

A thrilling and informative Women's Day Event creates awareness of the Defence Reserves among women in business

Article supplied by Mrs Regine Lord. Photos supplied by Brent and Lorraine Best, and R. Lord.

On Saturday, 11 September 2010, a group of about forty women, representing various spheres of the community, participated in a thrilling and informative programme of **interactive demonstrations and presentations** by five Reserve units based at Fort iKapa in Goodwood, Cape Town. The aim of the day's events, which had been organised by the Defence Reserves Provincial Office Western Cape (DRPOWC), was to create awareness of military volunteers.

The day began with a generous buffet breakfast, which was served by Moeniba Roberts and her staff in the spacious Dolphin Room in the lovely Het Bakhuis venue at the Castle of Good Hope. Seated at beautifully decorated tables, the guests quickly struck up conversations with each other.



Photo 1: Buffet breakfast at Het Bakhuis

Suddenly, the shrill whistle of **Lt Col Johan Conradie of the DRPOWC** brought dead silence to the room filled with excitedly chattering women. After warmly welcoming everyone, Lt Col Conradie caused a stir by warning the participants in the day's programme that they would be marching and drilling before the end of the day, and that he hoped everyone was wearing sturdy boots!

There was a palpable increase of the tension in the room, as the guests looked at each other, both apprehensive and a little intrigued.



Photo 2: A warm welcome by Lt Col Johan Conradie of the Defence Reserves office in the Western Cape

He introduced **Captain (SAN) Trunell Morom**, Senior Staff Officer of the DRPOWC, who spoke eloquently about the Defence Reserve System and the role of women in the Reserves, as well as what it means to have a colleague or an employee who is in the Reserves. She further elaborated on the benefits of a Reserve system for the country.



Photo 3: Capt (SAN) Trunell Morom explained the Defence Reserve System

As Capt Morom put it, “In time of peace, we prepare for a war, that we hope will never happen.”

If it does, though, the Reserves can be called on to supplement the Regulars. Capt Morom stressed the importance of both civilians and the military finding incentives that would benefit both parties.

She also explained the purpose of the various **Defence Reserve Provincial Offices** around the country, namely, to promote and market the Reserve System to industry and business, as well as to

the Regular Force. This Women’s Day Event was part of this strategy.

Capt Morom explained how employers could benefit from the positive qualities and skills of Reservists who have undergone tough and demanding military training; she highlighted their physical and mental strength, their discipline and leadership abilities, their strong sense of duty and commitment, and their ability to respond quickly in emergencies.

Although military units are trained to protect the sovereignty of the country by defending it against attack in wartime, they also play a pivotal role in stabilising the country in peacetime. They facilitate the creation of a stable government, economy and environment so that other sectors of governance and society can contribute to a growing democracy.

Capt Morom explained that the participants in the day’s event were in an ideal position to contribute to the creation of a business environment that is conducive to developing a strong Reserve Force in the province, by promoting a greater understanding of the Reserves and encouraging employers to allow Reserves and potential Reserves to join and serve in the military.



Photo 4: G1 25-pounder gun at Cape Field Artillery

The objective of the day's programme was thus to give the participants a little taste of what women in the Army and the Army Reserves did, and to have a great deal of **fun** in the process!

The group travelled by bus to Fort iKapa in Goodwood, where the following units were visited: Cape Field Artillery, 71 Signal Unit, 3 Parachute Battalion C Company, Regiment Oranjerivier and Regiment Westelike Provincie.

The first stop was at the headquarters of Cape Field Artillery (CFA), where

Colonel Bernie Ashlin, OC of Fort iKapa, gave a detailed presentation about this military base and the Defence Reserve Units currently stationed there. He spoke about the history of the base and its strategic importance, given its easy access to the main roads and railway lines. Originally, the Reserve units were dotted about all over Cape Town, but over the years, more and more have relocated to Fort iKapa. The mission of this centralised base is to provide the necessary protective and supportive services for all the units.



