

## **A Change of Command at Regiment Oranjerivier**

*Article and Photographs by: Regine Lord*

On Saturday 23 June 2018, during a parade at the regimental headquarters of Regiment Oranjerivier (ROR) in Fort Ikapa Military Base, the outgoing Officer Commanding, Lieutenant Colonel J.P. Wessels, handed over command to his successor, Lt Col Thembelani Dlakadla.

Invited guests, family and friends of the regiment were warmly welcomed by Major Philip Wessels, Master of Ceremonies for the change of command parade as well as for the Armour Shot Action that followed. Everyone stood for the arrival of the command group: Lt Col J.P. Wessels, Major Thembelani Dlakadla, Captain Amanda Goli, and Capt Reinhardt Kruger. Chaplain Caroline Pillay of the SA Armour Formation led the scripture reading and prayer, followed by the singing of the Tanker's Prayer.

Master Warrant Officer Karel Minnie, the Regimental Sergeant Major, lit the Flame of the Armour: this symbolises the inextinguishable spirit and energy of the South African Armoured Corps and reminds us of the fire that burns within each Armour soldier, inspiring him or her to deliver extraordinary performance and achievements. To cite the stirring words of the Armour Song, which was sung at the event, "Armoured man, still be true, Others do rely on you! Ever proud, ever strong, That's the oath we pledge, 'Ever be true!'"

During his farewell speech, Lt Col Wessels looked back on his military career, mentioning some of the highlights: Starting Basics at the School of Armour (1992), becoming an Officer at the School of Armour (1992), being appointed as adjutant of Brigadier General Chris Gildenhuys and Brig Gen André Retief respectively at the School of Armour, studying at the Military Academy in Saldanha, becoming the OC of Regiment Oranjerivier in February 2015, and being part of the Executive Committee of the Cape Town Military Tattoo. Under his command, the unit can pride itself on receiving a 100% audit with no findings in all relevant departments during 2017, which is an impressive achievement.

In the years since Lt Col Wessels became 2IC of ROR, under the then-OC Lt Col Jaco Olivier, much work has been done on landscaping the surroundings of ROR's HQ and improving the overall look of the dilapidated old aircraft hangars at Fort Ikapa Military Base. The regiment has regularly participated in the Cape Town Military Tattoo, in the Opening of Parliament, and in other military parades. When their members did gate duty at the entrance to Fort Ikapa, they invariably looked neat and well turned out in their black berets, with the ROR insignia.

Lt Col Wessels has certainly left his mark on Regiment Oranjerivier. Throughout his involvement with the regiment, he has displayed leadership with heart and integrity. He and the regiment

under his command have always prided themselves on doing things a little differently, and with a touch of class!

This is in no small measure due to the influence of Yolandé, Lt Col Wessel's lovely wife, whose light feminine touch and designer's eye for beauty, style and grace impressed all who attended ROR's birthday celebrations, medal parades, formal dinners, and family days over the years. The exquisite floral arrangements, beautifully designed posters and program booklets, the delicious formal meals and trays of finger snacks, the tastefully decorated venues at ROR's Fort Ikapa headquarters as well as at the Castle of Good Hope during the Cape Town Military Tattoo – everything was done with attention to detail as much as to the big picture. And it always created an unusual juxtaposition with the huge and powerful machinery of the armour!

In recent years, the famous Rooikat armoured fighting vehicle of ROR regularly featured in the various Freedom of the City parades of the Western Cape's Reserve Force regiments. It was on display at the Cape Town Military Tattoo, the Navy Festival, community festivals and drill marching events in the Western Cape, where youth drill squads wowed the crowds. At all these events, the Rooikat was always surrounded by youngsters, eager to climb aboard and see what it was like to sit in this powerful vehicle, and firing dozens of questions at the ROR members on duty.

