

# Neither Sandhurst, nor West Point: the South African Military Academy and its foreign role models

BY DEON VISSER\*

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of the first true professional standing armies in Europe during the seventeenth century brought the need for properly-trained officers. France, the foremost military power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, took the lead in the establishment of military academies to meet this need. Other countries soon followed the French example and this resulted in a proliferation of military academies during the nineteenth century. Of them, the French *École Spéciale Militaire* at St. Cyr, the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and the United States Military Academy, West Point became role models for many similar institutions following in their wake. And it was to these and other traditional military academies that the South African military turned for inspiration in the training of young officers following the establishment of the Union Defence Force in 1912. The aim of this article is to determine to what extent the South African Military Academy, which emerged from this process, followed the tradition of foreign role models.

South Africa's foreign inspiration for the training of cadets actually predates the establishment of some of the more famous role models like Sandhurst and West Point, both of which were established in 1802. Experiencing serious problems in finding suitably qualified artillery and engineer officers for the Cape Garrison, the Dutch East India Company instructed Governor Van der Graaff as early as 1786 to establish a Militaire Kweekschool at the Cape for the training of locally-recruited cadets. The financial problems of the Dutch East India Company and its final collapse in 1795, however, prevented the Militaire Kweekschool from really

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getting off the ground.<sup>1</sup> Ironically enough, financial constraints would later also prove to be one of the major obstacles in the development of the South African Military Academy.

## 2. The predecessors of the Military Academy

More than a century passed, after the demise of the Militaire Kweekschool, before another institution for officer training was established in South Africa; in fact, only subsequent to the founding of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The South African Defence Act of 1912, by which the Union Defence Force was established, made provision for the formation of

an institution for training and instructing ... candidates for appointment to commissioned rank in the Defence Forces ... [and] officers of the Defence Forces... At ... [this] institution there may be combined with the training and instruction aforesaid other training and instruction of an educational nature ... The institution shall be designated the South African Military College.<sup>2</sup>

Such a training institution was duly established in the old Presidency in Bloemfontein when the Defence Act became effective on 1 July 1912.<sup>3</sup> It was, however, not designated the South African Military College as the Act stipulated, but was instead called the South African Military School. When it was relocated to Tempe Military Base just outside Bloemfontein in 1914 and amalgamated with other military instruction schools, it was given the collective title of South African Military Schools.<sup>4</sup> Explaining this deviation the Under Secretary for Defence, H.R.M. Bourne, said that the SA Military Schools was

not a Military College in the sense that Woolwich and Sandhurst in England, West Point in America, Kingston in Canada, and Camberra (sic.) in Australia are Military Colleges, i.e., for giving a consecutive course of military and other instruction for two years or so to young men desiring to take up the military profession as officers.<sup>5</sup>

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1. P.E. ROUX, *Die Verdedigingstelsel aan die Kaap onder die Hollands-Oosindiese Kompanjie, 1652 - 1759* (sic) (Stellenbosch, 1925), pp.46–47.
  2. UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA (FORTHWITH U. OF SA), *South Africa Defence Act, Act No. 13 of 1912*, art. 50.
  3. J.J. COLLYER, *Report of the Staff Officer for General Staff Duties, 22 December 1913*. In U. OF SA U. OF SA, *Annual Reports. Department of Defence and Executive Commands for Year ending 30th June, 1913*, p.14.
  4. ANON., “The South African Military College” in *The Nongqai*, vol. 33(9), September 1942, p.954; C.M. BAKKES, *Die Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Militêre Kollege, 1912 – 1955* (South African National Defence Force Archives (SANDEFA), Pamphlets 99, pamphlet 3108, unpublished manuscript, c.1955.), p.6.
  5. H.R.M. BOURNE, “Report of the Under Secretary for Defence” in U. OF SA, *Annual Reports. Department of Defence and Executive Commands for Year ending 30th June 1913*, p.7.

## Instead the SA Military Schools provided

short classes of instruction in special subjects for officers and N.C.O.'s [non-commissioned officers] of all portions of the Defence Forces, and for officers of the Cadet organization.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Sandhurst and other similar overseas institutions, the SA Military Schools thus did not prepare prospective officers for appointment to commissioned rank. Furthermore, the “special subjects” referred to comprised drill, tactics, reconnaissance, field-sketching, field-fortification, field-engineering, military law, musketry, gunnery, medical staff duties, signalling and field cooking.<sup>7</sup> There was consequently also no question of training of an “educational nature” as envisaged by the Defence Act and as was the practice at Sandhurst and other similar institutions. Bearing the Union’s subordination to Great Britain in mind, as well as the strong pro-British disposition of the architects of the Defence Act, however, it seems reasonable to accept that the idea was to eventually model the South African Military Schools on the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst at least to some degree.

