

## REGIMENTAL 55<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

### Report- RLIRA Africa 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The RLIRA -Africa Committee Members in South Africa, its membership, the RLIRA Association members World wide , RLI Families our Friends and Supporters -a heartfelt Thank -You for your part in helping to make the 55th Regimental Day and Unveiling of The Trooper Africa , one of the proudest days in the History of the Africa branch of the Association.

Thank You hardly seems adequate though as I look through the many hundreds of photos and posts on Face Book, the ' Pride and Honour' we shared on Friday and Saturday shines through. Many of these have been uploaded into our website (Members Section) See the link further down my report

For those who were fortunate enough to attend and be present as Regimental Association History was made in South Africa, you will get to keep some wonderful memories of Camaraderie and our shared service in our Great Battalion.

Many friends were able to reunite after some 40 years and rekindle the friendships and memories from the 'Old Days'. On Friday evening there were over 100 guests joining up for Boerie rolls and pints but more for the sheer joy of camaraderie with long last seen mates and brothers in arms. Saturday, with perfect weather saw the gathering of some 330 members and guests for the main event, the rededication of the Trooper. Bayonets on the parade numbered 109 included in this number are a few from other units/Associations.

The life size replica made by Jaco van Niekerk was absolutely magnificent and there are no qualms that this memorial is a very close facsimile of the original now at Hatfield House in the UK. Many a tear was seen in the eyes (once steely) of old warriors as Patron Lt. Col. Ian Bate (retd) and Russell Philips SCR unveiled the Trooper Statue for the second time in their lifetime.

I wish to propose a Toast to Absent Friends -although you were not present your 'Spirit' was felt and shared, you can be assured that your names were spoken with great fondness and pride. Your messages of support were received strength 10 .You were with us every step on Parade and sip taken. (RIP Manne)

Many of the men and women went beyond the' Call of duty' and made the event a resounding success by sometimes superhuman effort. We did have a few logistical challenges, some lessons have been learnt, but in true RLI Spirit and Tradition we all pulled together and 'Made a Plan '.

The RLI Association raised over R110 000 made up as follows:

Auction R56 000  
Gate Takings R7 350  
Sales of memorabilia R30 000  
Raffle R9 210  
Donations R12 000

Special thanks to Charlie Norris, Toni Jean Floyd Fachie, Gerry Cilliers, Neil Swart, Jimmy Gallagher and the ever willing Len Beechey for their sterling efforts in making fund raising possible. Thank you one and all, some valuable memories were made. The venue although oversubscribed was fully

utilized and the catering absolutely incredible. When you think that our members and guests could sit down to a three course meals fit for a king, and have seconds for many, for the princely sum equivalent to GBP 4.60 or USD 6.08 is incredible. Hats must come off and kudos to Lynette Theron and her team that set before us such sumptuous fare. Thank you to all those who traveled across the globe to support the events we owe you a great debt.

I must thank all of my committee members and those of you seconded to help in the planning and preparation and there are many of you. Well done.

**Officers seen on Parade (Friday and Saturday)**

Ian (Tufty) Bate	Chaplain Padre Bill Dodgen
Kip Donald	Ken Johnstone
Rick van Malsen	Mark Adams
Jug Thornton	Vernon Prinsloo
Neil Jackson	Billy Wiggill
Robin Tarr	Neill Storey

Guests John Redfern (Rhodesia Association)

Grahame Wilson (SAS Assoc.)

**RLI Warrant Officers on Parade (Friday and Saturday)**

Reg Ayling	Gerry Oosterhuisen
Ken Reid	Derek Fraser
Brian Lewis	Derek Taylor
Jimmy Jaimeson	Dave Hoskins

The web galleries are now loaded with a whole lot of photographs in the [members section](#). You will have to log in with your password at the link:

[http://www.mm3.co.za/gallery/gallery\\_view.aspx?sectionid=6705&galleryid=325](http://www.mm3.co.za/gallery/gallery_view.aspx?sectionid=6705&galleryid=325)

**You can read our Ensigns to the Colours reflections a bit further down**

## **AGM**

### **REMINDER!!!!!!!**

The AGM is one of only two formal gatherings held by the Association, the other being our annual Reunion each year. We hope you will attend and catch up with your old mates and update yourself with news of the Associations activities both here and abroad. This is an opportunity for you to have your say in the running of your Association.