Photo 5: Col Bernie Ashlin, OC of Fort iKapa, spoke about the history of the base and the Reserve units currently stationed there



Photo 6: Major Dalene Coetzee, 2IC of Cape Field Artillery, spoke of her experiences in the Defence Reserves

Major Dalene Coetzee, Second in Command of **Cape Field Artillery**, spoke of her experiences of military service, mentioning some of the challenges faced by women in the military, while also emphasising the sense of excitement, adventure and camaraderie of being part of a unit.

A G1 25-pounder gun was on display inside the hangar, and a female gunner, Lieutenant Mali, together with her colleagues gave a quick demonstration of how the gun is fired, going through the drill sequence.

Lastly, Gunner Tracy Leibbrandt introduced herself to the group. A piper in the Pipes and Drums of Cape Field Artillery, she then entertained the visitors by performing a tune or two on her bagpipes. Everyone listened with rapt attention, as she played the familiar 'Amazing Grace'.

The next destination was the headquarters of **71 Signal Unit**. Lt Col Johan Johnson, Commanding Officer of the unit, gave a presentation about the unit. Among other things, he explained that their role is to provide conventional tactical support to the Western Cape Reserve Units as well as to the SANDF, and to supply telecommunications in support of Wilderness Search and Rescue organisations in the case of emergencies or disasters.

Radio carrier systems, complete with antennas and handsets, were displayed on the table in the conference room; each of them had been assigned a particular call sign. Lt Col Johnson invited the participants to pick up the handsets and to speak to the soldiers sitting in a communications truck parked outside the building. Their attempts to communicate correctly by using the right terminology caused much mirth and excitement!



Photo 7: Gunner Tracy Leibbrandt of the Pipes and Drums of Cape Field Artillery

Thereafter, the group visited at the home of **3 Parachute Battalion C Company HQ** (3 Para Bn Co Coy).



Photo 8: Testing the communications equipment at 71 Signal Unit

The forbidding sign near their hangar, which announced, rather ominously, “BEWARE: You are now entering Paratrooper Country – Zero Tolerance!” caused some apprehensive looks and nervous giggles onboard the bus.

It was thus a relief to be warmly greeted by WO2 Boshoff, and his two cheerful and friendly assistants for the day, Major Marais and Gunner Mark Bouillon, under the supervision of Captain Tawse, OC of 3 Para Bn.

WO2 Boshoff revealed that paratroopers underwent extremely rigorous and demanding training, as they had to be very fit and strong both physically and mentally. In order to illustrate this, he invited the women to pick up the so-called ‘marbles’, which are very heavy cement blocks: “Now try running with those,” he added with a smile, as they staggered under their weight. Troops are also sometimes expected to carry a long metal cylinder during training, and a rectangular ‘stretcher’, weighing about 90kg, which is used to simulate carrying wounded soldiers to safety.

Gnr Mark Bouillon, strapped firmly into a parachute harness, demonstrated the correct drill for jumping out of an aeroplane, with a static line connected to the plane ensuring that the parachute would open, and then landing safely. He explained that the military parachutes used for these jumps had limited manoeuvrability, unlike conventional steerable parachutes. Juanita Daniels bravely volunteered to be strapped into the harness too, before showing that she had paid attention, by accurately performing the same drill.



Photo 9: WO2 Boshoff, Major Marais and Gunner Mark Bouillon of 3 Parachute Battalion

The three paratroopers then showed the group how they would jump out of a plane with all their gear, with WO2 Boshoff going through the sequence of instructions. There was a wonderful spirit of camaraderie among them, as they performed their drill in front of an admiring audience.

This was followed by a skilful fastroping demonstration, which was greeted with appreciative applause and cheering from all the women present. Gnr Bouillon also gave a demonstration of how to land safely. Two of the women nervously volunteered to try the 'land and roll' on the mats, and were applauded enthusiastically for their courage.



Photo 10: Juanita Daniels tested the parachute harness

During the tour around the base, the group was accompanied by Corporal Natasha le Roux, a medical orderly. She carried her entire medical kit in a bulky and heavy backpack. Even just lifting it up onto one's back required considerable muscle strength, never mind carrying it everywhere!

At **Regiment Oranjerivier (ROR)**, an armour regiment of the SANDF, the group was greeted by Lt Col Jaco Olivier, Commanding Officer of the Regiment.