The SA Military Schools were closed for the duration of the First World War, after which it was decided to concentrate the various military training schools at Roberts Heights (later Voortrekkerhoogte, currently Thaba Tshwane). The new institution, once again known as the South African Military School, opened its doors in January 1920.<sup>8</sup> A few years later, in 1922, a permanent force cadet course of twelve months was introduced at the South African Military School, with the object of training candidate officers for the South African Infantry and Artillery. Shortly after the commencement of the first cadet course, the commandant of the Military School made a thorough study of the cadet courses offered at Sandhurst and the military colleges in the British dominions, particularly the Australian Royal Military College. This resulted in some changes to the cadet course, including the introduction of matriculation as the minimum entrance requirement and the extension of the duration of the course to eighteen months. The introduction and subsequent adaptation of the cadet course brought the level of instruction at the South African Military School, at least in principle, on the same level as at Sandhurst and other foreign counterparts. The South African Military School was consequently redesignated the South African Military College with effect from 1 July 1924. Two years later, in 1926, an air force cadet course was also introduced at the Military College, and this was amalgamated in 1930 with the army cadet course in order to avoid duplication, save money, create better promotion

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6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. U. OF SA, Abridged Annual Report of the Department of Defence for the Year ended 30th June, 1921, p.12.

opportunities and to enhance co-operation between the land and air forces. The amalgamated course was subsequently extended to two years.<sup>9</sup>

Local conditions, not the least of which were financial constraints,<sup>10</sup> placed the South African Military College on a slightly different course to that of its overseas role models. Apart from conducting a joint cadet course for the army and the air force, the South African Military College was not solely devoted to the training of permanent force cadets. It also offered various other training courses for officers and non-commissioned officers of both the permanent and the citizen forces. Furthermore, the cadet training was still almost purely functional, with no real attention yet to training of an “educational nature”.<sup>11</sup> Despite these differences, the South African Military College was nevertheless, as far as its cadet course was concerned, gradually developing more or less according to the example set by similar institutions overseas, particularly in Great Britain and its dominions. The official journal of the South African Forces, *The Nongqai*, reported in January 1926 that the South African Military College

does not compare favourably with military colleges of other dominions as regards size and equipment, but a high standard of efficiency is aimed at, and it keeps well abreast with the latest and most suitable developments in modern warfare.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. A broad, liberal education

During 1938 and 1939 Defence Headquarters once again made a thorough study of overseas cadet courses, amongst others those at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, the Canadian Royal Military College, Kingston, the *École Speciale Militaire de Saint Cyr* and the German Military School, Dresden, with a view to further improving the cadet course at the South African Military College.<sup>13</sup> South Africa’s entry into the Second World War, however, prevented the implementation of changes resulting from this study. After the Second World War, the cadet course was again closely examined with the aim of

establishing an officer corps capable of forming and maintaining an efficient and

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9. R.J. HAINES, “The Training of Candidate Officers in South Africa” in *Militaria*, 8(3), 1978, pp.1 – 4; C.M. BAKKES, *Die Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Militêre Kollege, 1912 - 1955*, pp.13 - 14.
  10. R.J. HAINES, “The Training of Candidate Officers in South Africa” in *Militaria*, 8(3), 1978, p.1.
  11. *Ibid.*, pp.1, 4.
  12. ANON., “The South African Military Schools” in *The Nongqai*, vol. 17(1), January 1926, p.56. (Also quoted in R.J. HAINES, “The Training of Candidate Officers in South Africa” in *Militaria*, 8(3), 1978, p.1.
  13. CGS (Gp. 2) 657, CGS1024, Reports on Military Colleges and Schools - Overseas, 17 October 1938 - 15 July 1939.

sophisticated military force in a complex, polyvalent age, an age of ideologies, of the transistor and nuclear power.<sup>14</sup>

This time the cue was specifically taken from Sandhurst and West Point<sup>15</sup> and a new two-year cadet course was introduced in 1947 to place the South African Military College on par with these two famous institutions. A Military College promotion brochure published in 1947 suggested that the introduction of the new cadet course had done just that. It explained the origins and nature of the South African Military College as follows:

Since the dawn of history Man has practised War, and throughout the Ages we read of Military Schools where the art of war was taught and studied. These old Military Schools of the Middle Ages prospered and they grew...In this way Military Academies have developed in all the continents of the world - institutions like Sandhurst, West Point, Potsdam...In our country, we have modelled on its famous predecessors a newcomer, a younger brother... the South African Military College.<sup>16</sup>

The aim of the new cadet course at the South African College was taken almost word-for-word<sup>17</sup> from West Point's mission statement. It read:

The ... cadet must not only be turned into an efficient soldier, but he must be trained so that 'each cadet shall have upon graduation, those qualities and attributes that are essential to his progressive and continued development throughout a life-time career as an officer of the South African Permanent Force'.<sup>18</sup>

Both Sandhurst and West Point had adapted their cadet courses after the Second World War to place more emphasis on a broad, liberal education,<sup>19</sup> aimed at truly

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14. R.J. HAINES, "The Training of Candidate Officers in South Africa" in *Militaria*, 8(3), 1978, p.5.
  15. Ibid.
  16. SA MILITARY COLLEGE, *The South African Military College* (South African Military College, Pretoria, 1947), pp.11 - 12.
  17. West Point's mission read as follows: "The mission of the Military Academy is to instruct and train the Corps of Cadets to the end that each graduate shall have the qualities and attributes essential to his progressive and continued development throughout a lifetime career as an officer of the Regular Army." (*U.S. War Department Circular No. 109*, 3 October 1940, quoted in S. FORMAM, *West Point: A History of the United States Military Academy* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1950), p.208.)
  18. SA MILITARY COLLEGE, *The South African Military College*, p.23.
  19. H. THOMAS, *The Story of Sandhurst* (Hutchinson, London, 1961), pp.223 - 231; J. SMYTH, *Sandhurst: The History of the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, and the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, 1741 - 1961*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1961), pp.209 - 210; T.J. CRACKEL, *The Illustrated History of West Point* (Harry N. Abrams Inc, New York, 1991), pp.225, 239 - 243; S. FORMAM, *West Point*, pp.199, 208 - 213, 219; T.J. FLEMING, *West Point: The Men and Times of the United States Military Academy* (William Morrow & Company, New York, 1969), pp.341 -345.

training and educating the ‘whole man’.<sup>20</sup> Besides the normal military subjects, the curriculum of the new cadet course at the South African Military College therefore also included a number of academic subjects, in order to

bring out all the faculties of the officer cadet, to develop his physical and mental powers, to make him intellectually alert, and to provide the professional background for his future career.<sup>21</sup>

The idea was thus to broaden the pre-war concept of officers’ training to that of officers’ education after the example of West Point and Sandhurst.

