The Gunners’ National Memorial is situated in Potchefstroom on a site originally owned by the government but transferred to the Town Council of Potchefstroom in 1972. The location of the Memorial was selected adjacent to the now closed No 3 Gate of the Military Base through which, over a period of time, all gunners passed on entering or leaving the camp.

The design of the Memorial was conceived by the eminent architect, Dr Gordon Leith, himself a gunner, who served overseas with the SA Artillery during World War I.

The Memorial was unveiled on 10 May 1952 by the Chief of Staff, SA Army, Lt Gen “Matie” C.L. de Wet du Toit and entrusted for safekeeping by the Gunners’ Association to the then Officer Commanding Western Transvaal Command. It was consecrated by Chaplain Tom Harvey, war time chaplain of the Transvaal Horse Artillery.

The original plaque on the Memorial reads “To the glory of God and the memory of all Gunners who lost their lives in two World Wars, 1914 – 1918; 1939 – 1945”.

At the 47th Annual Gunners’ Memorial Service held on 19 April 1998 the Memorial was rededicated with the unveiling of an additional plaque reading “To the glory of God and the memory of all Gunners who laid down their lives for South Africa”. This memorial addresses the deceased of both the statutory and non-statutory forces. Refurbishing of the Memorial took place in the years 2000 – 2015.

One of the Memorial guns, no 289, is a 13-pdr used by the Transvaal Horse Artillery during the GSWA Campaign. The THA lost two guns to the Germans in the Battle of Sandfontein on the 23rd September 1914. They were spiked (ie rendered unusable) by the South African Gunners and the Germans dropped them into Lake Outjikoto, north of Tsumeb. The lake is extremely deep but one of them struck an underwater ledge of rock at the side of it and was subsequently recovered and used for training purposes by the South African Field Artillery Depot in Potchefstroom. The THA coincidentally did most of its Citizen Force training on this gun from 1913 and subsequently (after the War) until 1922.

The Memorial is administered by the “Gunners Memorial Trust” in collaboration with the Gunners’ Association in terms of a National Deed of Trust dated 25 July 1955.
CAPE TOWN

“Their name liveth for evermore”
“Hunnenamen leven voor eeuwig”

The annual Gunners’ Memorial Service takes place at the Howitzer Gun in the Cape Town Company Gardens in March each year.

‘The Gun’, was the name given by Cape Town members of the South African Heavy Artillery Association to their War Memorial, a World War One 6-inch 26CWT howitzer, one of 6 guns donated to the SAHA by Field Marshall Douglas Haig – Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, mounted on a granite plinth built in the form of a cross. One hundred and sixty-seven names of Gunners of the heavy batteries that fought in France appear on the memorial tablet Roll of Honour attached to the plinth.

The memorial was originally situated opposite the statue of Jan van Riebeek, on the western corner of the junction between Adderley Street and the Esplanade, the latter a walkway and roadway on the edge of the sea. The Esplanade has long-since disappeared but some of the palm trees which edged it, remain. The memorial was close to, and almost faced, the end of the old Cape Town Pier, which ran out into the bay from the bottom of the city’s main thoroughfare. The site was hired from the South African Railways at one shilling per year.

The Gun Memorial was unveiled on Saturday, 12 May 1923, in the presence of a large gathering of veterans, by the Chairman of the Association, Lieutenant Colonel Conyers W Alston, ON, RA, (Rtd). The Chairman was a former Battery Commander of 72nd (Griqualand West) Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery from 1916, until he was severely wounded, losing one eye and an arm. The memorial was dedicated by His Grace, the Archbishop of Cape Town. After the lowering of flags, and the sounding of the Last Post, trumpeters sounded the Reveille as the flags were raised again after two minutes silence. Lieutenant Colonel Alston gave an address, and this was followed by another given by the Right Honorable J C Smuts, PC, CH, KC, Honorary Colonel of The South African Heavy Artillery. A wreath was laid on behalf of The Regiment and a similar wreath was borne by four veterans who were representing the four regiments of the South African Infantry Brigade that had also fought in France and Flanders. A Guard of Honour was provided by the South African Mounted Rifles, and NCOs of 6th Citizen Battery (Prince Alfred’s Own Cape Field Artillery) provided the four sentries to the memorial.

In a letter dated 1 October 1930, the City Council accepted responsibility for the care and maintenance of The Gun. It is still given an annual coat of paint by the Parks and Forests Department. It is hoped that the Gun will be refurbished in 2015/16.

