

Regiment Oranjerivier celebrates its 60th Birthday with the opening of the new ROR Laager at Fort Ikapa

Article and photos supplied by Mrs Regine Lord.

The weekend of the 1st of July 2012 was a special one for the Regiment Oranjerivier (ROR): the regiment was celebrating its 60th birthday.

ROR is an armoured regiment, whose mission is to execute armour and reconnaissance tasks for the South African Army's Armour Formation. It is a reserve unit, which means that its members are not full-time soldiers, though they can be called up for active duty if the need arises. Their regimental motto is "*oculi et aures*" (eyes and ears), and the badge, which is worn on the traditional black beret of the Armoured Corps, depicts an eagle with outspread wings.



Photo 1: The Castle of Good Hope hosts the Regiment Oranjerivier on their 60th Birthday

The regiment was founded at Upington in the Northwest Cape Province on 12 September 1952, initially as Regiment Noordwes-Kaap, though its name was changed later that year to Regiment Hertzog. JBM Hertzog was a Boer general during the second Anglo-Boer War who later became the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa (1924 to 1939). On 1 January 1960, as part of the reorganisation of the Citizen Force, the name of the regiment was changed to Regiment Oranjerivier. In 1966, the Regiment was awarded the Freedom of Access to Upington, and two years later, to the town of Keimoes. On 15 November 1974, it became the armoured car regiment of 71 Infantry Brigade, which was part of 7 South African Division, and in 1975, the ROR headquarters was re-located to Cape Town. ROR was mobilised, together with other units of the 71 Infantry Brigade, to serve in Southern Angola during Operation Savannah (1975-76).



Photo 2: The birthday dinner is held in the beautifully decorated Dolphin Room

Around that time, the Marmon-Herrington armoured cars they had used previously were replaced by the highly mobile Eland Mk7 light armoured car (also fondly referred to as Noddy cars). These were well suited to the terrain at the border between northern Namibia and southern Angola, where the regiment was deployed during the South African Border War and the Angolan Civil War. On 2 November 1990, ROR was honoured with the Rooikat Floating Trophy (the first time this trophy had

been awarded) as the best unit in the SA Armoured Corps.

Nowadays, ROR uses the Rooikat armoured vehicle. The Rooikat was custom-designed and built in South Africa for combat reconnaissance and for search-and-destroy missions, as well as to



Photo 3: Lt Col Jaco Olivier, OC of ROR, hands a certificate of appreciation to Col André Retief of the Armour Formation, in acknowledgement of the significant role played by SA Army Armour Formation in the regiment's history

give combat support. It accommodates a driver in the hull, and a commander, gunner and loader in the turret. Capable of travelling at up to 120 kph on the open road and 30 to 60 kph across rough terrain, it can climb gradients of 70 degrees, traverse gradients of 30 degrees, cross 2 metre wide trenches at a crawl and ford water up to 1.5 m deep.

ROR's 60th birthday celebrations began on Friday evening, 29 June 2012, with a sumptuous dinner in the magnificently decorated Dolphin Room of Het Bakhuis at the Castle of Good Hope.

This is one of the loveliest function venues in the Castle. Crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling, and silver candelabras had been placed at intervals on the long table. The team of servers in their distinctive leopard-skin patterned vests, worn over white shirts, attended quietly and efficiently to the invited guests.

After Capt Reinhardt Kruger had read the code of conduct, MWO Karel Minnie, the RSM of ROR, lit the Armour Flame. Capt Philip Wessels explained the symbolism of this flame, which symbolises the inextinguishable spirit and energy of the South African Armoured Corps.

It is a visual reminder of the fire that burns within each Armour soldier, inspiring him or her to excel, and to advance fearlessly in the face of the enemy. It also embodies the destructive firepower of the Armour, when attacking the enemy in defence of the country.

And it resonates with the National Torch of Tolerance, which itself symbolises that, even though we are outwardly people of many colours, races, cultures, languages, religions and origins, we are all tied to one another, sharing a common destiny.



Photo 4: The medal parade takes place at the ROR headquarters in Fort iKapa – the Rooikat and the Eland armoured vehicles stand guard

Maj JP Wessels (2IC) delivered the toast, with the company drinking the traditional Diesel and Dust, a very special drink unique to the Armour Corps. Col André Retief from the SA Army Armour Formation and Lt Col Jaco Olivier (OC of ROR) addressed the gathering, and Lt Col Willem Rall delivered a toast on fallen comrades. As per the regimental tradition, two songs were performed: the very moving Tanker's Prayer, which asks for protection when going into combat, and the stirringly powerful Pantserlied or Song of the Armoured Corps.



Photo 5: Col André Retief of the Armour Formation addresses the gathering and formally hands over the medals to the recipients

On Saturday morning, a medal parade was held at the regiment's headquarters in Fort Ikapa military base, when the new ROR Laager was formally opened. Col André Retief handed over the medals and certificates to the recipients, who stood proudly to attention. The regiment's 60th birthday celebrations concluded with a church parade at the base on Sunday morning, during which the ROR's very unusual birthday cake, in the form of the regiment's distinctive Rooikat armoured vehicle, was cut.



Photo 6: The central fireplace, representing the Armour Flame, lies at the heart of the new ROR Laager, which was ceremonially opened during the ROR's 60th birthday celebrations

The opening of the new ROR Laager was a special occasion. A laager is a mobile fortification made of wagons arranged into a rectangle, a circle or other shape: an improvised military camp. In Second World War armoured warfare, a laager is a formation of tanks or other armoured vehicles, used for quick resupply or refuelling. It is rather vulnerable to attack, especially from the air, so it is only maintained for a short period, in a relatively safe location.

The new ROR laager was created in the fynbos area just next to the ROR hangar, and surrounded by tall blue gum trees, which were retained for shade and protection, although they are alien trees. Various fynbos plants, including proteas, silver trees, blushing brides and pincushions, had been planted in the area, and care was taken to disturb the national biodiversity as little as possible. Logs were arranged around the edges of the laager and along the pathway leading to the central area, as well as serving as seating places inside the laager itself. Forming a circle, they surrounded the central fireplace, which represents the Armour Flame. This new laager will no doubt become a wonderful gathering place for the soldiers of this regiment.

May the Flame of the Armour burn forever!