#### 4. Scuttled ideals

On 1 April 1950, the striving towards parity with overseas institutions with regard to the training and education of candidate officers was taken a step further, when the South African Military Academy was established under the auspices of the South African Military College. In imitation of West Point, cadet education in South Africa would henceforth culminate in the awarding of a university degree.<sup>22</sup> The Academy was originally envisaged as an independent branch of the SA Military College, functioning almost autonomously under the academic guardianship of the University of South Africa. In fact, the intention was that once the Academy had found its feet, it would be emancipated from the University of South Africa and would issue its own degrees. Civilian academics were to be recruited and appointed as officers in the Union Defence Force to present the entire four-year degree course that was envisaged.<sup>23</sup>

Financial stringency and professional jealousy scuttled these high ideals. The Department of Defence was unable to obtain enough money to appoint either the Academy’s full complement of lecturers, or its own military instructors and administrative staff, let alone erecting its own, separate building complex.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the University of Pretoria was not prepared to allow the University of South Africa to open a satellite campus on its doorstep. It instead offered to take

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20. J.P. LOVELL, *Neither Athens nor Sparta? The American Service Academies in Transition* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1979), p.16.

21. SA MILITARY COLLEGE, *The South African Military College*, pp.7, 27, 28.

22. SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 164, MC/T/12/1, enclosure 31, MC/T/12/1, Commandant SA Military College – Chief of the General Staff, 27 February 1950; SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 164, MC/T/12/1, enclosure 35, MC/T/12/1, Commandant SA Military College – Director Policy Co-ordination, 16 March 1950.

23. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/2/1 vol. 1, enclosure 24, Summary of recommendations of Kriegler Committee, 27 January 1949, p.7.

24. SANDFA, KG K43, L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 1, enclosure 1, Chief of the General Staff – Minister of Defence, 7 November 1949.

the proposed Military Academy under its own wing.<sup>25</sup> The end result was that the Academy was not established as an independent branch of the SA Military College, but was placed initially under the General Branch of the College and eventually ended up under the Physical Training Branch. In terms of the staff component, only a dean and a few other staff members were appointed exclusively for the Academy. For the rest, it had to share the available College staff.<sup>26</sup>

Without money to appoint lecturers for the Academy, the Department of Defence was indeed faced with the choice of either accepting the offer from the University of Pretoria, or postponing the establishment of the Academy until the necessary funds could be found to appoint lecturers. Eager to get the Academy off the ground, the Minister of Defence, F.C. Erasmus, accepted the University of Pretoria's offer. A few military lecturers were eventually appointed in 1951, but they were by and large restricted to the teaching of a few first-year subjects only. The University of Pretoria presented the bulk of the specially designed three-year BA(Mil) and BSc(Mil) degree courses introduced for the army and air force cadets.<sup>27</sup> The military authorities of course initially hoped that the Academy could produce officers for all three services, but this was compromised by the inland location of the Academy, which made the training of naval cadets impractical.<sup>28</sup>

This first cadet course was an unmitigated disaster. Only seven of the 30 cadets that were admitted, passed their first-year, while two more obtained sufficient credits to continue with their second-year. There were thus only nine second-years in 1951; and only six of them, graduated at the end of their three-year training and education programme.<sup>29</sup> There were several reasons for this. Firstly, imitating

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25. SANDFA, CGS (WAR) 281, 56/36, enclosure 24, Rector UP – Private Secretary, Minister of Defence, 1 October 1949; SANDFA, CGS (WAR) 281, 56/36, enclosure 24, Rector UP – Director Policy Co-ordination, 1 October 1949.
  26. SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 87, MK/F/1/2, enclosure 7, MK/F/1/2, Commandant SA Military College – Army Chief of Staff and Adjutant General, 6 March 1954; SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 164, MC/T/12/1, enclosure 60, MC/T/12/1, signed Maj. S.A. Engelbrecht, 10 August 1950; M. Van Niekerk – G.E. Visser, interview, 16 September 1992.
  27. UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA, (UP ARCHIVES), Minutes of the Board of the University of Pretoria 1950, Minutes of a meeting of representatives of the University of Pretoria and the Union Defence Force, 26 May 1950; SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 88, MK/F/5/2, enclosure 15, S8166, Report by Subcommittee on relationship between the SA Military Academy and the University of Pretoria, n.d.
  28. L. JOOSTE, FC Erasmus as Minister van Verdediging, 1948 – 1959 (MA, UP, 1995), p.115.
  29. SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 169, MK/K/227G vol. 2, enclosure 28, Statistics w.r.t. Cadet Courses, 1950 – 53; Military Academy Archives, list of Military Academy graduates.