The post of Chairman is a three year commitment therefore Brian Lewis will remain at the helm. You will be able to put forward your nominations for the executive post of Treasurer by e-mail to the Secretary (buckstheron@yahoo.com)

Please ensure that you have discussed this with your nominee/s before putting names forward for election. The current Secretary, Bucks Theron has agreed to stand for nomination again.

The Regional Representatives are nominated by the executive and not by vote or by proxy so there is no need to nominate for these posts. The same applies to the internal appointment of Quarter Master

For those of you who, for good reason, are unable to attend, can e-mail the Secretary with any issues you wish discussed at the AGM.

All postal nominations will close at midnight on Thursday 3 March 2016.

Note that only PAID UP full members may vote or present a nomination for the executive position.

Date: **Saturday 5th March 2016**

Venue: The Ridgeback Bar, Dickie Fritz Shellhole,

1. 115 Dickie Fritz Avenue, off Elm Road, Dowerglen, Edenvale, Gauteng.

Time: **11h30 for 12H00 sharp.**

Dress casual.

Normal Monthly get together will follow. All forces welcome to this. Braai fires will be provided. Bring your own meat and salads.

**ALL DRINKS MUST BE PURCHASED FROM THE MOTHS BAR.**

Brian Lewis.

Chairman

RLIRA-Africa

## The Ensigns'

### Reflections on the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of "The Incredibles" – The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Rhodesian Light Infantry

Yesterday I had the extraordinary privilege of being the ensign to the RLI Regimental Colour as we paraded at the MOTH Shellhole in Edenvale, Johannesburg to mark the 55<sup>th</sup> birthday of our Battalion and to remember the many comrades who fell on the field of battle during the long Rhodesian war. It was, for me, not just a moment of privilege and honour but also one that loosened the cord on a bulging kitbag of memories and gave me pause for some reflections I'd like to share.

Some 35 years ago, on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1980, as the senior subaltern of the Battalion I had the honour of being the ensign to the Queen's colour as our beloved and revered unit marched into the dusty pages of memory. It was, unequivocally, the saddest day of my young life. The tears that ran freely down my face that day, almost blinding me were wept from a deep, and it seemed at the time, inconsolable and insurmountable sense of loss. I don't believe there was a man on parade that day that wasn't similarly wracked with emotion. It was as if the very foundations of our lives had been snatched away and we'd been cast adrift into a tumultuous and uncertain storm.

Above all was the sense of loss; the loss of good friends and comrades and the feeling that they had died in vain. The loss of our country, the loss of a cause to serve and the deep sense of purpose that comes from doing so and, of course, the loss of our Battalion. The end of the road for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Rhodesian Light Infantry signified by the Laying Up of the Colours, our most venerated symbols signalled the loss of the regiment that had become our home, our refuge and our source of pride.

But even in that deeply sad moment the RLI lived up to its reputation; the drill was immaculate, the parade was flawless, Colonel Aust's speech was moving and inspirational. We left that parade ground for the last time much as we had fought – with precision, aggression, skill and with dignity and courage. Our RLI reputation fully intact.

Fast forward 35 years and yesterday, as I stood in the baking sun, facing the parade holding the Regimental Colour, standing next to Neill Storey (for whom many, many years ago I carried the MAG) and desperately trying not to cock up anything too badly, my overwhelming feeling was not one of sadness at who and what we had lost along the way (although of course that couldn't be avoided) but rather of gratitude for what we had.

