



THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL GUNNERS' MEMORIAL AT POTCHEFSTROOM

When the "SA Artillery Trust Fund" was formed under the direction of Col, Senator Fritz Adler MC VD by a Notarial Deed on 9 October 1941 it is quite clear from the Articles of Association that an embryonic concept of a National Gunners' Memorial to be erected at Potchefstroom was envisaged. An important clause from the Articles records that the Fund was empowered to "Subscribe towards any Memorial which may be erected for or by the SA Artillery to commemorate the SA Artillery or any of the Members thereof".

The Fund was administered by a Board of Trustees which converted and expanded the scope of the Fund and formed the Gunners' Association which adopted its first constitution at a meeting of Congress held at the Drill Hall, Johannesburg on 2 July 1943.

Once again one of the objects in the constitution embodied a clause that the Gunners' Association "May administer and apply funds by subscribing towards any Memorial as may be decided by the Board".

From the Association records, four years passed and it was not until the Board of Trustees meeting, held on 24 January 1947 that Maj Frank Harpur "Suggested that the Association should place a Memorial to Gunners who fell in the war at some suitable place on the Potchefstroom Range, such as at the Witrand cross roads".

In July 1947 the Board agreed to accept the proposal and Maj Harpur with Mr Donaldson were requested to investigate the cost of a Memorial which would be erected on the Potchefstroom Range or in the Artillery camp "on the assumption that 200 names would appear on the plaque".

At the 4th annual meeting of Congress held on 3 October 1947 at the Drill Hall, Johannesburg under the Chairmanship of Col IB Whyte references were made for the establishment of a Gunners' Memorial and an extract of his report reads:

"The Board is planning the erection of a simple Memorial to commemorate all fellow Gunners in the 1939-1945 war. The Memorial will be of granite with suitable bronze plaques bearing the names, and will be erected at Potchefstroom probably on the Range where all the Gunners were trained".

At the 5th Annual Congress held on 29 October 1948, Lt Col LWK Stevens in his Chairman's report stated:

"It will be recalled that Congress last year dealt with proposals for an artillery memorial at Potchefstroom. Unfortunately no information has been received as to what has been done and it is not known whether any steps have been taken for the erection of a memorial at Potchefstroom".



At the same Congress, Brig Adler stated “That contrary to general opinion he considered Cenotaphs most suitably expressed the sentiments which one has for his Regiment and for the spirit of comradeship which exists in a Regiment. He therefore recommended that the Board of Trustees should continue to pursue the question of erecting a Shrine or Memorial in honour of those who lost their lives in the last war”.

Brig Adler added “That he was expecting Brig du Toit to visit him shortly and he would take up with him the question of a Gunners’ Memorial at Potchefstroom”.

The Board agreed that Brig Adler should discuss the matter with Brig du Toit and submit his recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

Brig du Toit later communicated to the Board in October 1948 “that the erection of a Memorial on the Range at Potchefstroom was probably impracticable as no control could be experienced over any portion of the Town Lands of Potchefstroom and anything erected there was liable to be damaged by vandalism. He outlined a scheme which was being considered by the 11th Armoured Brigade at Potchefstroom for the erection of an undenominational church with a garden and memorial shrine forming part of it, and suggested that this would be a suitable memorial to receive financial support from the Gunners’ Association. A memorial plaque bearing the names of all Gunners would be erected in the memorial shrine.

Col Stevens suggested that a donation of £500 be made towards the proposed scheme. Brig Adler pointed out that he had not as yet obtained any estimates of total cost at this stage, all that he desired was the support of the Association in principle”.

The Board accordingly agreed that this would be a most suitable memorial and that the Association would support the scheme financially but the amount would be decided when more details would be available. Brig Adler undertook to obtain concept plans and an estimate of cost.

Some months later the Chairman of the Board, Mr SF Nicholls reported that he had seen Brig du Toit who informed him that he had found the proposed Memorial Gate would not be suitable. Changes had been made in the layout of the camp entrance at Potchefstroom and a triangular piece of ground, with frontage to three streets, was now available. On this, Brig du Toit suggested the erection of a memorial, in the erection of which the Permanent Force would assist.



Maj Hull suggested an obelisk, 8 to 10 feet high, with a suitable plaque. It was agreed that designs be obtained for a simple and inexpensive memorial, requiring no maintenance, and that a sub-committee consisting of the Chairman and Lt Col Greenwood be appointed to handle the matter, with a view to reporting to Congress.

The Chairman referred to a resolution opposing the originally proposed Memorial Gate, (taken at an Annual General Meeting of Western Province branch on 4 February 1949), and expressed the opinion that the new suggestion would probably be accepted.