West Point, undue emphasis was placed on the Natural Sciences, to the extent that Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Applied Mathematics were compulsory subjects for both the BA(Mil) and BSc(Mil) degrees. Secondly, the limited number of applications for the Academy forced the military authorities to select candidates that did not have the school-leaving qualification requisite for the studying of many subjects at university level. Thirdly, the students found it rather difficult to cope with both military training and academic studies at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

A rescue was attempted by extending the degree course to four years and dropping subjects such as Mathematics from the BA (Mil) curriculum. The cadets now completed their first-year subjects over a two-year period at the military gymnasiums, the various military colleges and the Military Academy. Thereafter, they enrolled for two years full-time study at the University of Pretoria, without the burden of undergoing concurrent military training. However, these measures did not bring about a significant improvement. In the meantime, the low output of the Academy forced the military authorities to institute short, non-degree cadet courses, in order to meet the demand for junior officers.<sup>31</sup> This easier route to officership not only robbed the Academy of prospective candidates, but also prevented the Academy from becoming the sole cradle of army and air force officers, thus denying it the opportunity to really institutionalise itself in the heart of the Union Defence Force.

Defence Headquarters was also painfully aware of the fact that the Academy was not producing the much-desired West Point/Sandhurst-type of officer. The permanent force cadets were obtaining almost purely civilian degrees, subjects were not contextualised to the military and two years full-time study at the University of Pretoria made proper military training impossible. In fact, the two years of civilian university exposure went a long way in undoing previous military training. Furthermore, the scattering of the cadet training at several institutions, together with the Academy's subservience to the Military College, also made it impossible to create the kind of atmosphere and cultivate the culture and *esprit de corps* that is associated with institutions such as West Point and Sandhurst. In this regard, a major difference with these institutions was that the cadets did not start their military training at the Military Academy, but underwent basic military

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30. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 1, Minutes of a meeting of the Military Science instructors, 6 September 1951; SANDFA, KG K43 L81, CGS/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 2, enclosure 9, memorandum "Militêre Akademie", 12 August 1953.

31. SANDFA, AG(3) 222, AG(3)1906/9 vol. I, enclosure 29, unpublished manuscript "Die Militêre Akademie", 23 August 1951; SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 1, enclosure 57, HGS56/36, Chief of the General Staff – Minister of Defence, 12 October 1951; SANDFA, AG(3) 222, AG(3)1906/9 vol. I, enclosure 35, DGL0720/2, Army Chief of Staff – Secretary for Defence, 10 January 1952.



training at the Military Gymnasium before arrival at the Academy.<sup>32</sup> A certain amount of socialisation in a somewhat different military culture had thus already taken place when they enrolled at the Academy, robbing that institution of a “clean slate” to impress its unique stamp.

## **5. Inspiration from India**

Amidst these problems, there was also no clear policy as to the progressive development of the Military Academy, whilst a lot of resistance was experienced from within the Union Defence Force to the novel idea of graduate training for officers. There was in fact a very real danger that the fledgling Academy would be closed down.<sup>33</sup> However, thanks to the personal involvement of minister Erasmus and the efforts of Maj. Melt van Niekerk, Dean of the Military Academy since 1951, it was decided to re-establish the Military Academy as an independent, combined institution, educating and training officers for all three services.<sup>34</sup> Maj. Van Niekerk borrowed the idea of a combined academy for the South African Army, Air Force and Navy from the Indian National Defence Academy. At that institution, established in 1949 and organised roughly in the same fashion as Sandhurst and West Point, cadets of the Indian army, air force and navy, received four years joint training, before being posted to the academies of their respective services for specialised service training.<sup>35</sup> It should be added, however, that it was only the idea of joint training that was adopted from the Indian National Defence Academy. The training system and curricula of that institution was apparently not studied in any detail.

Saldanha was chosen as the new location of the Military Academy: it already housed the Naval Gymnasium, which would facilitate the training of naval students, and the close proximity of Langebaan Road presented excellent training facilities for air force students. More than adequate space was also available to create training facilities for army students.<sup>36</sup> Maj. Van Niekerk also noted that

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32. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, CGS/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 2, enclosure 5, memorandum, “Oorsake van die Kreeftgang van die Akademie”, n.d., [M. van Niekerk – F.C. Erasmus, 22 October 1952].

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.; SANDFA, KG K43 L81, CGS/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 2, enclosure 9, CGS/GPT/1/2/5, Chief of the General Staff – Adjutant General, 6 August 1953; SANDFA, MV/EF 135, MV130 vol. 1, enclosure 53, MV168 oor MV130, Private Secretary Minister of Defence – Chief of the General Staff and Secretary for Defence, 31 August 1953.

35. T. RAINA, *Cradle for Leadership: The National Defence Academy: A History 1949 - 1996* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, etc., 1997), pp. 4 - 14.

36. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, CGS/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 2, enclosure 9, preliminary report by Board of Officers w.r.t. cadet training in the SA Permanent Force, n.d.

Saldanha offered the same kind of geographical isolation as West Point.<sup>37</sup> As an independent military unit, the offices of the commanding officer and dean of the Military Academy were combined in a single post. Academically the Academy would in future function under the trusteeship of the University of Stellenbosch, from whom successful candidates would receive a B Mil degree in the Natural or Human Sciences.<sup>38</sup> A third study direction, Commercial Sciences (currently Management Sciences), was added in 1961.<sup>39</sup>

The Military Academy was divorced from the SA Army College and the University of Pretoria on 1 February 1956,<sup>40</sup> whereupon its headquarters were shifted temporarily to Stellenbosch, awaiting the construction of suitable accommodation at Saldanha. The first 31 military first-year students had, in the meantime, already begun attending classes at Stellenbosch at the beginning of 1955.<sup>41</sup> The move to Saldanha was effected in December 1957 and the Academy started to function at its new location at the beginning of 1958.<sup>42</sup>

