

A colourful and thrilling display of marching skills: The Western Cape Schools Marching Drill Festival 2012 at Florida Park in Ravensmead

Article and photos supplied by Mrs Regine Lord.

On Saturday, 20 October 2012, Florida Park Sports Ground in Ravensmead hosted the Western Cape Schools Marching Drill Festival of 2012. It was an even bigger event, than the previous year's festival at Vygieskraal stadium in Athlone.

It had been organised by Mr Saeed Ruiters, the President of the Western Province Marching Association (WPMA), working closely together with the South African Army Band Cape Town and various regular and reserve regiments of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).



Photo 1: More than a dozen school marching teams arrive at Florida Park sports ground in Ravensmead to participate in the Western Cape Schools Marching Drill Festival 2012 on Saturday, 20 October 2012

The regiments had set up an impressive static display on the slightly elevated ground on the far side of the field, directly opposite the grandstand. The display proved very popular amongst the inquisitive and excited boys and girls, who enjoyed climbing all over the vehicles, picking up the various weapons on display, peering through the sights, and firing a barrage of questions at the soldiers on duty.

Cape Garrison Artillery had used their heavy SAMIL 100 gun tractor to tow an Oerlikon 35mm twin-barrel quick-firing anti-aircraft cannon to the site. The Cape Town Highlanders had arrived in a Ratel infantry fighting vehicle, and Regiment Oranjerivier were well-represented with their



Photo 2: The SANDF static displays are always very popular with the youngsters – here they are admiring one of the 25-pounder guns of Cape Field Artillery

Rooikat armoured reconnaissance vehicle, driven by MWO Karel Minnie, the Regimental Sergeant-Major: as always, this was an immediate hit among the youngsters, who swarmed all over it as soon as their teachers had given them permission to 'climb aboard'!

The SAMIL 20 gun tractor of Cape Field Artillery stood alongside one of their 25-pounder guns. These guns are traditionally used to fire salutes at ceremonial and annual occasions,



Photo 3: 9 SAI Battalion has set up a comprehensive weapons display in a tent; a knowledgeable instructor is answering questions about the light machine gun

such as the Opening of Parliament, Remembrance Day and the Gunners' Memorial Service. They also regularly participate in the performance of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, which is one of the highlights of the Cape Town Military Tattoo at the Castle of Good Hope.

Troops from 9 South African Infantry (9 SAI) Battalion had brought along two Casspirs from their base in Eersterivier and set up a comprehensive weapons display in a camouflage tent. 9 SAI is a Regular unit, with a long history dating back to 1781; after several changes in name and format, it was known as the Cape Corps, until it was redesignated as 9 SAI in 1990.

The Drill and Marching Festival has its roots in a cadet marching programme that was initiated in 2007 by Mr Ruiters, a teacher at Portlands High School in Mitchell's Plain, and Ms Lyrice Trussell, the senior curriculum advisor for the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). This programme, targeting Grade 12 Life Orientation learners, was incorporated into the weekly school timetable as a physical education class, and proved hugely popular. The children on the

Cape Flats are exposed to many social problems, including poverty, drug abuse, alcoholism, crime and gangsterism. This has led a lack of discipline and respect for educators and fellow pupils, truancy and absenteeism, and violence in the classroom and on the playground.

Mr Ruiters' marching programme has had a significant positive impact on the learners at the school, instilling qualities such as discipline, self-confidence, teamwork and leadership. Exhibition marching displays have also become a regular feature at school assemblies, which has inculcated a sense of pride in the school, the school uniform and the school team.



Photo 4: Mr Saeed Ruiters and Marlon Johnson, a learner at Portlands High School and a drummer in the school's Drill Squad

From its humble beginnings at Portlands High School, the programme was rolled out to all the schools in Mitchell's Plain, and beyond to schools in the WCED education districts. This has led to the establishment of the Western Province School Marching Drill and Exhibition Association (WPSMDEA). The Western Cape is currently the only province, where Marching Drill competitions are held. Their

goal is to promote and train schools in other provinces too, with the aim of holding a National Inter-schools Marching Competition in the future.

Thus far, accolades and recognitions were received from the SA Army, the SA Navy, the SA Air Force, the London Metropolitan Police, the MEC for Education (Alderman Donald Grant), the MEC for Safety and Security (Alderman JP Smith), the Cape Town Metro Police, Traffic Services and Law Enforcement. These organisations have developed a close relationship with the WPMA. Mr Ruiters was recently interviewed for the eTV series “South African Heroes: Teachers”.



Photo 5: MWO Karel Minnie, the Regimental Sergeant Major of Regiment Oranje Rivier, keeps a watchful eye on the Rooikat armoured reconnaissance vehicle of ROR, as the curious youngsters explore it

In 2010, the SA Army Band Cape Town had launched a Schools Outreach Programme, conducting workshops to train a selected group of learners in drilling and the basics of music, and introducing them to career paths in the SANDF. All the learners who participate in the programme are eager to be selected for the WP Schools Marching Team or Drill Squad.

The best students from various schools on the Cape Flats were thus selected to be part of this Squad, which performed at the Castle during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the 2010 Cape Town Military Tattoo and the 2011 Sunset Concert. They also performed at major events, including the Old Mutual Two Oceans Marathon and festivals in the City, in Oudtshoorn and in Hermanus. These public performances have motivated the youngsters to train hard, to improve their skills, and to work together as a team with learners from other schools.



Photo 6: The SA Army Band Cape Town march onto the field, led by their Drum Major, Warrant Officer 2 André van Schalkwyk

The inter-schools competition held at Florida Park in October 2012 gave them an opportunity to show off their drill and marching skills to their classmates, their parents, their teachers – as well as to impress a group of knowledgeable adjudicators.