At a meeting on 14 July 1947 Lt Col Greenwood reported that he had been in touch with an ex-Gunner artist Bdr AH Barratt well known for his pictorial presentation in map form of the advance of the 6th Armoured Division in Italy, who undertook to design a suitable Memorial and a sub-committee was convened under the Chairmanship of Lt Col Stevens with Maj Thomas and Lt Col Greenwood who was appointed to obtain specifications and quotations for the erection of the Memorial. The cost of which proved to be approximately £3 000 which the sub-committee found to be prohibitive.

Branches were advised of the estimated cost involved and were requested to re-state their views and after consideration of their replies it was agreed:

- a) that a Memorial, though of a much less expensive nature, be erected at the Potchefstroom camp site;
- b) that the Memorial be in the form of three guns, one at each apex of the triangular portion of ground made available to us, in a garden setting with (funds permitting), a small granite memorial in the centre, the present design being dropped;
- c) that the sub-committee go ahead with the new scheme as fast as possible, the Chairman to advise Brig Kriegler accordingly, and to try to get the guns from the Department of Defence; and
- d) that a letter of thanks be sent to Mr AH Barratt, who designed, and produced plans for the memorial as previously approved.

Two months later, in January 1950, the Board approved the acceptance of a tender from the Garrison Officers' Mess to make available, on indefinite loan, one 13 pounder and one 18 pounder for the Memorial, and an 18 pounder MK11 from the 4th Field Regiment on the same conditions. This would not involve the Association in any cost.

It was agreed that a low wall surrounding the gardens would be most desirable, and that we write to Brig Kriegler enquiring as to the cost, and whether assistance would be obtained.

The Chairman paid tribute to the assistance and co-operation received from Brig Kriegler.



At the 6th Annual Congress the following month, dissention was rife regarding the proposed Memorial and various opinions were ventilated regarding the cost and suitability of design with the result that all the work on the Memorial was stopped.

The Minutes read as follows:

The Chairman referred to the full statement hereon in the Board's report. The sketch of the Memorial for the tender accepted by the Board in the sum of R240 was tabled, showing a sloping granite slab, 5'6" x 2'6", sides rough-dressed the top polished to receive an inscription, mounted on two flat larger slabs, each 6" high, the whole measuring overall 6'6" x 3'6", height at head 2'6", sloping to 1'8" at foot. Additional to this would be the cost of the inscription.

A low surrounding wall, if approved as suggested by O.C. Potchefstroom Camp, would be another £4/600, plus £80 per annum as estimated maintenance of the gardens.

Mr Thomas considered the total cost would be too high, and suggested a low hedge instead of a wall. Col Whyte criticized the memorial as being in-artistic, unsuitable, and inappropriate, and said that designs should have been obtained from Architects rather than from a monumental works. Mr Abrahams, (Secretary, Johannesburg branch), and Mr Butt (alternate trustee) supporting this, recommended that the matter be referred back to the Board. Mr Martin (Kimberley Chairman) said that the Board seemed to bear too much in mind the keeping down of expense. Col Whyte said the project should not be skimped on because of money, and that work should be stopped, and something better erected.

The Chairman, recapitulating, stressed that the Board had given a great deal of time and thought to the memorial. The original design approved by the Board - that of a Commercial artist - had been unanimously condemned by branches as too expensive. Certain branches were still strongly opposed to expenditure on a memorial of this nature, while others wanted expenditure thereon restricted, - in the case of Johannesburg branch, to £400. Lt Col Greenwood had visited Potchefstroom, and had seen work done by this mason, whom Brig Kriegler recommended, and the Board had decided to press ahead, keeping in mind the direction of Branches regarding expenses. A change of plan would therefore not only involve the Association in additional expense on the present contract, which was almost complete, but would also delay the layout to be done at the Camp entrance, which Brig Kriegler was keen to get completed. All branches had been informed of developments from time to time, and were aware of the position to date. Col Whyte then proposed, and Mr Butt seconded:



“That Congress directs the Board of Trustees:

- a) to instruct that work be stopped forthwith on the memorial, which in its present form is considered unsuitable;
- b) to reconsider the whole matter, and to obtain new designs, preferably from Architects; and
- c) to spend an amount in the vicinity of £1 000 on the memorial.

The motion, having been put to the meeting, was declared carried. It was further agreed that arrangements for an opening ceremony, when the memorial is ready, be left to the Board.

The stoppage on the activities of erecting a memorial precipitated the convening of a special Board Meeting on 2 March 1950 and it was recorded “For the benefit of those not at Congress, the Chairman, Mr HK Hull reviewed briefly the decisions taken to stop work on the memorial in its present form, to seek new designs, and to increase the Board’s spending authority to a figure of about £1 000. Branches now realised that the present design – the best that could be done with the small sum of money authorised and for the work on which Congress had paid tribute to the Board – would not meet with general approval. All delegates, including those from branches previously opposed to any expenditure on such a project, now agreed that something more elaborate was required if the memorial were to be a fitting tribute, and more money had therefore been made available to the Board for this purpose.