The newly appointed commanding officer and dean of the Military Academy, Col. (later Brig.) P.J.G. de Vos, a former professor of Physics at the University of Stellenbosch and commanding officer of a citizen force unit, Regiment Tobie Muller,<sup>43</sup> insisted on visiting a number of overseas military academies to gain

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37. SANDFA, MV/EF 135, MV130 vol. 1, enclosure 60, M. van Niekerk – F.C. Erasmus, 1 April 1954.
  38. SANDFA, KG K39 L67, HGS/GM/5/3(1955), Minutes of General Staff meeting, 29 April 1955; SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 4, enclosure 21, abstract from Minutes of meeting of Staff and Section Heads, 4, 7 en 8 July 1955; University of Stellenbosch Archives, Minutes of the Board of the University of Stellenbosch, 9 December 1954, pp.228 – 230 and 28 April 1956, pp.55 – 56, 60.
  39. Military Academy Archives, Agreement between the Department of Defence and the University of Stellenbosch, 31 January 1960; See also University of Stellenbosch Archives, Minutes of the Board of the University of Stellenbosch, 29 October 1960, pp.158, 166, 174 – 175.
  40. SANDFA, Union Defence Force Order 82/56, 25 May 1956.
  41. SANDFA, KG K39 L67, KG/GM/5/3(1955), enclosure 4, Minutes of General Staff meeting, 30 March 1955, p.11; SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 3, enclosure 53, AG(3)1906/9, Acting Adjutant General – Registrar University of Stellenbosch, 30 May 1955; SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 4, enclosure 3a, Minutes of discussions between representatives of the Department of Defence and the University of Stellenbosch, 17 June 1955.
  42. SANDFA, AG(3) 226, AG(3)1906/9/1 vol. 8, enclosure 64, A/ADM/7/1, Officer Commanding Military Academy – Army Chief of Staff, etc., 12 November 1957; P.J.G. DE VOS, *Die Militêre Akademie, 1956 - 1967*. In E.M. MÜLLER, et al., (Eds.), *Military Academy 1950 – 1975: Silver Jubilee* (Military Academy, Saldanha, 1975), pp.17, 21.
  43. SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 87, MK/F/1/2, enclosure 7, MK/F/1/2, Commandant SA Military College - Army Chief of Staff and Adjutant General, 6 March 1954.

insight into the role and nature of such institutions, to prepare himself for his task, and to insure that South Africa was keeping pace with officer education abroad.<sup>44</sup> The military authorities realised the necessity of such a venture and during June through to September 1956 sent Col. De Vos on a three-month tour of well-known overseas institutions, such as the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell, the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, the Canadian Royal Military College, Kingston, the United States Military Academy, West Point, the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, the Dutch *Koninklijke Militaire Academie*, Breda, the French *Ecole Speciale Militaire de Saint Cyr*, as well as similar institutions in Sweden.<sup>45</sup> This tour would prove to be a valuable education: De Vos would later implement some of the ideas that he picked up overseas.

Under the new dispensation, it was agreed that the Academy students would spend their entire first year on the campus of the University of Stellenbosch, in order to comply with the regulations of that university. During their first year they thus followed the normal civilian subjects offered by the university and attended their classes with the civilian students. The second and third years were spent at the Academy, where all academic subjects were presented by military lecturers (mostly civilian academics recruited from outside the Defence Force and appointed as officers in the permanent force) and as far as possible contextualised to the military environment.<sup>46</sup> In January 1961, however, the Academy became a faculty in its own right: the Faculty of Military Science of the University of Stellenbosch. Henceforth, the first-years were also accommodated at Saldanha, meaning that for the first time since its inception in 1950, the Academy was allowed to present the entire military degree course to its students.<sup>47</sup>

On the surface its establishment as an independent unit at Saldanha, brought the Military Academy closer to its foreign role models than before. Situated at its own premises, with its own building complex, personnel establishment and commanding officer, it could now begin to create the kind of atmosphere and cultivate the unique culture and *esprit de corps* that is associated with institutions such as West Point and Sandhurst. However, an important element was still missing from the equation

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44. P.J.G. DE VOS, *Die Militêre Akademie*, p.17.

45. SANDFA, KG K39 L67, HGS/GM/5/3(1955), enclosure 6, Minutes of General Staff Conference, 27 October 1955; SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 5, enclosure 134(a), Travel programme: Col. P.J.G. de Vos, 29 March 1956.

46. UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH (Archives), Minutes of the Board of the University of Stellenbosch, 9 December 1954, pp.228 – 230.

47. Military Academy Archives, Agreement between the Department of Defence and the University of Stellenbosch, 31 January 1960; see also University of Stellenbosch Archives, Minutes of the Board of the University of Stellenbosch, 29 October 1960, pp.158, 166, 174 – 175.

*Historia* 46(2), November 2001, pp. 387-404.

as far as the creation of a traditional military academy was concerned, namely formative military training. The Academy students still received their basic training at the respective service gymnasia.<sup>48</sup> Whereas a Military Academy sergeant-major and three military instructors (one for each service) were appointed, no fundamental formative training was conducted at the Military Academy. Defence Headquarters provided neither a fixed military training programme, nor issued clear guide-lines to De Vos in that regard. The military training programme was completely left to De Vos's discretion and imagination. At his initiative one day per week was set aside for military training, which amounted to little more than drill, physical training and occasional shooting exercises, although some attention was given to specific service training. Training facilities at the Academy itself were lacking due to financial limitations, whereas services training at neighbouring units created some logistical and administrative problems and understandably resulted in some time being spent unproductively in shuttling to and fro.<sup>49</sup>

Drawing on his observations from abroad, De Vos tried his utmost to convince Defence Headquarters to recruit Academy students directly from high school and to concentrate the entire four years of candidate officer training (i.e. one year gymnasium training and three years degree study) at the Military Academy. He argued convincingly that "during these four years all training should have one aim and mission: the creation of career officers" and that the distribution of the training at more than one institution made it "far too interrupted for the successful accomplishment of our mission".<sup>50</sup> The creation of the Faculty of Military Science and the consequent concentration of the complete degree course at the Academy were in fact a direct result of his efforts in this regard. However, the army, air force and navy attached too much value to the socialisation of their candidates in their respective services to entrust the gymnasium year to the Military Academy.

