KRI FTH*.

For nearly twenty years I did field duty, which means serving on ships or in leading a company, from 1971 until 1991, from the ranks of Second Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel, discounting the times when I was studying and carrying out assignments on land.

I had experienced the ups and downs of living at sea, having to deal with the whims of nature as well as the limitations of equipment. However that was mild compared to having to fight real enemies in battles.

My first experience of simulated battle was on the *KRI MLH*, during a torpedo shooting practice using MK-44. The practice target was a simulated ship made of barrels tied up together to look like the real thing. When everything was set up, the torpedo was released. It went around once, 360 degrees, looking for its target, but instead of heading for the pretend ship, it went straight for our own ship, *KRI MLH*! Important to note that the torpedo had a higher speed of movement than that of the ship. In the United States the procedure for practice would have been to use simulated torpedoes. But in Indonesia we used the real thing!

Were we reckless or careless? Or maybe we were too dismissive about safety.

The moments where the torpedo was coming toward our ship, I heard the Commander's voice talking to me over the telephone: 'Head Engine Room Officer, is the engine normal? If it is, I'll move it to full speed!' I detected fear or extreme concern in the Commander's voice, though he didn't reveal to me what was



disturbing him. I replied, 'Normal Commander. Go ahead!' Just then the ship shot into full speed, because the torpedo was chasing our ship! The chase went on, and the distance between the torpedo and ship became smaller every second. We were all tense, nobody spoke. Six minutes passed. If in six minutes the torpedo were able to reach us, there would have been nothing of the *KRI MLH* but a name.

After six minutes the battery of the torpedo finally ran out and it fell into the sea, and we breathed a sigh of relief.

An officer in my charge later recounted his experience. When he was tasked to go up to check on deck, he saw the torpedo heading straight for our ship. He promptly rushed back down, found a safety vest and put it on, yelling, 'We are in danger!'

He waited inside, not daring to come out again, his fate staring at him. To his relief, he was told that we were safe.

Today whenever we talk about the event, we have a good laugh but boy, nobody was laughing at the time!

## REACHING SENIOR RANKS

On 1 April I was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

One Saturday, when my ship was on operation assignment in eastern Indonesia, *KRI MLH* docked in Bitung, Manado. The following day accompanied by my Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Frits A.C. Mantiri, I went to *IKIP* Manado to sit for an Open University examinations. The night before the exams I was put up at the Commander's parents' residence. His mother made me a ceremonial yellow rice for breakfast.

On 27 May 1989 when I was on assignment at sea, I received a telegram bringing sad news, from the East Armada, that my mother-in-law, Friday's mother, had passed away.

After my third year on *KRI MLH*, in 1991 I was given the opportunity to study at the School for Navy Command and Staff or *Sekolah Staf dan Komando Angkatan Laut (SESKOAL)* for eleven months in Jakarta. During these months I had time to regularly visit and stay over the weekends at my young brother Chandra Iskandar's home. Chandra is an engineer, graduate of the University of Indonesia, or *Universitas Indonesia*, who married Nining Budiman, also an engineer, a graduate of Trisakti University. They have three sons, Adi Christian, Andreas Rio and Timotius Billy. They live in Jalan Duta Niaga I number 12, Pondok Indah, South Jakarta.

## MOVING ON, TO THE USA

In 1990 when I was on assignment in East Armada, I sent a transcript to the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) of the US Navy via their headquarters in Pensacola, as part of the requirements to do post-graduate study there. I didn't receive any answer.

Then when I was studying at SESKOAL, a friend from the Army who happened to have applied at the NPS also, brought me the photocopy of a telegram from Pensacola, which stated that I was accepted at the postgraduate school in NPS, Monterey, California. Unfortunately the Navy, for reasons unknown to me, had not forwarded the telegram to me, and even approved my study in SESKOAL. I had to accept the situation, once again.

I was still in God's sight. In March 1992, still studying at SESKOAL, I sought permission successfully to attend my graduation ceremony at the Open University in Pondok Cabe. I received my Economics degree. One of my dreams had become a reality.

When I completed my study at SESKOAL in 1992, an opportunity opened up for me to serve in a wider scope: in the Navy Headquarters or *Markas Besar Angkatan Laut (MABESAL)* in Jakarta, at its Navy Logistics Service or *Dinas Material Angkatan Laut (DISMATAL)*.