They did so with commendable enthusiasm: Lined up in columns of three abreast, all dressed in matching uniforms of different colours, each of

the participating school teams marched onto the sports ground. As they marched, swinging their arms to shoulder-height, they shouted in unison, “Left, left, left-right-left, left, left, left-right-left.” Each group was led by a baton-twirling drum major, with an entourage of drummers and school-flag carriers bringing up the rear.



Photo 7: The raising of the national flag during the singing of the South African national anthem marks the formal start of the event

shirts and black vests, who were led by Pipe Major Staff Sergeant Andrew Imrie. After performing ‘Scotland the Brave’, the beautiful ‘Amazing Grace’ and a rousing ‘Highland Cathedral’, they marched off the field to much applause. These two bands always work so well together – all the band members are dedicated musicians, passionate about their work, and willing to give their time and energy to reach out to the community.

Next were the St Joseph Worker Church Lads and Girls Brigade from Bishop Lavis who impressed the spectators with their musical skills on fifes, drums and bugles. A non-profit organisation established in 1952, this Brigade has become one of the

The relentless pounding of the drums ensured a fast marching pace, and their energy was contagious. The announcement of each school’s name was accompanied by a roar of excitement from the spectators and supporters on the grandstand. They had all leapt to their feet, cheering loudly and applauding, as the teams – holding their banners aloft and their heads up high – marched proudly past the stands: it was an impressive, colourful sight.

The festival included a mini-tattoo. The first act was the ever-popular SA Army Band Cape Town, led by Drum Major Warrant Officer 2 André van Schalkwyk. As they played during the singing of the South African National Anthem, under the baton of Captain Vernon Michels, the SA national flag was ceremonially raised to mark the start of the event.

Marching past the stands in different formations, they performed several pieces on their own, before they were joined by the Pipes and Drums of Cape Field Artillery in their scarlet Royal Stuart tartan kilts, brilliantly white



Photo 8: The Pipes and Drums of the Cape Field Artillery in their scarlet tartan kilts, under Pipe Major Staff Sergeant Andrew Imrie, join the SA Army Band Cape Town for several rousing tunes, including the hauntingly beautiful ‘Amazing Grace’ and the stirring ‘Highland Cathedral’

leading organisations to raise awareness on all social issues and to train potential leaders within the community it serves.

The Dog Unit of 505 Squadron from Air Force Base Ysterplaat had the youngsters on the edge of their seats with a thrilling demonstration. 505 Squadron is tasked with protecting and safeguarding all personnel, buildings and equipment of AFB Ysterplaat. The handlers showed how well-trained and obedient the dogs are in tackling and bringing down attackers. As the roar of the crowd increased to fever pitch, one of the soldiers in a thickly padded protective suit and helmet was chased and brought down by two dogs.



Photo 9: The highly trained dogs of the Dog Unit of 505 Squadron from Air Force Base Ysterplaat chase and bring down a suspect

They also gave an excellent fire and movement demonstration, with much pyrotechnics from thunderflashes and blank-firing R4 rifles. Partially hidden by red smoke that billowed across the field, the soldiers advanced on a ‘thief’ who had stolen a mini-bus. The principle of the ‘fire and movement’ technique is that one military unit (in this case, made up of about three soldiers) starts firing at the target (suppressive fire), while another unit (another three soldiers) advances towards the target. The second unit then halts and begins suppressive fire, while the first unit advances once more. In this way, they alternated firing and advancing, until they had reached their target.

A final thunderous single salute from the Cape Field Artillery’s 25-pounder gun concluded the exciting show!



Photo 10: The soldiers of 505 Squadron, which is tasked with protecting and safeguarding all personnel, buildings and equipment of AFB Ysterplaat, give a thrilling fire and movement demonstration

Thereafter, the schools competed in the following categories: Best Dress; Grand March Past; Best Drum Major; Best Exhibition and Highest Points.

The adjudicators were all experts in the field of drilling; eager to plough their expertise back into the community, they willingly shared their wealth of knowledge with the schools and the WPMA. They included SA Army war veterans, formerly from the SA Coloured Corps and based at 9 SAI, namely, Major

E Esterhuize, Warrant Officer A Bengell and Warrant Officer J van Zyl. Still active members of the SA Navy were Warrant Officer 2 J Bright, Warrant Officer K Swartz and Chief Petty Officer JJ Prins.

Elsies River High School won the overall highest points in their division, followed by Oval North, who came second, and Florida High School, who ran a close third. Harvester Primary School scored the highest points overall in the Primary School division, beating Merrydale Primary with only two points, followed by Meadowridge Primary in third place. Schools were divided into groups, with each school competing for itself, as well as gaining points for their respective groups.

During the schools' individual performances, the WP selectors chose the best marchers to form the WP Schools Marching Team. Learners will receive their WP caps (colours) after a successful WP trial.



Photo 11: The youthful participants of the marching drill competition are eager to show off their skills and discipline and to impress the adjudicators and the WP selectors in the hope that they might be chosen for the WP Schools Marching Team

It had been an exciting and uplifting event. It was very clear from their smiling faces and their enthusiastic participation, that the youngsters had a great time on the field, and that they enjoyed the opportunity to proudly show off their marching skills as well as their teamwork to their peers and supporters. Congratulations to the winners!

Praise and acknowledgement must also go to the organisers of this festival and all the people who worked so tirelessly behind the scenes, generously giving of their time and resources: the WPMA, the teachers, the instructors, the adjudicators, the security guards, the soldiers from the SANDF, both Regular and Reserve Force, and the musicians from the various bands.

Their willingness to reach out to the community and to inspire the younger generation by supporting this event had undoubtedly made a very positive impression on everyone who attended the Western Cape Schools Marching Drill Festival of 2012.