Monday, 22 October 2018 saw the official opening of the 2018 Military Skills Competition at 4 Artillery Regiment in Potchefstroom. The day was marked by a colourful military parade which was officiated over by Major General Rudzani Maphwanya, the General Officer Commanding of the SA Army Infantry Formation. Maj Gen Maphwanya was pleased with the large turnout of both the national and the international teams. During his speech, he welcomed all the participants, highlighting the presence of the first-time competitors, Nigeria and Tanzania. This year, the Military Skills Competitions is proudly commemorating its twelfth year of existence and ever improving annually. Maj Gen Maphwanya extended his gratitude and appreciation for the continued support by all the role players including the honourable Mayor of Tlokwe Municipality; Sanlam, Defence Reserves Division; Reserve Force Council as well as the participants and support personnel.

Maj Gen R. Maphwanya, General Officer Commanding of the SA Army Infantry Formation, welcoming the participants and support staff during the official opening of the 2018 Military Skills Competition at the 4 Artillery Regiment in Potchefstroom.
2018 Military Skills Competition was officially opened with a colourful military parade which consisted of participants flanked by equestrian, dog and motorcycle sections from SA Army Specialised Infantry Capability, a Reserve Force unit based in Potchefstroom.

The Military Skills Competition aims at comparing and testing basic military skills in a competitive environment whilst being evaluated in fair and equal manner. This is an appropriate yard stick to test levels of basic combat readiness of competing soldiers. Countries comprising teams participated and competed over a six-day period tackling tough, physical and mental challenges and competitions which consisted of Water and Land Obstacles; Pistol Shooting; Rifle Shooting; Hand Grenade Throwing; 8 km Combat Run and Range Estimation.

The guests were warmly welcomed and treated to SANDF military culture in the form of a formal dinner, on Monday evening at General Constant Viljoen Officers’ Mess. The event was hosted by Defence Reserves Provincial Office North West in cooperation with SA Army Specialised Infantry Capability (SAASIC) Reserve. The purpose of the event was to present a conjusive atmosphere for participants and support staff to unwind and acclimatise prior to the well anticipated competition ahead. This formal dinner was the first of its kind to be presented at the Military Skills Competition since its inception twelve years ago and henceforth, it will form part of the competition.

Major General R.C. Andersen, Chief Defence Reserves was delighted to officiate as a guest of honor at the formal dinner. The General utilised the opportunity to address the guests about strategic issues that concern the Department of Defence and the SANDF Reserves in particular. During his address, Maj Gen Andersen welcomed all participants especially the foreign countries present for the enthusiastic response to the invitations to participate in this competition. He proudly informed the audience about the Defence Reserve Division’s milestone achievement of the development and approval of the Updated Reserve Force Service System after a long and tedious hard work of compiling it. He further encouraged the Regular and Reserve Force members to attend the proposed SANDF Reserve Conference to be hosted over the period 06
and 07 November 2018 at National Ceremonial Guard unit where this topic will be tabled as a main point of discussion.

Maj Gen Roy Andersen, Chief Defence Reserves enthusiastically briefed the audience about the burning strategic issues that concern the SANDF and the Reserve Force in particular.

Lt Col Holder, the Officer Commanding SASSIC Reserve was the appointed Mess President during the formal dinner.
…and it was time for a toast! The guests had a toast to the Republic of South Africa’s president.

The highlight of the competition was on day two during the Water Obstacle when Sgt Mustapha Baba of the Nigerian Defence Force, carrying his country’s national flag singing and cheering on his Comrades-in-Arms while negotiating the tough Water Obstacles for the first time in their military careers. Day three comprised the R4 Assault Rifle and Z88 Pistol Shooting competitions. L/Cpl Eric Ramagonono of team Botswana Defence Force and Lt Cook James representing British Army ‘The LANCS’ shot impressively well during Pistol classification shooting competition. Lt Sedumedi and L/Bdr Makhubela both from 4 Artillery Regiment (Potchefstroom) dominated the Land Obstacle Crossing competition. Lt Sedumedi clocked three minutes and three seconds while L/Bdr Makhubela topped the Class of 2018 by registering two minutes and fifty nine seconds.

It was a chilly Saturday morning, the last day of the competition when the 8 km Rombat Run kicked off at the far side of the SA Army Support Base Potchefstroom Training Area. L/Cpl Husamatu Sanusi of the Nigerian Defence Force led the pack throughout the race and at some point he was clocking about 20 km/h on the down slope, he maintained the position until the finish line and he set a new Military Skills Competition record for the 8km Combat Run with an impressive time of 29 minutes and 01 second. L/Bdr Van Rooyen of 4 Art Reg (first time competitor) was the first lady to cross the finishing line with a comfortable time of 43 minutes and 06 seconds.
Sgt Mustapha Baba holding the Nigerian national flag flanked by his fellow soldiers, singing and cheering on L/Cpl Raymond Nanribef who was trying hard to negotiate the Water Obstacle.