The Chairman reported that together with Messrs. Sacke and Thomas, he had been to Potchefstroom, and had seen Brig Kriegler, and the mason, Mr Kirkbride, both of whom understood the position and were willing to help in any change of plan.

After discussion it was agreed:-

- a) that the general scheme and layout, as originally approved be adhered to;
- b) that Dr Gordon Leith MC FRIBA an admired Architect and Gunner who had served in WWI, be approached by the Chairman, and asked to submit designs for the memorial;
- c) that such designs as are considered suitable by the Board be sent to Branches for comment before a decision is taken; and
- d) that the sum of £60 be paid to FE Kirkbride towards his expenses to date.



The following month Dr Leith had completed his sketch design which was tabled at a meeting of the Board on 13 April 1950, a brief description being:

- a) A sketch plan by Dr Gordon Leith was tabled, the Memorial to be in Potchefstroom slate, about 18' high, and flanked by three guns. The Chairman said it had been thought that slate, locally supplied and erected, would result in a substantial saving. It had been a shock, therefore, to receive a rough estimate cost of £3 000 – the price of the original Memorial designed by Mr Barratt.
- b) Further enquiries had been made about the original Barratt design. It was found that much of the cost arose from the large granite base, and quotations had therefore been obtained for the pylon only. These were, exclusive of the bronze grenade, plaque, and laurel wreath:
 - 1) Spire only, to original size and design, no base £1 050.
 - 2) Spire only, reduced to 3'6" at bottom and 1'6" at top £900.
 - 3) Same size as No 1, but not hollowed sides £800.
 - 4) As for No. 1, with granite base shaped as bottom of spire, approximately 5'6" on each face £1 300.

It was agreed that the Chairman continue to consult with Dr Leith, and that an informal meeting be held to record progress as soon as possible; also that the Chairman reply to a letter from Brig Kriegler in which he complained of the delay and stressed the difficulty of keeping open indefinitely his offers of practical assistance.

The Board further agreed that a vote of thanks be passed to Mr Barratt, from whose original design the Memorial was developed and to Dr Leith who had offered his Architectural services gratis to the Association.

At this stage the Board embarked upon a fund raising drive to meet the costs involved and publicity was obtained in the "Rand Daily Mail" and "Sunday Times".

To ensure that the names of the deceased Gunners which would be inscribed on the Memorial were correct in every detail, authority was obtained from War Records to compile names of the Gunners who had lost their lives in World Wars I and II.

By now the estimated cost of the Memorial had risen to between £2 400 and £3 000, a sum considerably more than the amount of £1 000 previously approved by the Board. Donations at this stage amounted to some £1 100.



Finally the decision to proceed with the Leith Design was taken at the 7th Annual Congress held in Bloemfontein on 28 April 1950 and once again the design size of the Memorial came under review. “The Chairman referred briefly to the present design of the Memorial, which branches had approved, and considered by the Architect to be of the minimum height satisfactory for the site. The estimated cost would be some £3 000, so that allowing for the sum previously voted by Congress, there would be a shortfall in the funds now available.

Mr Ferrar moved, and it was duly seconded:

“That the Board be authorised to proceed with the immediate erection of the Memorial in its present form, and that the shortfall in the amount now available be met from the Association’s accumulated funds.

Further, that branches continue a fund raising campaign, any moneys thus obtained being offset against a shortfall, but the Memorial to be completed in any case”.

After lengthy discussions, an amendment proposed by Mr Withington, and duly seconded:

“That the size of the memorial be reduced to conform with the funds now available, and that expenditure be restricted to that amount” was put to the meeting and lost.

Mr Ferrar’s proposal was then put, and carried.

Brig Adler proposed, and it was unanimously agreed:

- a) that the Board enquire into the possibility of compiling a vellum Roll of Honour in book form.
- b) that a special vote of thanks be passed to Durban branch for the model of the memorial exhibited at Congress.

However, the Board increased its financial vote to £4 000 to cover the cost of the bronze grenade which tops the obelisk and other bronze plaques. The height of the obelisk being reduced to 7,100 mm (Approximately 24 feet).

Tenders were finally negotiated in the amount of £4 100 and work commenced, the final overall cost being £4 461.52.



Brig Adler stressed the need for safeguarding and the eventual care of the Memorial and recommended a Legal Deed of Gift to an appropriate body at some future date.

On 10 May 1952 the Gunners Memorial was unveiled by the Chief of Staff Lieutenant- General CL de Wet du Toit, DSO and handed over to the O.C. Potchefstroom Command for safe keeping. The dedication ceremony was attended by nearly 2 000 Gunners, next-of-kin and official guests. A film of the unveiling ceremony was shown throughout the Union on African Film newsreels, and a recording made by the S.A.B.C. was also broadcast.

