

Gunners' 67th Annual Memorial Service Honours the Artillery's Fallen

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In its continued quest to pay respects to South Africa's fallen artillerymen and women, the South African Gunners' Association inaugurated new commemorative tablets at the National Gunners' Memorial precinct in Potchefstroom's Kannonierspark on Sunday 14 April 2019, which now contain the recently found names of four uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) Gunners who fell in 1988. The service at the National Gunners' Memorial takes place annually, and functions as a platform to remember the ultimate sacrifices made by the country's past and present Gunners. The chief dignitary for the 2019 service was Lieutenant General J.S. Mbuli, Chief Logistics South African National Defence Force (SANDF), General of the Gunners.



The National Gunners' Memorial service, seen from the vantage point of the memorial precinct's GV2 BL 5.5 inch gun

Chaplain S.K. Museri conducted the service, its invocation and prayer, followed in the programme by the address given by the National President of the Gunners' Association, Lieutenant General (Ret) P.O. du Preez. The organisation had followed through on information shared with it regarding hitherto unknown casualties, and continues in its reconciliatory moves to add the names of erstwhile foes of a struggle now concluded, into the Gunners' Memorial.

The memorial's impressive central spire contains the names of Gunners fallen in the First and Second World Wars, as well as those who perished in the years between then and the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, and to the present.

The South African Gunners' Association expanded the space upon which names could be listed, to encompass two low-standing walls bearing the revised tablets. These today contain the names of Gunners who died in the line of duty from both the statutory and non-statutory forces that would eventually be amalgamated to form the SANDF.



Chaplain S.K. Museri leads in the service's benediction

The fallen MK Gunners' inclusion on the newly displayed memorial tablets was highlighted by the appending on the day of red remembrance poppies next to their names:

Gnr O.W. Lukhele
Gnr S. Nkosi

Gnr D.M. Nkabinde
Gnr M. Velaphi

Members of the Lukhele, Nkabinde and Velaphi families were in attendance on the day to participate in the service.

This initiative by the South African Gunners' Association follows the most recent addition to the memorial precinct in 2018 of the restored Ordnance QF (Quick-Firing) 13-pounder 'Barrel no 289' from the Transvaal Horse Artillery (THA). The gun had been captured by the German Schutztruppe at the Battle of Sandfontein in German South West Africa (present day Namibia) on 26 September 1914 and later recovered by South Africa's Union Defence Force (UDF) troops in the following year.

The wreath laying ceremony was preceded by the homage to the fallen that included presenting of arms by the paraded troops and sentries. This entailed the playing of the bugled Last Post and Reveille, punctuated by a first and then second gun salvo fired by the THA Gun Troop, bracketing the two minutes' silence.



The Transvaal Horse Artillery Gun Troop fires the opening gun salute

As with previous years, the event was well attended by representatives from the SANDF's Regulars and Reserves, military veterans' organisations and associations, members of the community and local municipal administration. Numerous foreign representatives from the Military Attaché and Advisory Corps (MAAC) once again participated in the wreath laying ceremony.



The National Gunners' Memorial following the wreath laying ceremony, during the playing of the National Anthem

The comprehensive re-inscribing of names on the National Gunners' Memorial panels for the period 1965 to date was made possible through the charitable contribution by 53 Gunners amounting to R31 791. The effort took advantage to correct spelling mistakes as well as the inscription of previously missing and unknown names. Saturday 30 March saw a maintenance day spark over the memorial in anticipation of the service on 14 April.



The memorial tablet with the newly included names of MK Gunners who passed on in 1988, indicated by red poppies

The event continues to cement the fellowship and camaraderie amongst Gunners, their families and friends. In remembering fallen Gunners and rendering support to members and their dependents, the South African Gunners' Association unites all in commemorating the profession of artillery past and present in South Africa, honouring those who serve and sacrifice faithfully within it.