I was away a great deal from my family - from Frida and Steffie, since I began my work in Jakarta. However I also had the opportunity to see a lot of my brother Chandra and his wife Nining. Once I was sent to Denmark for a week as an inspector, tasked to check all the spare parts the Navy was buying from Denmark, in the quantitative, qualitative and legal sense. Some of the per diem I received during that time I saved up to spend on improving the air-conditioning in my work vehicle Toyota Kijang, and also toward paying for Steffie's education in America later.

God has shown His might again. On 20 March 1994 Frida, Chandra, Nining and Adi, saw me off to the USA. I was heading off to Monterey, California to study for my postgraduate degree at the NPS. After the slip-up beyond my control in 1991, I still ended up doing what I wanted to do then, in 1994.

I often wondered why I had to wait till I was forty-five to study overseas. Frida provided the answer, 'Don't complain. This coincides with Steffie's graduation from secondary school!' True enough, four months later, in July 1994 Frida and Steffie came to join me in the USA. Steffie went to Monterey Peninsula College

(MPC) for his undergraduate study, while I was studying for my post-graduate degree in Defence System Analysis.

There had been challenges however. Before Frida and Steffie were able to join me, there was news that the US Senate had recommended suspension of government assistance to the education of Indonesian officers because of what happened in East Timor. We feared that Frida and Steffie would not be able to come.

However my brother Chandra told me that regardless of what happened, Steffie would definitely go to study in the US, and he would foot the bill. However thank God, things went well. Frida and Steffie were able to be with me for twenty months.

When we were in the US, something sad happened. Chandra passed away in June 1996, and we were unable to attend his funeral. Again, God is great. He guided Nining and the family. Their company, *PO Kramatjati* continues to do well, and Adi and Rio were able to go to Australia and complete their undergraduate studies, while Adi went on for his postgraduate degree.

## CHALLENGES AND BLESSINGS IN HIS LIFE AND CAREER

At my return to Indonesia, Colonel AD Nyoman from the Overseas Cooperation or *Kerja Sama Luar Negeri (KERMALUGRI)* asked me to shift to Defence Department, but my superior at *DISMATAL* refused to release me. That meant that I remain a Lieutenant Colonel. Again, I accepted the situation. As long as there were no promotions, I would never become a Colonel. I was in a rut.

Frida's words brought me comfort. She said, 'Don't worry about ranks. Even if you retired as a Lieutenant Colonel I would still be happy and grateful to God. We have been able to see Steffie through in his study to graduation from Indiana University at Bloomington. Don't you think that was a blessing?'

In fact, in September 1996 I had to return to Indonesia when my study at NPS was completed, while Steffie had not finished his undergraduate study at MPC. I knew Steffie wanted so much to gain his undergraduate degree in the US, but he didn't have the heart to say that to my face. I then braced myself and called Nining in Indonesia, asking for a loan of eight thousand dollars to advance Steffie's twenty-three thousand-dollar costs for his study in Bloomington for another year.

Lo and behold, when I returned to Indonesia, Nining, who had been looking after my salary while I was away, informed me that the total waiting for me was eight thousand dollars, no more

no less! And when Steffie came home in 2002, he also brought home twenty-three thousand dollars, the amount of money I gave him six years previously. I don't believe it was a coincidence. I see God's hand in this. Steffie got his B Sc from Indiana University in Accounting and Management, and he had also worked for two years at Target Department Store, in its Grand Rapid outlet, as their Hard Line Manager, then in their headquarters in Minneapolis as a Business Analyst. He was in the US for eight years.

In August 1998 I was moved to SESKOAL, to take the position as Guidance Officer, or *Perwira Penuntun (Patun)*, a position I deem as noble, yet unpopular among officers in general. This is because a guidance officer receives very few facilities. His working vehicle, for example, is among the oldest and ugliest in the service. He has no subordinates, so he has to do everything, such as lesson plans, himself.

However I was still grateful to God, because I enjoyed being a lecturer. And we were still given accommodation at SESKOAL, a vehicle though old and ugly and which only came after a long wait. More importantly, it made me more independent, because I had no one to rely on. And lastly, I gained the respect of my students. However this was only achieved by being always high-spirited, motivating the students to always give their best to country and nation. It certainly could not be achieved by being glum and complaining, seeing I was nearing retirement.

God will always grant us what we need, not what we want.

On 1 April 1999 I was promoted to the rank of Colonel, after being a Lieutenant Colonel for ten years. My faith in God and Frida's unrelenting support kept me strong.

In January 2000, SESKOAL received an invitation to be present at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asia Pacific Naval College Seminar in Tokyo, in which twelve countries participated, including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, the USA, Vietnam, and Japan. The Seminar took place from 24 to 29 January 2000.