The first Annual Memorial Commemoration Service was held on 10 May 1953, when between 500 and 600 Gunners and their families attended. The 7th Medium Regiment provided the Guard of Honour.

On Sunday, 9th May 1954, the second Commemoration Service was held, N.F.A. Regiment providing the Guard of Honour.

It was recorded that since the close of the financial year 30th June 1953, the shortfall on the Memorial Fund has been made good.

Special mention should be made of the Johannesburg Branch contributions and the individual efforts and collections by its Chairman, Ramsay Addison.

In a whirlwind personal drive, Col Geoff Harrison collected over £800 to redeem the last £152 outstanding, and to provide a permanent Maintenance Trust Fund of over £600 for this and other Artillery Memorials.

The following message was received from the Master Gunner, Field Marshall, the Viscount Alanbrooke, K.G., G.C.B., O.M., D.S.O., D.C.L., L.L.D., (RHA), St James Park, to the Gunners' Association on the occasion of the unveiling of the Gunners' Memorial, honouring the Dead of World Wars, 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, at Potchefstroom on 10 May, 1952. – "The thoughts of all ranks of the Royal Regiment of Artillery are with you today at the unveiling of the South African Gunners' Memorial. "At the going down of the Sun and in the Morning we will remember".

(Signed) WJ Cardale, Brigadier
Senior Army Liaison Officer



It was not until 1954 that the well-known semi-circle of poplar trees, which form a backdrop to the Monument were planted at intervals of 4 000mm to 5 000mm and the area between the trees and the new tarred strip was levelled and grassed.

Between the years which marked the unveiling ceremony in 1952 until 1976 no alterations to the Monument were considered or undertaken only annual maintenance being embarked on and the wooden elements of the gun wheels were replaced.

However after the 1975-1976 Anglo incursion the names of 7 Gunners who paid the supreme sacrifice were inscribed on the Memorial and other names have been added since of Gunners who served in the operational area.

From 2010-2018 a programme was implemented to upgrade the Memorial. These initiatives include:

- a) The replacement of dying poplar trees (2010).
- b) Refurbishment of the three guns at a cost of R70 787 (2011).
- c) Repairs to the floodlights, flagpoles and lectern (2011).
- d) Updating the Roll of Honour on the website (2011).
- e) The addition of a “granite boulder” at the entrance to act as a signboard (2013).
- f) The erection of two signboards, one of which is on the Ventersdorp road and the other on the town side in Chief Albert Luthuli Road.
- g) The installation of a sprinkler system (2012).
- h) The addition of a Sexton at the North West boundary (2013).
- i) The acquisition of a 40mm ADA Gun
- j) The erection of a fence around the perimeter at a cost of R110 000 for which a donation was received (2013).
- k) The installation of an electric fence (2013).
- l) The repainting of the steps to the Memorial (2015).
- m) The addition of a GV1 (25Pdr) and a GV2 (5.5) gun (2018).
- n) The respraying of all guns on the site for which donations were received (2018).

At the Memorial Service on 22 April 2018, a plaque was unveiled by Lt Gen P du Preez (Ret) President of the Gunners’ Association and Lt Gen JS Mbuli General of the Gunners, on 13 Pdr, barrel number 289, confirming this as the THA gun from the Battle of Sandfontein.



At intermittent times since 1976, the names of qualifying deceased Gunners who lost their lives after 1960 have been added to the Memorial. This includes the names of members of the Non-Statutory Forces. As a consequence of these changes, some of the names were misspelt and out of chronological order.

An initiative was launched to reinscribe all post 1960 names in time for the 2019 Memorial Service. An appeal was made to all Gunners to contribute at least R50 to this cause and sufficient funds were collected.

The ground on which the Monument is erected is 557.42 square metres in extent and was originally owned by the Government and leased to the association at a nominal rental of R2.00 per annum.

In 1972 the Town Council of Potchefstroom negotiated the transfer of the ground to the Potchefstroom Municipality.

The Memorial is under the direct control of the "Gunners Memorial Trust" which was constituted in 21 July 1955. The original members were Lt Col GH Harrison, Col HH Greenwood and Maj Gen NN Webster. The current Trustees are Maj Gen RC Andersen (Chairman), Col W Prevost, Maj N Wiid and Maj K Galane. The Trust is supported by a Stakeholder Group that meets quarterly.

Memorial Services continue to be held annually, usually in April and are organised by the Artillery and ADA Formations and the Gunners' Association. The troops on parade and the gun troop are provided by the Regular and Reserve Force units including the School of Artillery, 4 Artillery Regiment and Transvaal Horse Artillery.

This history has been compiled from notes prepared by Col W Prevost, including extracts from the Gunners' Association minutes (1941-1976) and Maj Gen RC Andersen (1977-2018) from the Gunners' Memorial Trust minutes.