In 2015, Lt Col Wessels received a special request from the Reach for a Dream Foundation: to fulfil the dream of 9-year-old Marius Nel to ride in a Rooikat. The Foundation works with children who have life-threatening illnesses, and seeks to inspire hope, joy and healing. In August 2015, Marius and his young brother Caleb were not only given a ride in the famous Rooikat, but they also met soldiers from the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes) and 3 Parachute Battalion, who demonstrated some of their training drills and equipment to the young boys. Sadly, Marius has since passed away.

During his farewell speech, Lt Col Wessels declared: "Never stop living, never stop loving people, never stop trying! Try everything!" He underscored this message by playing the catchy title song "Try Everything", performed by Shakira, from the endearing animated movie "Zootropolis". Its cheerful bouncing beat soon had some of the guests tapping their feet in time with the music.

He added:

"Our lives are too short to not try everything that comes our way, and if it doesn't come your way, change your route and bump into it. You have nothing to lose, because if you fail, just get up again and be stronger.

Some of the movie's BEST lessons are: Try Everything. Do not underestimate the power of any good deed. Do not judge a book by its cover. Assumptions from first glances can be misleading. Always be prepared. Do not be afraid to keep dreaming."

After these rousing and memorable words, Lt Col J.P. Wessels ceremonially handed over the ROR symbol of command, a silvered 90mm practice round, to his successor, Major Thembelani Dlakadla.

A crucial aspect of good leadership is succession planning – which entails recognising talent, nurturing and developing skills, and using a mentoring approach that empowers people. In Lt Col Thembelani Dlakadla, the Regiment has certainly found a good successor. As Lt Col Wessels mentioned in his speech, the two of them got to know each other by working at the grassroots level – quite literally, by planting the lawn and laying the irrigation pipes around the ROR hangar.

Also present at the event were Brigadier General André Retief (General Officer Commanding of the SA Army Armour Formation), Brig Gen Gustav Lategan (Director Joint Force Preparation and Training J Ops Division), Lt Col Philip Coetzer (Acting SSO Reserves SA Army Armour Formation), Lt Col Steven Pierce (OC Fort Ikapa Military Base), Captain (SAN) (Ret) Trunell Morom, Officers Commanding of other units, including Lt Col Francois Marais of the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes), Lt Col Braam Korff of Regiment President Steyn, Lt Col Johan Conradie (SO1 of the Defence Reserves Provincial Office Western Cape), Chief Warrant Officer Tsoganyetso Abel Mabote (Formation Sergeant Major), Formation Warrant Officers, and Prof Edna van Harte (Chairperson of the Defence Force Service Commission).

At the Armour Shot Action that followed the change of command parade, Brig Gen André Retief thanked Lt Col Wessels warmly for his decades of loyal and true service, in serving the SA Army and the Armoured Corps. To much applause, he also announced the promotion of Major Thembelani Dlakadla to Lieutenant Colonel, and his new Second in Command Captain Amanda Goli to Major.

We wish Lt Col Dlakadla, Major Goli and the leader group of ROR much success in the coming years! May all of them lead by example, affirming positive values such as honour and integrity and standing strong in the face of adversity.

May the Flame of the Armour continue to burn brightly in their hearts and light their way!  
*“Faithful, true and steady – come what may, we are ready”.*

## **Biography – Lt Col J.P. Wessels**

Lieutenant Colonel Joachim Paulus Wessels was born in Vredendal on the West Coast and matriculated at Middelburg High School in 1990.

Lt Col Wessels completed his National Service from 1991 to 1992. During his time at the School of Armour, he was a training instructor at the Regimental Training wing. He fulfilled various other posts at the School as adjutant to Brig Gen Chris Gildenhuis (previous General Officer Commanding of the Armour Formation), as well as being the adjutant of Brig Gen André Retief (current General Officer Commanding of the Armour Formation). Maj Wessels furthered his career by studying at the Military Academy till 1998, when he obtained his degree in Industrial Psychology. He continued his studies at the University of Stellenbosch to obtain his Honours Degree. During his studies, he also filled the post as Carnival Chairperson at the University. He is currently a member of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and a registered psychometrist.