I was trusted by the SESKOAL Commander to represent Indonesia. The main theme of the seminar was Maritime Situation Assessment in the Asia Pacific region, with additional theme of enhancing mutual trust among Asia Pacific countries' navy. Each delegate was required to prepare two papers to be presented at the seminar.

The seminar was fairly impressive. We were given the chance to exchange views and outlook among ourselves. We also

grabbed the opportunity to visit Senso-ji Temple and have lunch at Asakusa. It struck me what a small world we lived in when I met two of the twelve representatives in the seminar. They were Captain Sha'ari bin Abdul Raof from Malaysia and Captain Cesar Carranza. Captain Sha'ari had been my fellow-student at NPS in Monterey, while Captain Carranza was a former student of mine when he had been studying at SESKOAL. Captain Sha'ari's wife was a close friend of Frida's, and we had had dinners with Captain Carranza at SESKOAL canteen.

I had reached the top run of my career as Colonel; I had been through all the positions, as Guidance Officer, as Head of Battles Department, as Director of Research, and as Institution Secretary. I had nowhere to go. The position of Institution Secretary is two down from the Commander (Junior Admiral, two stars), just below the Deputy Commander (First Admiral, one star).

## NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD

I once said to Admiral Budiman Djoko, 'If it is allowed, I would like to retire in SESKOAL. He said, 'OK'. It was a genuine request, and a genuine response. I had never aspired to be a General.

In fact, in an Indonesian Officer's career path, there are no expectations for his Commander to recommend him to be promoted beyond the rank of Colonel. Colonel is the highest rank for a graduate of the Academy. General is a political rank, and it doesn't come automatically, regardless of how well we have carried out our duties. It has to be granted from above. Who would be moved to grant me a Generalship? I am of the minority twice, a Catholic and an ethnic Chinese.

Reality tells a different story. Despite my double disadvantages, God decided to turn into reality what we thought was an improbability. As he says in Isaiah 41, verse 10a, 'Do not be afraid, as I am with you.'

The procedure for a Colonel to become a General is no mean feat. First, he has to be recommended by his superior, a High Officer with two stars or one star, and there is no compulsion for any High Officer to do so. It is purely up to his volition. Then, when the Head of Staff of the Navy receives the recommendation, it is up to him either to act on it, or to shelf it. And each recommendation has to contain three candidates. Then the recommendation will be brought to a meeting of thirteen Generals who will decide on it. The breakdown of the thirteen Generals are: Head of Staff of the Navy with four stars, Deputy Head of Staff of

the Navy with three stars and some Chief Officers, some Commanders, and Assistant Head of Staff of the Navy with two stars. No officers with one star are allowed to take part in the decision-making in the meeting of Policy Council of High Officers. There are thirteen Generals present in supervising capacity to scrutinise the candidates' operational and educational backgrounds, their records of loyalty and their family's suitability. Each of the participating decision makers has the right to have his say, to reject or to approve. So there is hardly any opening for collusion or bribery. You can only pass on merit.

In my case, God moved a High Officer, Junior Admiral Ardius Zainuddin from Padang, to recommend to the Head of Staff of the Navy, to promote me to the High Officer rank. There were two other Colonels he recommended. And God also moved the Head of Staff of the Navy to send a note to his personal assistant, containing the words, 'Act on it!'

On 23 July 2003 I was officially appointed First Admiral of the Indonesian Armed Forces by Admiral Bernard Kent Sondakh. In the Silent Room of the Indonesian Armed Forces Headquarters, the Chief of the Armed Forces officially promoted High Officers from three classes. Then in the lobby of the Main Building of Indonesian Navy Headquarters, the Head of Staff of the Navy officiated the promotion of High Officers of the Indonesian Navy. That day I was officially made First Admiral of the Indonesian Armed Forces, as the Bureau Chief of Organisation and Administration in the Defence Department. I was very grateful to God, who has proven His love for, and appreciation of us all.

Our happiness was augmented when our son Steffie Iskandar, married Mariette Anie Kurniawati on 6 September 2006, almost a year after my retirement from the Navy on 1 December 2005

## CLOSING REMARKS

During my thirty-four years of serving my country in the Armed Forces, I had happy and less happy moments. And I assimilated both, all the while expressing my gratitude to God. Whatever happens we have to thank God for His blessings. I have also learned that we must love and respect our parents, not to do bad things to other people but to help those who need help, and since we are still living in this world, not to live beyond our means.

As for my original desire to prove that not all ethnic Chinese are only interested in reaping financial benefit from the country,

and that we are happy to be an integral part of the nation, I feel I have proved it with my own life.