



Transvaal Horse Artillery Celebrates its 115th birthday

Article and Photos by Capt J. de Vries, SA Army Reserves

Past and present serving members of the Transvaal Horse Artillery (THA) along with friends and family of the regiment came together in the unit's Officers' Mess at Mount Collins, Kelvin, Sandton on the evening of Friday 15 March 2019 to toast the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Reserve unit's 115th year, first marked on 17 March 1904.



THA OC Maj S.J. Ngwenya addresses those gathered for the Regiment's birthday celebration

THA's Officer Commanding, Major S.J. Ngwenya led guests in recounting the unit's history, stretching from its inception in the aftermath of the Second Anglo Boer War (also known as the South African War) as the Lys Volunteer Corps, soon thereafter changed to the Transvaal Horse Artillery Volunteers. The Major recounted THA's notable battles fought prior to, during and after the First and Second World Wars, as well as its service in South West Africa/Namibia. THA observed its 90th anniversary in 1994, itself an auspicious year marking the dawn of free and fair democracy in South Africa, while the unit's centenary was celebrated in 2004 with guests from far and wide, most notably from the British Armed Forces Army Reserves' Honourable Artillery Company (HAC), with whom THA maintains ties.

THA's 110th birthday, commemorated in 2014 was of particular import since on 26 September of 1914, the regiment fought a valiant stand in German South West Africa (present day Namibia) at the Battle of Sandfontein. The Regiment has elected and approved the motion to assume the name 'Sandfontein' in honour of its fallen gunners and in reverence for its part in the first substantial and courageous bleeding of Union Defence Force (UDF) troops during the First World War.



Maj Ngwenya shares THA's rich history, flanked by 2Lts Kgori, Ngema, and THA's Honorary Colonel, Maj Gen Andersen

Maj Ngwenya thanked his officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks present at the evening for their faithful service to the unit, especially to those such as Acting OC Second Lieutenant E.I. Kgori and Adjutant 2Lt V.O. Ngema who had held the unit in good stead during the Major's absence on course. THA's former Officer Commanding and present Honorary Colonel - Chief Defence Reserves Major General R.C. Andersen, took the opportunity to present engraved traditional glass bottomed drinking vessels to 2Lts Kgori and Ngema, to be hung above the bar with those mugs of their fellows past and present.



2Lt Kgori receives his engraved mug from THA's Honorary Colonel, Maj Gen Andersen

The evening was also a time of solemn reflection, commemorating the keenly felt loss of a number of THA notables in the presence of their families. Among those who had passed on were Colonel P. Lotz (former OC) in October 2018, Lt Col R. Ludeman (of the Regimental Council and Honorary Life President of the Gunners' Association SA) in November 2018, Maj I.C. Macdonald (former OC) in January 2019 and Lance Bombardier M.J. Sehurutshe in January 2018. Well wishes for a speedy recovery were echoed at the event for Gunner J.T. Motshabi, who suffered a stroke while on guard duty in Pretoria in 2018. A substantial charitable collection was gathered on the evening for the convalescing Gunner.

The tradition of bestowing of personalised drinking vessels to members of the unit (to be drunk out of not by them but by their comrades) is accompanied by the ritual of dashing the glass bottoms of these mugs upon the death of departed comrades, never to be drunk from again... Maj Gen Andersen broke the bottom of Lt Col Ludeman's mug, while Maj Ngwenya dashed the mug of Maj Macdonald, sharing with those gathered before he did so that – "I have served under Maj Macdonald, and I'll continue to break them, he was the greatest gunner among the gunners in the Regiment (to the chorus of 'hear hear')..."



Maj Ngwenya smashes the glass bottom of former THA OC, Maj Macdonald's regimental mug... We will remember them

In a sombre yet convivial atmosphere, the OC summed up the thunderous spirit of the members of the THA as he concluded formalities by saying that - "I have the pleasure to serve and be ready, willingly to let the guns roar whenever it might be called upon in defence of the Republic of South Africa!"

THA Gunners!