The group had earlier watched a slideshow presentation about the main vehicle used by the regiment, the imposing Rooikat armoured reconnaissance vehicle, which has been designed and built in South Africa.

Lt Col Olivier explained that, unlike a tank, which runs on tracks, an armoured vehicle has wheels. The Rooikat is designed for combat reconnaissance and for search-and-destroy missions, as well as to give combat support.

Naturally, everyone was very keen to go for a drive around the base with the Rooikat! And so, with Master Warrant Officer Karel Minnie, Regimental Sergeant Major, in the driving seat, one small group after another clambered aboard this commanding armoured vehicle.



Photo 11: MWO Minnie took a group for a ride on the Rooikat under the supervision of Lt Col Olivier

The contrast of the dainty women against this mighty machine was quite startling. It was awe-inspiring to hear the roar of the powerful engine and to feel its vibrations, as the vehicle accelerated down the straights.

It was clear from the animated chatter and the sparkle in everyone's eyes that, now that they had tasted the adventure of driving in such a powerful military vehicle, they wanted more!

At the headquarters of the **Regiment Westelike Provincie (RWP)**, a specialised infantry regiment of the South African Army, various weapons and equipment carried by infantry soldiers were displayed outside their hangar on a long table draped in camouflage netting. Lt Col



Photo 12: MWO Minnie demonstrated the dramatic effects of the smoke screen

Conradie explained the role of the infantry and the different types of infantry, using the Reserve units stationed at Fort iKapa as examples.

He emphasised that infantry soldiers had to carry all the equipment illustrated in the display: sleeping bag, cooking utensils, food, ammunition, spare ammunition, medical supplies, and all the water they could carry.

To illustrate this, one of the soldiers wearing camouflage uniform and camouflage cream was fully kitted out with helmet, a heavy backpack and rifle.

A bivvy (bivouac), which is a small emergency shelter used by the infantry, was so cleverly concealed among the bushes and covered by branches that it was quite invisible, until Lt Col Conradie pointed it out to the surprised group.

He identified some of the weaponry on display, such as R4 and R5 assault rifles, a grenade launcher, and a light machine gun, and invited one of the women to participate in the realistic training of the infantry.

Suddenly, two heavily camouflaged female soldiers, weighed down with weapons and full kit, emerged from the dense fynbos, dragging their 'wounded' comrade out into the open. They knelt down a metre or two away, their guns at the ready, keeping a lookout for 'enemy fire'.

At the same time, two medical orderlies, Sergeant Piet Human and Corporal Natasha le Roux (who had accompanied the group on their tour around the base), raced towards the 'wounded' soldier, and expertly examined the 'wound' before cleaning and bandaging it, applying a drip, and carrying the soldier to safety.



Photo 13: A 'wounded' soldier was dragged to safety by two heavily camouflaged soldiers from RWP



Photo 14: The medics, Sgt Human and Cpl Le Roux stabilise the wounded soldier

This exciting demonstration by the skilful medics ended the tour of Fort iKapa. The group returned to the Castle for some refreshing tea and coffee. As everyone said their goodbyes and thanked all the military personnel who had put in so much time and effort to create such a wide-ranging, informative and excitingly interactive program for this group of women from various areas of business, it was clear that the day's events had had a big impact.

Not only did all the participants now know much more about the Defence Reserve system and the military in general than they had when they arrived that morning, but they had also experienced first-hand a little of the spirit of camaraderie, the thrill of adventure and the discipline and dedication that

characterises the armed forces. And no doubt many of them would have felt inspired to share their new-found knowledge with families, friends and co-workers in the weeks that followed.

Much praise must be directed specifically at all the individuals and units (personnel of the DRPOWC, Col Ashlin, 3 Para Bn C Coy, 71 Signal Unit, CFA, ROR, RWP, 3 Medical Battalion Group, Lt Col van der Westhuijzen), that made the day possible. More than Reserve units in name, each of them went the extra mile in promoting the Reserve System, by willingly and enthusiastically sharing their time, their expertise and their experiences.

Their passion for their work in the military service made a deep and positive impression on everyone who was privileged to attend this marvellous event.



Photo 15: Group Photo in front of the Rooikat of Regiment Oranjerivier