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48. SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 2) 1, G/TRG/1/0 vol. 1, enclosure 24, G/TRG/1/0, Officer Commanding Military Academy – Adjutant General, 31 January 1964.

49. SANDFA, MVB 164, Verslag oor die Militêre Akademie Deel I (Hereafter Malan Report), 28 February 1969, pp.14 – 15; Military Academy Archives, "Memorandum oor die Militêre Akademie en die Offisiersopleiding voorgelê aan die Ministeriële Kommissie op 25 September 1965", pp.18 - 20.

50. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, enclosure 2, G/TRG/1/1, OC Military Academy – Chief of the General Staff, 26 October 1956.

Similar sentiments also prevented De Vos from introducing a distinctive uniform and insignia for the Academy, as was the custom overseas.<sup>51</sup>

## **6. Shift towards a traditional military academy**

Despite the lack of support and direction from Defence Headquarters, De Vos succeeded in developing the Military Academy into a worthwhile institution, imparting quality military-academic education to young officers of the South African Defence Force.<sup>52</sup> However, the military did not really accept ownership for the Military Academy. There remained a certain degree of resistance to degree study for officers in some circles of the Defence Force, while the Academy came to be regarded as an extension of the University of Stellenbosch, rather than a military unit. This can be seen as a direct result of the lack of formative training at the Academy and the fact that the commanding officer of the Military Academy was an academic, rather than a career soldier.<sup>53</sup> A decision was thus taken in 1967 to involve the Academy to a greater extent in the military training of candidate officers and to separate the offices of dean and commanding officer. The last-mentioned change was already effected in December 1967 to pave the way for the introduction of a new training system at the Academy, centralising the formative training of all permanent force officers at this institution. The new Commanding officer of the Military Academy was Brig. (later Gen.) M.A. de M. Malan, who eventually became Chief of the former South African Defence Force and, later, Minister for Defence.<sup>54</sup>

A concerted effort was now made to bring the Military Academy in line with overseas academies. Defence Headquarters sent Malan in 1968 on an extensive tour of officer training institutions overseas to scrutinise their training systems and make recommendations regarding future officer training and education at the

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51. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, enclosure 2, G/TRG/1/1, Officer Commanding Military Academy – Chief of the General Staff, 26 October 1956; SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, enclosure 63, memorandum, Commandant General – Minister of Defence, 25 February 1957; SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, enclosure 92, DGAF/TR/818/100/102/Org, Lugstafhoof – Commandant General, 27 December 1956; SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, enclosure 116, AG(1)950/1 over AG(3)1906/9, Adjutant General – Commandant General, 31 October 1957.

52. P.D. Steyn – G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 25 November 1994; M.A. DE M. MALAN – G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 24 November 1994.

53. M.A. de M. Malan – G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 24 November 1994.

54. SANDFA, AG (Gp. 1, Classified) 12, HWA(C)403/67/72, enclosure 4, Acting Chief of Defence Force Administration – Commandant General, 13 October 1967; SANDFA, Personnel Records, 01218700PE, M.A. de M. Malan.; M.A. de M. Malan – G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 24 November 1994; P.J.G. DE VOS, *Die Militêre Akademie, 1956 - 1967*, p.23; P.J.G. DE VOS – G.E. Visser, interview, Stellenbosch, 2 July 1993.

Military Academy. He followed more or less in De Vos' footsteps, visiting fifteen different military colleges and academies in West Germany, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States.<sup>55</sup> In accordance with his findings at these institutions, a new system for the development of young officers in South Africa was introduced, based upon the threefold concept of general, scientific (academic) and military forming. A six-month officers' formative course was consequently introduced at the Academy from 1970, followed by a degree course compressed into two years. Henceforth, for the first time since its inception, all prospective officers of the permanent force were routed through the Military Academy via the formative course. On completion of the formative course, those candidates that met the academic requirements and so desired, were admitted to the degree course. The rest continued their officer training at the training institutions of their respective services. This last principle, as well as aspects of the new leadership training programme, was borrowed from the Dutch military academy at Breda, whose training system Malan found to be particularly effective. Likewise elements of the training systems of other institutions were also incorporated into the new officer development system, since, due to cultural and other differences, no single overseas model completely met the specific needs of officer development in South Africa.<sup>56</sup>

With the introduction of this new training system, the Military Academy for the first time closely resembled its foreign role models, since it now in effect prepared candidate officers for their commissions as was the practice at traditional military academies. A significant difference, however, was that the prospective officers still received their basic military training at their service training institutions,<sup>57</sup> before they arrived at the Military Academy for formative training. This still resulted from the desire of the services to socialise their candidates before they were exposed to joint training. It was particularly the two smaller services, namely the air force and the navy, that clung to this system for fear of their candidates being

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55. Malan Report, p.28; SANDFA, DC (Classified) 74, DC17850/422/29, enclosure 10, A/VIS/8/0, Officer Commanding Military Academy – Chief of Defence Force Administration, 25 June 1968; SANDFA, DC (Classified) 74, DC17850/422/29, enclosure 13, HVS/305/3/1, Chief of Staff – Comptroller SA Defence Force, 26 August 1968; SANDFA, DC (Classified) 74, DC17850/422/29, enclosure 14, DC17850/422/29(B), Acting Comptroller SA Defence Force – Chief of Defence Force Administration, 26 August 1968.

