

The Tankers Prayer

Could the legend of General George S. Patton's famous 'weather prayer' ("A Genius for War" by Carlo D Este, page 685) or the love of writing poems and his great love of poetry, have been the inspiration for PFC (Private First Class) R.C. Johnson, a member of D Company, 2 Medium Tank Battalion, 67th Armor, 4th Armor Division to write the original prayer, known as "Tanker to God ... Over".



The prayer "Tanker to God ... Over" appeared in the March/April 1961 issue of *Armor* magazine (The Professional Development Bulletin of the Armor Branch PB-17-00-2) and was copied by a clerk in the office of Capt A.J. Snyman, an officer instructor at the School of Armour, circa 1966. He altered the original version's last verse and last two lines, and he changed the name to "The Tankers Prayer."

Original Version

"We ask you to accept us
These things dear Lord we pray."

Altered Version (circa 1966)

"We ask thee Heavenly Father
To take the burden of sorrow away – Amen"

This altered version was copied in limited numbers and distributed, for interest sake, amongst the members of the School of Armour. This version also appeared in the "Armour Action 1978" (annual magazine of the SA Armoured Corps).

The prayer remained in the background of armour personnel until 1987. In 1988, Maj W.J. Wagener of the School of Armour was appointed as the official announcer for the annual "Parent/Visitors Day" live-firing demonstration on the Gen de Wet Training Area. The Junior Leader group of the School of Armour on completion of their first year of training carried out this demonstration. Maj Wagener took the existing Tankers Prayer and deleted the fourth verse, as this verse was not applicable to the existing tank fleet of the armoured corps. He also changed the last two lines of the last verse.

Deleted Fourth Verse

"Keep our wedge nuts on and tightened

And the tension in our tracks
And be the eyes for our guards at night
When we are in the sack.”

Altered Version (circa 1966)

“We ask thee Heavenly Father
To take the burden of sorrow away - Amen.”

Altered Version (1989)

“We ask thee Heavenly Father
Take the pain and sorrow away - Amen.”

He then read this version while the tank squadron was withdrawing on completion of the demonstration. The prayer was recited with the playing of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” as background music. The manner in which the prayer was read coupled with the background music was very touching and many a hardened armour man shed a tear or two. The Tankers Prayer was here to stay.

The prayer started cropping up all over in the armoured corps, where it was read during certain parades and ceremonies.

In 1991, Col H.T. Heinze, then Officer Commanding School of Armour, appointed a local composer/vocalist, Phillip Kotze, to compose a song for the armoured corps as well as put music to the Tankers Prayer.

Phillip Kotze sang the Pantserlied (Armour Song) together with the “Tankers Prayer” for the first time on 11 October 1991 during the celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the School of Armour. Phillip Kotze repeated the last two lines of the last verse to harmonise the prayer. Since this date, the prayer has remained unaltered.

On 20 January 1992 the Tankers Prayer as sung and recorded by Philip Kotze, was played for the first time during the first ever “Training Commencement Ceremony” conducted for recruits at the School of Armour.

With the celebration of the SA Armoured Corps’ 50th Anniversary, a black male choir, trained and conducted by Chaplain (Ds) Johan Janse van Rensburg of 1 SSB, sang the Pantserlied and Tankers Prayer during the Gala Evening held on 14 September 1996 in the Sand du Plessis theatre in Bloemfontein.

The prayer then became a tradition to the armoured corps and was played more and more on special parades and ceremonies. On 11 September 1998, the Tankers Prayer together with the Pantserlied were sung for the first time by members of the armoured corps and guests attending a Shot Action held at 1 Special Service Battalion. Since this date, it has become a tradition to sing

the prayer by personnel of the Full time and Reserve force armour units, and it is customary to stand during the singing of the prayer.

The Tankers Prayer

I pray thee heavenly Father,
Please hear this tankers prayer,
And send an angel to me,
For my tank and crew to care.

Be with us for we need,
And lend a helping hand,
And carry safely our machine,
Across this barren land.

Please keep our tank from running dry,
When we face the foe in fight,
And place our gunner's cross hairs,
On the tank that comes in sight.

Please keep our radios in shape,
And our comms working right.
Be with us when we kneel and pray,
Ride with us day and night.

Please keep our ammo coming.
Help us ring out freedom's bell.
But above all heavenly father,
See we do our duty well.

And if we fall in combat,
In the mist of morning grey,
We ask thee heavenly father,
Take the pain and sorrow away.
We ask thee heavenly father,
Take the pain and sorrow away.

Amen

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