Lt Col Wessels returned to the School of Armour in 1999 and thereafter was transferred to the Armour Formation Headquarters in Pretoria, where he was appointed as Senior Officer Renewal Services. He completed his initial military career in 2001, after spending 10 years in the Permanent Force. Lt Col Wessels then had a break from the Defence Force and joined the Reserve Force (ROR), under the command of Lt Col Willem Rall. Lt Col (then Maj) Wessels filled the post as 2IC of the unit under the command of Lt Col Jaco Olivier. He completed his Regimental Commanders Course in 2012, and took over command of Regiment Oranjerivier on 14 February 2015.

Lt Col Wessels has received the General Service, Unitas and John Chard medals. He has also received various certificates of commendation during his career.

Lt Col Wessels was the General Manager Guarding at Coin Security Group for 10 years. Since 2009, he has been the National Business Development and Marketing Manager of Security Management Solutions, a company that specialises in technologically advanced security systems. Lt Col Wessels is also a part-time Lecturer in Marketing Communication at the Northlink College Business Management Campus.

Lt Col Wessels is happily married to his wife Yolandé (a Hospitality Lecturer). They have one daughter, Isabelle, who is 1 year and 4 months old. The family resides in Durbanville.

## **Biography – Maj A.T. Dlakadla**

Major Augustine Thembelani Dlakadla was born in Stutterheim, in the Eastern Cape, and matriculated at the Khayelitsha Joe Slovo High School in 2002.

He joined the SANDF Reserve Force in 2004, and did his Basic Training at Fort iKapa Military Base. He completed his Junior Leader course in 2007, and went on the Officers Formative course that same year, acquiring the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

In 2011, he completed the Squadron 2nd in Command course, and he was promoted to the rank of Captain. In 2015, he completed the Squadron Commanders course at the School of Armour in Bloemfontein and was promoted to the rank of Major. In 2016, he was appointed as the 2nd in Command of Regiment Oranjerivier under the command of Lt Col J.P. Wessels, and in May 2018, he was appointed as the Acting Officer Commanding of Regiment Oranjerivier, until the present.

Maj Dlakadla has received the following medal during his career: Award for Long Service Ten (10) Years.

Maj Dlakadla has also been permanently employed at PRASA from 2012 until the present, as a Protection Official.

Maj Dlakadla has two children: Asiphile who is 13 years old and is doing Grade 7 at Prestwitch Primary School, and Liqhamile who is 1 year and 7 months old.

Flags flying outside the HQ – SA National Flag, Armour Formation, and ROR's regimental flag.



Change of command parade at the regimental headquarters of ROR on 21 June 2018.



Guests at the parade.



Chaplain Caroline Pillay of the SA Armour Formation.



The singing of the Armour Song.



Lt Col J.P. Wessels delivering his farewell speech, with Maj Thembelani Dlakadla by his side.



Lt Col J.P. Wessels delivering his final address to the Regiment.



Lt Col J.P. Wessels handing over the symbol of command to his successor Maj Thembelani Dlakadla.



Newly appointed OC – Maj Thembelani Dlakadla – with the ex-OCs of ROR: Lt Col J.P. Wessels (2015 to 2018), Lt Col Jaco Olivier (2009 to 2015), and Lt Col Willem Rall (2005 to 2009).



The RSM, MWO Karel Minnie with the outgoing OC and the incoming OC.



Lt Col Thembelani Dlakadla delivers his first address as the new OC.



A farewell gift from Lt Col Braam Korff, Officer Commanding of Regiment President Steyn, to the outgoing OC.



A farewell gift from Lt Col J.P. Wessels to Lt Col Thembelani Dlakadla.



Brig Gen André Retief, GOC Armour Formation, presents a Certificate of Recognition to the outgoing OC.



Brig Gen André Retief, GOC Armour Formation, with the new OC and the outgoing OC.