With South Africa at war in 1939, and with a severe shortage of guns and allied equipment, the authorities cast their eyes on the SAHA memorial guns at Cape Town, Kimberley, Port Elizabeth, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Negotiations concluded, The Gun was removed from its plinth in December 1939, and sent firstly to the Ordnance Depot in Cape Town for a quick examination, and thence, in January 1940, to Potchefstroom, where it and the other five guns were completely ‘rebuilt’ and refurbished. Of the six, only four could eventually be placed in service, the other two being used only for training. The Cape Argus of 21 December 1939, in reporting on the removal of the howitzer form its plinth that day, also recorded that it was still in good condition. The barrel it said, was sound (it had been packed with mineral jelly) and the traversing and elevating gears had been kept greased by members of the SAHA Association during all the years it had stood on the Esplanade, exposed to the salt and sea air.
The Deputy Director Field Army Artillery reported in February that four 6-inch howitzers were being reconditioned “and when they were ready it was the intention to form an additional Medium Battery for allocation to one of the Divisions. The SAHA Association had agreed to their guns being used in this manner”.

On 10 May 1945, the Rand Daily Mail reported that Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, Chief of the General Staff, in the negotiations to remove the howitzers from the memorials had promised that they would be returned in good condition at the end of the war. He had said, “the 6-inch howitzers borrowed from memorials at Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Kimberley would be returned to their original places after the war. He promised they would be in good condition”.

The Gun was returned to Cape Town in July 1945, and stored temporarily in the Quarry Stores at the top of Strand Street – it was also reported as being at Wynyard Battery for a short while – until a place could be found for it. The old site had disappeared in the new foreshore and harbour works and at a meeting of the SAHA Association on 23 July 1945 the Secretary was instructed to ask the City Council for a new site in Government Avenue, or at the top of Plein Street. It was finally agreed to place The Gun in the Gardens, near the Delville Wood Memorial and in December 1951, it was mounted on its original plinth, alongside Government Avenue and facing the National Gallery.

The Gunners’ Association, Western Province Branch, had held their memorial services at the Cenotaph, the World War One Memorial in Adderley Street, since the mid-1950s, but in 1962 it was suggested in committee that it be held at what was considered to be the more appropriate gun in the Gardens. And on Sunday, 6 May 1962, that was where the service took place. Unfortunately, it raised the ire of Major Alex Mehan, VD, Chairman of the SAHA Association, who rightly or wrongly regarded The Gun as the property of his Association. Angry words were regretfully exchanged in the days after the service. The Western Province Branch of The Gunners’ Association, under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Colonel W R de Smidt, determined to have their own memorial, made representations to the National Monuments Commission and approached the City Council for permission to erect a memorial near the corner of the Grand Parade nearest the Castle. The request was approved by the Council. An architects drawing of the proposed memorial was rejected but a design submitted on 13 May 1968, by Major L Crook was accepted on 12 November. It took the form of a plinth in the form of a cross. Brigadier P F van der Hoven, Officer Commanding, Western Province Command, donated a QF 13 pounder gun to be placed on the plinth, and it was collected on Saturday, 8 February 1969. Permission to erect the proposed memorial was, however, refused by the National Monuments Commission.

And so, on Sunday, 4 May 1969, the annual memorial service was once again held at the Cenotaph. Unknown to members of The Gunners’ Association that day, they were attending the service in Adderley Street for the last time.

In 1969, Major Mehan, the last Chairman of The SAHA Association, which by now had only a handful of members, approached Lieutenant-Colonel W R De Smidt, ED, chairman of The Gunners’ Association, who had been commissioned by Major Mehan as a Second Lieutenant in 1934. He suggested that as his branch was more or less defunct, that The Gunners’ Association might wish to use their Heavy Artillery Memorial in the Gardens for the annual memorial service. The offer was accepted with much pleasure. The City Council raised no objections; they were only too glad to avoid the disruption of traffic in Adderley Street on a Sunday morning. It was formally entrusted to The Gunners’ Association in 1970 by the SAHA Association, represented by its last Chairman, Major A S Mehan, VD, commissioned into the Cape Garrison Artillery prior to World War One, and in 1933/35, commanding officer of Cape Field Artillery.