56. Malan Report, pp.14 – 15; SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 2) 2, G/TRG/6/2 vol. 15, enclosure 4, HVS/207/5/1, Commandant General - Officer Commanding Military Academy, 20 August 1969.

57. Malan Report, pp.47.

completely dominated by the army culture in the most receptive stage of their military socialisation.<sup>58</sup>

## **7. Migration towards a military university**

The new training system at the Academy eventually failed mainly because the services never really bought into the idea of joint formative training, as they perceived their training needs to differ too comprehensively.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the army culture dominated the formative training at the Academy to the extent that the other to services did not feel at home with it at all. Furthermore, the compression of the degree course into two years also proved to be a failure. It placed too much pressure on both students and lecturers, while the degree course lost its credibility because it was perceived to have been completely watered down as a result of its compression into two years.<sup>60</sup> The net result was that the formative training was once again returned to the services in 1976 and the degree course extended to the normal three-year period.<sup>61</sup>

The escalation of the South African Defence Force's involvement in the so-called "Bush War" on the borders of South West Africa/Namibia brought about a fundamental change in the role and nature of the Military Academy from 1976. To satisfy the increasing demand for junior officers resulting from the war, it was decided that candidate officers should be "task qualified" within their respective services and undergo some on-the-job training, before receiving their commissions, or becoming eligible for admission to the Military Academy. The degree course thus no longer formed part of the preparation of candidate officers for their commissions. It was merely a voluntary option for those who desired to obtain a

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58. MILITARY ACADEMY ARCHIVES, "Verslag deur Komitee van ondersoek met betrekking tot Jongoffisiersopleiding te Militêre Akademie Saldanha" (Hereafter Van der Westhuizen Report), 31 January 1975, pp.18 - 20.

59. MILITARY ACADEMY ARCHIVES, report by Lt. L.J. du Toit, (Directorate Psychological Services, Surgeon General, SA Defence Force) "Die Sisteem van Kwalifiseringsopleiding in die SAW met besondere verwysing na die rol van die Militêre Akademie" (Hereafter Psychological Services Report), March 1974, pp.58, 76; SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 3) 158, G/TRG/6/2/0 (Confidential) vol. 4, enclosure 18, report on problem areas w.r.t. Phase 2 training, 26 June 1974.

60. Psychological Services Report, pp.58, 65 – 67, 86 – 94.

61. SANDFA, MVB 184, MV53/2, enclosure 15, Minutes of Defence Staff Council meeting, 18 April 1975, p.7; SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 3) 77, G/TRG/6/2/0 vol. 1, enclosure 5, G/TRG/6/2/0, Officer Commanding Military Academy – Chief of Staff Personnel, 13 May 1975; SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 3) 146, G/SD/3/1/20 (Confidential) vol. 1, enclosure 25, G/SD/3/1/20 over G/TRG/6/2/0, Officer Commanding Military Academy – Chief of Staff Personnel, 8 September 1975; E.M. MÜLLER, *et al.*, (Eds.), *Military Academy 1950 – 1975: Silver Jubilee*, p.76.

degree.<sup>62</sup> The Minister for Defence, furthermore, also approved the admission of commissioned officers to the Academy, instead of candidate officers only, as was the case previously.<sup>63</sup> The result was that officers up to the rank of major, many of them already married and living out, were admitted to the Academy. The student body consequently became so diverse in terms of age, level of training, experience, rank and marital status, that sensible joint military training became quite impossible.<sup>64</sup> Military training thus disappeared from the scene for all practical purposes and the Academy in fact became a military university, offering a degree course to serving officers instead of a traditional military academy preparing candidate officers for commissioned appointment. The Military Academy had thus completely drifted away from its foreign role models. Writing for the *Navy International*, Col. Norman L. Dodd remarked in 1984:

The name 'Military Academy' is a misnomer; it is in fact a University which offers officers of the SADF the chance of obtaining a B (Mil) degree....<sup>65</sup>

Coinciding with the end of the Bush War, a deliberate effort was made during the late eighties to once again steer the Military Academy in the direction of a traditional military academy. The degree course was again incorporated into an overall officer's development programme, the student body was markedly rejuvenated and more emphasis was placed on continued formative training.<sup>66</sup> However, the divergent sentiments and training needs of the services made a substantial reversal to a traditional military academy impossible. The Military Academy, therefore, for all practical purposes retained its character as a military university. This trend was confirmed by the new dispensation introduced at the Academy at the beginning of 2001,<sup>67</sup> which, through a preparatory certificate programme, various certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate programmes,

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62. Van der Westhuizen Report, pp.9 – 10, 31, 55.

63. SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 3) 73, G/TRG/6/2 vol. 23, enclosure 33, HSP/DPO/599/2/2/1, Chief of Staff Personnel – Chief of Staff, etc., 13 November 1975.

64. Psychological Services Report, pp.61 - 65; Military Academy Archives, "Verslag van Projek WIMPOLE oor die Militêre Akademie" (Hereafter Wimpole Report), 13 October 1989, p5.13 – 15.

