

In solemn celebration of our fallen heroes: Remembrance Day at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital

Article and photos by Mrs Regine Lord

On Friday, 11 November 2011, military dignitaries in regimental uniforms gathered on the premises of the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Rondebosch, to pay tribute to their fallen comrades. In South Africa, we remember those who have fallen in wars and conflicts around the world since World War I and II, as well as those of the Korean War (1950-1953), the



Photo 1: The Izivunguvungu Youth Band, led by Commander Mike Oldham

Border War between northern Namibia and southern Angola (1966-1989), and the internal conflict in the country before the official end of apartheid in the 1990s.

Internationally, Remembrance Day is also known as Armistice Day, Veterans Day or Poppy Day. The red poppy is probably the most well-known emblem of this day – the flower's deep red colour symbolising the blood that was spilt in war, as expressed so eloquently in the poem "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae.

It has become a powerful symbol, with thousands of red paper poppies being sold or distributed at such events. As the guests and dignitaries began to arrive and take their seats in the shade of the marquee that had been erected in front of the Hospital's main entrance, they were handed programmes and red poppies by Audrey Robert and Melissa Patterson of the Children's Hospital Trust.

A suitable musical backdrop was created by the Izivunguvungu Youth Band, led by Commander Mike Oldham.

The Izivunguvungu Music Project, which began in 1996, is a social outreach organisation that is run under the auspices of the South African Navy. Cdr Oldham, the former Director of Music of the Navy Band from 1989 to 2004, established this project with the assistance of musicians from the Navy Band who visited local disadvantaged schools and set up various brass band groups.



Photo 2: Emeritus Professor David Beatty, founding member and trustee of the Children's Hospital Trust welcomes the assembled dignitaries



Photo 3: Military veterans and dignitaries at the Remembrance Day Service

Four armed sentries of the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes) regiment, led by Sergeant Major Mike Cairns, marched up to take their places next to the marquee.

Emeritus Professor David Beatty, founding member and trustee of the Children’s Hospital Trust, welcomed the assembled dignitaries and other guests to the first Remembrance Day service at the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital. Reverend Melvin Booysen, Chaplain of the Hospital, led the scripture

reading and prayer, lending a solemn air to the proceedings, which was underscored by the singing of the hymn, Amazing Grace.

After the laying of the wreaths by several dignitaries, including Mr Colin Eglin, Lt Col Bryan Sterne, representing the Defence Reserves Provincial Office Western Cape, and a representative of the MOTHS (or the Memorable Order of Tin Hats), Prof Beatty introduced the main speaker, Mr Colin Eglin, who had served with the Sixth South African Armoured Division in Italy during World War II.

In his autobiography, *Crossing the Borders of Power - The Memoirs of Colin Eglin*, Mr Eglin mentions the discussions that took place among the South African soldiers in 1945, whilst in Italy, waiting to be repatriated to South Africa. He said:

“The dominant view was that there should be a memorial, but that this should be a 'living' one that served the community, not merely a monumental structure. The servicemen, in overwhelming numbers, volunteered to donate two days' pay towards what was to become the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital.”



Photo 4: Mr Colin Eglin reminisces about the founding of the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital after the end of World War II

Since the Hospital opened its doors in 1956, it has grown from strength to strength. It is currently the only specialist paediatric hospital in Southern Africa, successfully treating very complex life-threatening and life-limiting conditions among children in this region and beyond. It manages around 250,000 patient visits each year. The majority of these patients come from poor and marginalised communities, and one-third of the Hospital’s patients are less than

one-year-old. They are referred to the hospital from the Western Cape, the rest of South Africa, Africa, and even on rare occasions from other parts of the world.



Photo 5: Pipe Major Tony Reis of the Cape Town Caledonian Pipe Band

The Hospital furthermore provides training for new paediatric specialists, offers postgraduate specialist paediatric medical and surgical training, conducts medical research into childhood diseases, and runs outreach programmes in the communities.

The Children's Hospital Trust, a non-profit public benefit organisation, was established as the fundraising arm of the Hospital, which depends on charitable donations from generous members of the public. The Trust has been assisting the Hospital for the last 17 years to upgrade its buildings and equipment and to develop its professional staff. 100% of all donations are spent on improving the Hospital, and not a single cent is spent on administrative costs.

After Mr Eglin's speech, Pipe Major Tony Reis of the Cape Town Caledonian Pipe Band played a melancholy tune on the bagpipes. Cdr Oldham played the Last Post and the Reveille on the trumpet, and everyone stood quietly for the Two Minute Silence. Finally, the singing

of the National Anthem was accompanied by the enthusiastic playing of the Izivunguvungu Youth Band, which was followed by the withdrawal of the sentries that marked the conclusion of the ceremony. After the ceremony, refreshments were served in the Hospital.

"It is so important that we acknowledge and remember the WW2 veterans who were so instrumental in the founding of the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital. They helped create a living legacy for future generations of sick children, which is embodied in the work of the Children's Hospital Trust today. Our Circle of Life legacy programme continues this tradition and commemorates those who have chosen to leave a legacy gift to the Trust in their Will. Legacies are the lifeblood of the Trust and enable us to plan for the Hospital's future needs. They are a critical source of funding for generations to come and a lasting memorial to each and every individual whose generosity and foresight helps to better the lives of thousands of sick children." (Liz Linsell, Children's Hospital Trust Head of Legacies)



Photo 6: Lt Col Bryan Sterne of the Defence Reserves Provincial Office Western Cape, Tara van Schalkwyk of the Children's Hospital Trust, Mr Cyril Slabber and Mr Colin Eglin