The Council had also indicated that they had no objection to a further suitably inscribed plaque being placed on the Memorial’s plinth. A plaque, donated by the national headquarters of The Gunner’s Association at a cost of R242.00, was affixed to the plinth by the City Council. The memorial was unveiled in the presence of the last four members of the SAHA Association by the National President, Colonel Ian Whyte, DSO, ED, and rededicated to all Gunners by the Reverend Franklin. On parade were personnel of Cape Field Artillery, the Anti-Aircraft Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, University of Cape Town Regiment and I Locating Battery. As usual the traditional salvoes were fired by Cape Field Artillery, as it had done at every service except one. On that occasion the salvoes were fired by 40 mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns!
The memorial, with the centre piece being a 13-Pdr gun (barrel number 291, built in 1913), was designed by Mr Keith Gow (who was also a Gunner in WW2 and who later became Chairman of the Durban Branch of the Gunners’ Association). It was unveiled at a Dedication Service held on the 27th August 1967. The ceremony was performed by the Army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General C.A (“Pop”) Fraser SM and the Guard of Honour was provided by two officers and 101 Other Ranks of the Natal Field Artillery under the command of Commandant Des Fell JCD. Platoons from three other Units formed three sides of the square, with the NFA’s Guard of Honour in the centre. Sacred music was played by the Regimental Band of the Natal Mounted Rifles and the ceremony was attended by the first woman Mayor of Durban, Councillor Margaret Maytom. The scripture reading and prayers were conducted by Ds JJP Stofberg of the NGK and the Reverend Hugh Yule, the Regimental Chaplain of the Durban Light Infantry.

The Annual Gunners’ Memorial Service has been held at the memorial gun, a 13-Pdr from WW1, ever since but in view of the significance of 2014 being the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, a combined service was held with the Durban Branch of the South African Legion and the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (MOTH).
The memorial was built by AA School/10 AA Regt in Kimberley Diskobolos base and completed in September 1992. The memorial was unveiled by Maj Gen H. Roux, SD,SM on 4 December 1992.

The memorial consists of the brick structure depicting the Honoris Crux Medal with the gun Skinny Liz mounted on top and in the centre of it. The Honoris Crux Medal was awarded for outstanding bravery in extreme danger. The memorial design features the Maltese cross that centers in a raised circle with Skinny Liz placed in the top centre position, surmounted by a larger base level circle. The Maltese Cross was officially adopted by the Order of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John in 1126. Its eight points denote the eight obligations of the knights, namely “to live in truth, have faith, repent one’s sins, give proof of humility, love justice, be merciful, be sincere and whole-hearted, and to endure persecution”. The memorial symbolises the supreme sacrifice of SAADA soldiers for their country. It also has a flag station to the front of it with a pathway leading to it from the road.

The plaque originated from the wall in front of the Unit Headquarters in Youngsfield and was moved during 1991 when AA School/10 AA Regt relocated to Kimberley and placed on the gun Skinny Liz. Thus the inscription of the plaque “Roll of honour in memory of unit members killed in action during operational duty”. The plaque however contains names of all Air Defence Artillery Corps members killed in operations and training.

“SKINNY LIZ”

The history of the Air Defence Artillery in South Africa dates back to 1914 with the Skinny Liz (a purpose built gun designed for use against aircraft).

Two 15 pounder BLC guns were converted for use in an Anti-Aircraft role and the SA Railways and Harbours Magazines in October 1914 reported that, “tests have recently been made at Woodstock of a gun specially mounted for firing at hostile aircraft”.

On the ordinary field carriage the 15 pounder BLC could not be elevated beyond 16 degrees and for the Anti-Aircraft gun to work a special carriage was designed and built at the Army Ordnance Workshop, Fort Knokke (where the Woodstock station today stands). This presented difficulty as the piece alone weighed 9 cwt (475 kg) and the normal recoil through the cradle in the field carriage was 3 feet 6 inches (1.06m). Initially only one gun was converted by Captain C.L.Grandsden, Inspector of Ordnance Machinery, South Africa, and his team of armament artificers, and this new Anti-Aircraft gun, capable of elevation of more than 60 degrees was tested and placed in service in the Cape District.

Subsequently a second carriage, designed on an improved plan, with a maximum elevation of 71 degrees, was constructed in the Salt River Railway workshops and the Army Ordnance Workshops, Fort Knokke. The carriage was made of 1-inch (25mm) boiler plate steel and was apparently so heavy that ten men were required to lift the trail. The gun was mounted on wagon wheels and large holes were made on the sides of the carriage plate in order to reduce the weight. Extra springs had been fitted to the recoil buffer “to absorb the violence of the recoil at high angels and to bring the gun up again after firing”.
The second gun was tested at Simons Town, probably at Queen’s Battery, in September 1914, before a distinguished company of ladies and gentlemen, which included Mrs Louise Botha, the wife of the Prime Minister, General Sir James Wolfe-Murray, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, South Africa, and Lady Wolfe-Murray; and Major General C.W. Thompson, SB, DSO, Officer Commanding Cape District.

“Six rounds were fired with satisfactory results and the shrapnel shells, exploded by time and percussion fuzes, produced a fine effect”, records the Railway Magazine. Apparently the bursts, “which took place at an altitude of some thousands of feet”, were clearly seen.