65. N.L. DODD, "South African Navy: Simon's Town Base and Training" in *Navy International*, October 1984, p. 608.

66. Wimpole Report, pp.45 – 48; Military Academy, current files, MA/B/501/1 vol. 2, enclosure 1, MA/B/501/1, Officer Commanding Military Academy - Chief of Staff Personnel, 9 April 1990; Military Academy, current files, MA/B/518/7/1 vol. 1, enclosure 66, briefing on Military Academy to R. Adm. R. Eberlein and Brig. J.C. van Deventer, 5 June 1990.

67. MILITARY ACADEMY ARCHIVES, Briefing by Flag Officer Commanding Military Academy and Heads of Departments to Chief of Joint Training, SANDF, 23/24 August 2000.



will make the Academy the alma mater of most future permanent force officers, but leaves the formative training of candidate officers with the services. The proposed linking of postgraduate studies with military command and staff courses under the new officer education system will certainly strengthen the image of the Academy as a military university.

## **8. Conclusion**

The original aspirations of the South African military authorities to create a Sandhurst or West Point type of institution, were never realised, not in terms of its training model nor its spirit and stature. With the exception of the short spell of formative training during the seventies, the Military Academy has, since its establishment at Saldanha, almost completely moved away from the traditional military academy model in the direction of a military university. This drift was dictated by local circumstances. Financial limitations and student numbers have made separate academies impractical. The establishment of a joint academy in turn has made a traditional academy impossible, as the divergent sentiments and training needs of the different services resulted in the location of the formative training of candidate officers at the various training institutions of the services. Furthermore, as only a very small percentage of permanent force officers have historically been routed through the Academy, it has not yet created a tradition of officership comparable with that of West Point and Sandhurst. Unlike its two more renowned role models, the South African Military Academy has not been popularised and institutionalised to the degree that it merely became known as 'Saldanha' after its hometown. It is not surrounded by the magical aura that Ellis and Moore ascribe to West Point (and which is also true of Sandhurst):

Most of the thousands of tourists and other outsiders who visit West Point every year already possess a highly developed mental picture of the academy before they arrive. Films such as 'The Long Grey Line' have contributed to the national lore about West Point, a lore which provides most visitors with dramatic expectations and perhaps more than any other American monument, West Point looks the way it is supposed to look the way most visitors knew it looked before they set foot on the grounds. The Cadet Chapel, Battle Monument on Trophy Point, The Plain, the cadets on parade – all convey the sense of solidity and permanence most visitors expect to find. Even graduates of West Point, who realize that the physical appearance of the Academy reinforces a public craving for tradition, often seek inspiration from trips back to alma mater.<sup>68</sup>

Although the South African Military Academy has developed into a military university rather than a traditional military academy and has not achieved the standing and recognition of a Sandhurst or West Point, it has well served the unique

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68. J. ELLIS and R. MOORE, *School for Soldiers: West Point and the Profession of Arms* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1974), p.5.

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needs of the South African National Defence Force through its first half-century of existence. It has certainly made a valuable contribution towards military professionalism in South Africa. The new dispensation instituted at the Academy at the beginning of 2001, promises to make the Military Academy the alma mater of most permanent force officers in future. Furthermore, the envisaged linking of staff qualifications with postgraduate studies will bring permanent force officers back to their *alma mater* at various stages of their careers, which will certainly strengthen the bond between Academy graduates and their alma mater. The South African Military Academy might thus well in time become as synonymous with officer education as its famous foreign counterparts.

## Opsomming

### **Die Suid-Afrikaanse Militêre Akademie en sy buitelandse rolmodelle**

Die stigting van die Suid-Afrikaanse Militêre Akademie op 1 April 1950 was daarop gemik om offisersopleiding in die Unieverdedigingsmag op dieselfde peil as in die buiteland te bring. Die idee was dus om die Akademie na die voorbeeld van West Point en Sandhurst in te rig. Die Akademie was egter totaal ondergeskik aan sy voorgede, naamlik die Universiteit van Pretoria en die SA Militêre Kollege. Die kandidaatoffisiere het feitlik 'n suiwer burgerlike graad van die Universiteit van Pretoria ontvang. Die Akademie was dus nóg wat status en atmosfeer, nóg wat die militêr-akademiese voorbereiding van sy graduandi betref, op gelyke voet met West Point of Sandhurst. Teen die middel van die vyftigerjare is die Akademie na die voorbeeld van die Indiese National Defence Academy as 'n selfstandige, gesamentlike akademie vir die Leër, Lugmag en Vloot op Saldanha hervestig, dié keer onder die Universiteit van Stellenbosch. Die Akademie het steeds 'n baie oppervlakkige ooreenkoms met sy buitelandse rolmodelle getoon, aangesien dit bitter min militêre opleiding verskaf het. Van 1970 af het die Akademie die vormingsopleiding van alle Staandemag kandidaatoffisiere behartig en is sy opleidingsmodel voortaan sterk op veral die voorbeelde van West Point en die Nederlandse militêre akademie te Breda geskoei. Die weermagsdele het egter in 1976 weer die vormingsopleiding van hul onderskeie kandidaatoffisiere oorgeneem. Die Akademie het voortaan ook nie meer slegs jong, ongetroude kandidaatoffisiere toegelaat nie, maar ook opgeleide offisiere, waarvan baie reeds getroud was. Langs dié weg het die Akademie inderwaarheid 'n militêre universiteit, eerder as 'n militêre akademie geword.