


SSGT. MARK SCICLUNA

# Rise and shine!

Photographs by Darrin Zammit Lupi



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**D**rill has for many hundreds of years been the foundation of military discipline in any army. Instilled and acquired on the parade ground right from the start of any military career, it is developed further as soldiers move on to learn various specialist skills such as gun drills and battle drills.

Drill is an excellent tool to conquer fear as troops tend to lose their individuality when unified in a group under the obedience of orders.

Ceremonial parades have been described as the noblest and proudest form of drill. A ceremonial parade, impeccably performed, can never fail to be a source of inspiration to those who watch it and for those selected to be part in it. But behind the vivid colours of the uniforms, drum calls and the shining bayonets lie hours of thought, preparation and, last but not least, stockpiles of elbow and knee grease. Rehearsals begin around two weeks before the actual date of the ceremonial occasion. Soldiers are put through their paces under the watchful eyes of the Force Sergeant Major as well as the Regimental Sergeant Majors. No movement goes unnoticed, particularly if it is wrongly performed or uncalled for. Slackness on parade is not tolerated.

The parade commander, who is normally a Major, gives the executive words of command for all movements intended to be simultaneous, unless the size or formation of the parade does not allow him or her to make himself heard by all concerned. Any ceremonial activity by the AFM will also feature the Force's band, playing a suitable selection of band marches from its vast repertoire.

The long hours spent on parade rehearsals have to be complemented by excellent uniform turnout. The forage cap, which is blue and red and with a prominent gloss peak, must have the shiny Cap. Badge affixed in the exact frontal panel of the cap. There should also be no blemishes on the peak whilst the cap must be clean, well brushed and preserved. The ceremonial jacket and trousers have to be steam ironed as soldiers compete between themselves to ensure that their uniform has perfect creases.

The rest of the kit, including waist belts, bayonet holders, rifle slings, sashes and other decorations are also carefully wiped, cleaned or polished. Last but not least are the army boots. Any drill instructor can tell how experienced and well seasoned a soldier is from the polishing skills (in army slang 'bulling' skills) of the boots. The art of bulling is a specialised technique which requires a lot of attention and practice to perfect.

A few hours before the ceremonial occasion, all the officers and soldiers will congregate at Luqa Barracks where the last inspection is conducted before moving to the parade site. Timings are closely monitored as nothing is left to chance. When the time to march off arrives, a sequence of events is triggered. As the Sergeant Major orders all to fall in, it is time for all the troops to be *on parade*... and to demonstrate pride in the Armed Forces, their performance and their profession of arms. ●