For we, however we served in the RLI, have much to be thankful for.

We had the opportunity to serve our country, our families, our friends and our comrades in a way that is given to few men throughout the course of history and even less so in modern times. Some paid the ultimate price in that service and pretty much all of us carry both physical and mental scars from those days. We should carry them with as much dignity as we can muster in honour of all our comrades.

We had the opportunity to be warriors in the true sense of the word; often outnumbered, ill-equipped and almost friendless on the global stage we fought to protect a young country against the depredations of a discredited ideology and morally bankrupt leadership that, as history has subsequently shown us, has gone on to destroy the prospects, lives and economy of what was once the breadbasket of Africa. We took on numerically superior forces time after time and vanquished

them. We may have been politically doomed and economically naïve and losing the war a predestined outcome but we can take great pride, as a military unit, in the flair and élan we showed in all the battles we won.

We had the opportunity to develop (alongside the other great units like the Selous Scouts, SAS and RAR) military tactics, especially in the shape of the Fire Force concept and its vertical envelopment of the enemy, which are studied and practiced by armed forces around the world even today. That initiative and inventiveness is a hell of a fine legacy to leave and I think we often don't appreciate enough that aspect of our military prowess.

We had the opportunity to travel the length and breadth of our country seeing places and scenery from vantage points that few others will enjoy. Ops, patrols, long-term ambushes and contacts across the beautiful landscapes and the muscular physicality of the scenery of Inyanga, the Rua River, the Zambezi, Mount Darwin and Centenary, the Mazoe River, the Lundi River, the koppies and caves of Mtoko, the Chilojo Cliffs and many other places across the land imbued a strong, palpable sense that what we were fighting for was worth protecting.

We received arguably the finest training available and had experiences that we may not otherwise have enjoyed. As a small example; I had never been in an aircraft until I joined the RLI and very soon there I was being thrown out of choppers and Daks and choppers with impunity. I've never quite gotten over that feeling, that commingling of fear, trepidation, anticipation and excitement that boils away in the pit of your stomach as you sit with your feet on the skids of an Alouette, surfing the river line tree tops on your way into a Fire Force contact.

The experiences we shared and the obstacles we overcame together, through camaraderie, skill and professionalism forged friendships that have endured across decades and that were plainly evident in the banter and laughter at yesterday's event.

We got to face our fears and test our mettle as men and to come out of these tests with an abiding confidence and understanding not just of ourselves but of humanity at large. Few people have that opportunity to test themselves in the crucible of war. We number among the relatively few people worldwide who have experienced the sense of achievement that comes from winning in battle. Whilst sports and business offer numerous chances to compete and win (and many ex-RLI men have accomplished greatly in the intervening years) the fact that we mastered our enemy when it came to skill at arms is something nobody can take away from us.

So, all in all, while our memorial service yesterday was tinged with sadness I came away with an abiding sense of being thankful for having been part of something great and of gratitude to the men and women of the RLI Association around the world who do so much to keep our memories and traditions alive today.

Our glory days may be behind us but I hope that, for all of you reading this, your best days are yet to come.

Lt Simon Carpenter BCR

7<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Dear All

There is nothing I can add to my fellow Ensign's wonderful words except to add my congratulations to Brian and the Africa committee for laying on such a brilliant reunion yesterday. The Organisation was superb and to have brought together such a huge contingent was a real achievement. Personally it was a great Honour to be asked to carry the Colour for which I am truly grateful. Was relieved that

this 'civilian in drag' (Mark Adams in the Officers Mess circa 1977) managed to stay vertical and hopefully not cause too much embarrassment to the assembled RSM's and senior NCOs'. It was also a delight to be with, and assisted by, Simon who left my troop for Hooters in early 78 and sadly we were never fellow subalterns.

Stay well everybody and stay vertical for the 60th even if it resembles a Yurra ou Skate below!

Kind regards  
Neill Storey