

## Western Cape Schools Drill & Marching Festival 2011 at Vygieskraal Stadium in Athlone

Article by Mrs Regine Lord. Photos by Mrs R Lord and WO2 André van Schalkwyk.

The Western Cape Schools Drill and Marching Festival was held at Vygieskraal Stadium, Johnson Road, Rylands, Athlone on Saturday, 15 October 2011. It was attended by learners from numerous schools in the Western Cape, who, judging from their enthusiastic cheering and singing, were very excited to be attending this event. It had been organised by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in close cooperation with Mr Saeed Ruiters, the President of the Western Province Schools Marching Drill and Exhibition Association (WP SMDEA).

The opening ceremony began at 09h00 sharp, with a performance of the SA Army Band Cape Town and the Pipes and Drums of Cape Field Artillery, two of the star performers in the Cape Town Military Tattoo 2010. They were joined by the St Joseph Worker Church Lads and Girls Brigade and the soldiers and dogs of 505 Squadron from Air Force Base Ysterplaat.

Photo 1: The SA Army Band Cape Town and the Pipes and Drums of Cape Field Artillery



First to march onto the field were the popular **SA Army Band Cape Town**, led by Drum Major Warrant Officer André van Schalkwyk. Director of Music Major Martin Chandler conducted the band during the singing of the South African National Anthem by the three tenors, as the flag was ceremonially hoisted to mark the start of the day's events.

After the singing of the anthem, **Mr Brian Arendse**, principal of Aloe Junior High School and Chairperson of the Mitchells Plain Primary School Sports Organisation addressed the learners, explaining the history of the marching drill programme and the background of the annual Drill and Marching Festival to the learners.

Photo 2: Mr Brian Arendse, principal of Aloe Junior High School and Chairperson of the Mitchells Plain Primary School Sports Organisation addressed the learners



This programme was rolled out at Western Cape schools as part of a Life Orientation activity in 2007, which means that it is incorporated into the weekly school timetable as a physical education class. It has had a significant positive impact on participating learners, instilling qualities such as discipline, self-confidence, teamwork and leadership. This has led to many of them voluntarily mentoring their fellow pupils and passing on these positive qualities.

The **SA Army Band Cape Town** is the oldest Regular Force band in the country, having originated in 1915. It is based at the Army Support Base in Youngsfield, under the command of Colonel Pieter Kobbie. The Band is strongly committed to building bridges between the community and the SANDF, and Warrant Officer Van Schalkwyk acts as the community liaison. The Band is closely involved with youth groups from previously disadvantaged areas, and often gives youngsters with an interest in marching and being part of a marching band a learning opportunity to participate at musical events.

Photo 3: The bugle and fife band of the St Joseph Worker Church Lads and Girls Brigade



For instance, at the start of October this year, a couple of youth groups, including a drill squad of the WP SMDEA, the Brigade of the St Joseph Worker Church and the Marimba Dancers of the Likhwezi Arts Projects, performed in public at the Castle of Good Hope as part of their musical and skills development.

The Army Band was joined by the **Cape Field Artillery Pipes and Drums**, led by Pipe Major Staff Sergeant Andrew Imrie, to the stirring sound of the bagpipes and the thumping and rattling of the drums that reverberated around the stadium. Their pieces included the fantastic Highland Cathedral, the ever-popular Amazing Grace, and the traditional Scotland the Brave.

Then it was the turn of the talented **St Joseph Worker Church Lads and Girls Brigade** from Bishop Lavis to display their musical skills on fifes, drums and bugles. A non-profit organisation established in 1952, this Brigade has become one of the leading organisations to raise awareness on all social issues and to train potential leaders within the community it serves. They received loud and cheerful applause from the spectators.

Photo 4: One of the schools participating in the Grand March



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 dog handlers showed how well-trained and obedient the dogs are in tackling and bringing down attackers.

They also conducted a mock-assault on the field, complete with gun-fire, explosions of thunder flashes and billowing white, yellow, green and red smoke of smoke grenades.

Immediately thereafter, the **Field Guns of the Cape Field Artillery** fired a single thunderous shot that echoed around the grounds of Vygieskraal stadium, eliciting a rousing cheer from the youngsters. These same powerful 25-pounder guns fire the 21-gun salutes during state visits and at the annual opening of Parliament.

Throughout the day, the learners visited the various static displays of the **SANDF**, including career displays by the Defence Reserve Provincial Office Western Cape (DRPOWC), the South African Medical Health Services and 9 SA Infantry Battalion. The Regiment Oranje Rivier had their awe-inspiring Rooikat armoured vehicle on show. **Mr Kader Miller** of Midea Marketing and Promotions very kindly sponsored the refreshments for the learners.

For the rest of the day, there were marches and exhibitions of the precision drill squads (including the WP SMDEA), the drum majorettes of the WP Drum Majorettes Association and the gymnaestrada of the Western Cape School Sports Organization. The march past of the drill squads from all the participating schools, in their colourful matching uniforms, was indeed an impressive sight. It had been a very exciting day for all the participants and spectators.