During the campaign in German South West Africa, the South African troops were continuously pestered by a German aircraft, the pilot of which indulged in bombing raids and reconnaissance missions over the South African positions. Affectionately known as "Skinny Liz", this Gun was sent to South West Africa under the command of Lieutenant E.H. Tamplin, MC, RFA. Commander Hay records that “an anti aircraft gun dubbed “Skinny Liz” (was) mounted on the fore-castle of the SS Gaika ready for use should an enemy aeroplane appear”, during the voyage to Walfisch Bay. How the gun received its name is not known but there may be a connection with Colonel Skinner (later Major-General Sir Percy Skinner, KBE, CB, CMG, DSO) who commanded one of the Infantry Brigades during the voyage. The Gaika arrived at “Walfisch Bay” on Christmas Day, 1914.

The gun accompanied the advance of General Skinners (3rd) Infantry Brigade but its only recorded action against enemy aircraft appears in the official report of the 2nd Battery, South African Mounted Rifles, which mentions that it was fired at a German Taube monoplane, the only enemy aircraft in South West Africa, which had periodically worried the Battery. The report, which does not mention dates or places, does, however, say that the engagement was not successful and that one of the recoil springs broke with each round fired!

Perhaps the best work done by the gun was at the battle of Trekkopjes on April 26 1915, when it came into action as a field gun in the open. It was the only gun present and took on the opposing German guns single-handed, registering several direct hits. Owing to the construction of the carriage it was necessary for the gun layer to stand on two biscuit tins in order to lay the gun, which rendered him an even more conspicuous target. Although several enemy shells landed between the gun and the limber, Skinny Liz was not put out of action.

Skinny Liz saw the whole South West African campaign through to its victorious close and after spending some time mounted on one of the Cape Peninsula’s coast batteries, was gracefully retired. Both this well-known Anti-Aircraft gun, and the first Gransden gun stood for many years outside the Wynberg Officers Club. Skinny Liz was mounted in 1976 to a place of honour at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, Youngsfield.

In 1991 when Anti-Aircraft moved from Youngsfield to Kimberley they also moved Skinny Liz to Kimberley. To date it stands in the Diskobolos base where it has been given the centre position of a memorial where the South African Air Defence Artillery Corps annually commemorate Air Defence soldiers that made the highest sacrifice for their country.
The South African Heavy Artillery Memorial in the Johannesburg Zoo is dedicated to the men of the South African Heavy Artillery who died in Europe during the First World War. At the conclusion of the war, the British Government presented six 6 inch 26 cwt howitzers to the South African government to be used as memorials to the South African Heavy Artillery batteries established in the major centres of the country, viz:

- The Johannesburg Zoo (71 Transvaal Siege Battery)
- Clyde N Terry Museum, Kimberley (72 Griqualand West Siege Battery)
- Company Gardens, Cape Town (73 Cape Siege Battery)
- Port Elizabeth (74 Eastern Province Siege Battery)
- Warriors Gate, Durban (75 Natal Siege Battery)
- Union Buildings, Pretoria (125 Transvaal Siege Battery)

It is probable that Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, well-known South African philanthropist, author and politician, was involved in the discussion about the placement of the Johannesburg Gun. His son, Nugent, served in the South African Heavy Artillery in France during the war and was killed in action at Beaumetz on 14 December 1917. Fitzpatrick was deeply affected by the loss of his son and it was his proposal that was acted upon. His small menagerie was kept in the Sachsenwald (today the suburb of Saxonwold) and was donated by him to the Town Council in 1902 to form the basis of the Johannesburg Zoo in the Herman Ecksteen Park. The area adjacent to the new zoo was donated by the company, Herman Ecksteen & Co, of which he formed part, for the Rand Regiments Memorial (today known as the Anglo Boer War Memorial). The Gun was placed in position in 1920 at the west end of the diagonal vista which leads up to the Anglo Boer Memorial located on the high point at the east end of the same vista. The South African Artillery Corps provided the costs of creating the plinth while the Town Council approved the funds required for the bronze plaque which bears the names of 167 men of 71 Siege Battery commemorated on the memorial. The Gun was restored by the Gunners Association in 2007 and re-dedicated back in its original position in June 2008. The inscription on the plaque states the following:

“There Name Liveth for Evermore - Erected by the Officers, NCO's and Men of the South African Heavy Artillery in Memory of the Comrades who fell in the Great War 1914 – 1918”.

There Name Liveth for Evermore - Erected by the Officers, NCO's and Men of the South African Heavy Artillery in Memory of the Comrades who fell in the Great War 1914 – 1918”.