

Regiment Oranjerivier makes Marius' dream come true

Article and photographs by: Mrs R. Lord and Major J.P. Wessels

On a cold, overcast winter's day in August 2015, a dream came true for two young boys.

Some weeks earlier, Major J.P. Wessels, Acting Commanding Officer of Regiment Oranjerivier, 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 armoured fighting vehicle.



Marius and his brother Caleb see the Rooikat for the first time

The Reach for a Dream Foundation, which was created in South Africa in 1988, works with children between the ages of 3 and 18 years. Their mission is to encourage children to use their dreams to fight life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer and leukaemia, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, renal failure and many others. By making their dreams come true and creating unforgettable magical moments that distract them, albeit temporarily, from the medical issues and hospital environments they must confront every day, the Foundation seeks to inspire hope, joy and healing. Early on Saturday, 15 August 2015, young Marius, his 6-year-old little brother Caleb and their parents Guillaume and Joanne thus arrived at Fort Ikapa military base in Acacia Park, Goodwood.

Just inside the perimeter gate, they were warmly welcomed by Maj J.P. Wessels, the Regimental Sergeant Major, Master Warrant Officer Karel Minnie, Lt Amanda Goli, and a group of soldiers from ROR. Christelle Gantz and Nolie Jacobs of Reach for a Dream, Lieutenant Colonel Johan Conradie of the DRPOWC, Lt Col Ralph Wilkinson of Fort Ikapa military base, and Advocate Anthea Michaels of the Defence Provincial Liaison Committee, were also present.



Marius and Caleb riding in the Rooikat with Lt Goli and Cpl Nikelo, and WO1 Hellmuth at the wheel

When Marius and his brother Caleb heard the deep rumbling roar of the Rooikat vehicle and saw it driving towards them, the look on their faces was unforgettable – a mixture of astonishment, disbelief and sheer delight!

When they were told that they would be allowed to ride in the Rooikat, their joy and enthusiasm was plain to see.

The two young boys eagerly used every opportunity to climb aboard the Rooikat for a ride around Fort Ikapa, and driver WO1 Henry Hellmuth was happy to oblige by taking them all over the military base. The morning's program included visits to the headquarters of Regiment Oranjerivier, the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes) and 3 Parachute Battalion (C Company) – and the boys clearly relished every single moment. Lieutenant Amanda Goli and Corporal Dumisani Nikelo were tasked with looking after the two brothers, helping them into their helmets and protective gear, and assisting them as they climbed onto and down from the massive vehicle.



Marius and his parents ride on the Rooikat with Lt Amanda Goli





Marius, Caleb and their mother on the Rooikat with Maj Wessels, Lt Goli and Cpl Nikelo

Lt Goli and Cpl Nikelo patiently answered the many questions of the two inquisitive boys, as they explored the Rooikat. The youngsters learned that this armoured fighting vehicle has a four-man crew, which is made up of the driver, the loader, the gunner and the commander, and they took turns climbing down into the driver's seat and into the turret compartment to see what it was like to sit inside. They were curious to learn all about the highly mobile Rooikat and the speed and ease with which it can travel on tarred roads as well as across very rough terrain, through soft sand and mud. They learned about the fearsome firepower of the Rooikat's 76-mm gun and the vehicle's night-fighting capability, and they enjoyed the demonstration of the emergency stop and the smoke screen capability. They were even dressed in armour fighting vehicle jackets, and received their own nametags.



Marius, Caleb and their parents with Lt Matthew Ndzena of the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes)

These experiences also brought back many memories for their father, who had been in the Armour Formation during his own military service. Marius and Caleb listened attentively, as Lieutenant Matthew Ndzena from the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes) told them about the infantry, demonstrating what gear a soldier was required to carry, such as radios, tents, ammunition, food and water. They were a little shy at first, but soon overcame their initial hesitation, as they strapped on the helmets and tried on the bulky battle jackets, and confidently posed for photographs with their parents.



Staff Sergeant Abraham Samboya teaches the boys the chant of the airborne soldiers – "up, up, up, up, up, up – airborne!"

Staff Sergeant Abraham Samboya of 3 Para Battalion (C Company) had everyone spellbound with his energetic demonstration of the various drills that airborne soldiers must practice during their strenuous training – how to jump out of an airplane, how to deploy and steer the parachute to avoid mid-air collisions, and how to land safely, both on land and in water. He also demonstrated how to fastrope out of a helicopter, getting everyone to call out the various checks for equipment, helmet, reserve parachute and the various straps, before sliding down the thick rope.



Marius and Caleb are dressed in armour fighting vehicle jackets and helmets, with their own nametags



Marius and Caleb excitedly stepped forward to feel what it was like to be strapped into the tightly packed parachutes and safety helmets. As the young boys stood proudly among the soldiers, Staff Sergeant Samboya led everyone through the chant of the airborne soldier – “1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, let’s go – up, up, up, up, up, up – airborne!”

The final item on the programme was a function at the ROR headquarters, with delicious refreshments prepared by Major JP Wessels’ wife Yolande and MWO Karel Minnie’s wife Ricky. The two young brothers were given certificates of friendship by Maj Wessels, to remind them of this special day that they had spent with some of the men and women of the Defence Reserves in the Western Cape.

They very much enjoyed looking at MWO Minnie’s collection of armoured vehicles. And much to their delight, they also received a miniature model of a Rooikat armoured fighting vehicle as a memento; these models had been created for them by Chris Baxter.

No doubt, Marius and his young brother Caleb will remember for a long time the sense of exhilaration of riding on the Rooikat. And perhaps, when they encounter difficulties and challenges in their lives, they will draw on the strength, agility and power of ROR’s indomitable Rooikat and the fierce fighting spirit of the men and women of this Armour regiment, to inspire and motivate them to overcome any obstacles. Marius and Caleb, may the Flame of the Armour forever burn brightly in your hearts! 



Caleb and Marius receive certificates of friendship from Regiment Oranjerivier



Caleb and Marius each receive a miniature model of the Rooikat



Marius and Caleb and their new military family and friends in front of the Rooikat