L/Cpl Eric Ramagonono eager to represent Botswana Defence Force in the Z88 Pistol Musketry shooting competition.
Lt Cook James representing British Army ‘The LANCS’ during Z88 Pistol Musketry shooting competition.

L/Bdr Makhubela from 4 Art Reg (SANDF) participating in the Land Obstacle Cross clocking a time of 2 minutes and 59 seconds.
The Gunners’ dominated competition: Seen is Lt Sedumedi from 4 Art Reg participating in Land Obstacle Crossing; he managed his personal best time of 3 minutes and 03 Seconds.

L/Cpl Husamatu Sanusi of the Nigerian Defence Force participating in the 8 kilometer Combat Run flanked and cheered on by his fellow country soldiers as he established a new record of 29 minutes and 01 seconds.
Hard at work! Bombardier Rapitswana of 4 Artillery Regiment (*1st* SANDF member to cross the finishing line), obtained a *3rd* position in 8 kilometer Combat Run with 31 minutes and 30 seconds.

Competing with the boys! Lance Bombardier Tina van Rooyen (number 141) of 4 Artillery Regiment obtained the *1st* position for women with a time of 43 minutes and 06 seconds.
Lieutenant General Hlatshwayo, Chief Joint Operations was delighted to officiate at the 2018 Military Skills Competition prize giving ceremony on behalf of the Chief of the South African National Defence Force. In his speech, Lt Gen Hlatshwayo praised and thanked the organising committee, participants and support staff on a splendid and well executed competition. He challenged the foreign competitors to return next year with well rehearsed teams for the competition. He urged the SANDF’s commanders at all levels to support the event and provide more teams from the Services.

He also took the opportunity to brief the audience about the successful implementation of the Updated Reserve Force Service System and Project “KOBA TLALA.” (Both available in www.rfdmil.za)

“It was no easy path; international counterparts were exposed for a much longer period and had a sound understanding of the physical and mental challenge of such a competition. The word (military skills) can be interpreted in many ways, but the outcome of this is the fact that any and every man or woman in a military force needs to know and be able to execute some of the basic skills that are required to survive in combat. The ability to conduct a successful operation is the ultimate reason for the existence of a military force and therefore warfighting places the greatest demand on such forces” said Lt Gen Hlatshwayo.

Lt Gen Hlatshwayo, Chief Joint Operations was the main functionary during the prize giving ceremony of the 2018 Military Skills Competition. In his speech, Lt Gen Hlatshwayo whole heartedly thanked the organisers and participants for their enthusiasm and the esprit-de-cur displayed throughout the competition.

The Reserve Force Council played a major role in the successful presentation of the 2018 Military Skills Competitions and is still prepared to continue to support this competition going forward.
Colonel Monica Muller (Ret), Councillor of the Reserve Force Council gladly awarded the woman overall winner trophy, medals and certificates of the best women competitors. During her speech, Col Muller said “the military skills competition is more of force preparation and endurance than an ordinary sports /competition”. She also stressed the fact that this Competition is not all about winning or losing but application of the skills, team work and experience acquired in combat situations.

Col Monica Muller (Ret), Councillor of the Reserve Force Council, was delighted and honoured to present the women’s overall winner trophy.

In his closing remarks Lieutenant Colonel Uys van der westhuijzen, chief coordinator of the Military Skills Competition thanked the Reserve Force Council, Defence Reserves Division, SAASIC Reserve, Army Support Base Potchefstroom and other partners for their outstanding contribution towards the successful presentation of the 2018 Military Skills Competition. He officially announced that the 2019 Military Skills Competition will be hosted by the South African Army Armour Formation.

The Military Skills Competition with international participation provides a sound platform where members of the Reserve Force and Regular Force can showcase these skills. The Reserve Force is an integral part of the ‘ONE FORCE CONCEPT’. And these members have shown that they are contributing tremendously in the Defence of the Sovereignty of the Republic of South
Africa through their internal operational deployments, through OPERATION CORONA as well as international deployments in the SADEC Region.

National flags of the participating countries displayed in chronical order (Republic of South Africa, Republic of Botswana, Germany Federal Republic, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Tanzania and The United Kingdom), trophies, certificates, medals and badges to be awarded to deserving competitor's/teams.

Group Photo: 2018 Military Skills Competition organisers, representatives and participants of various countries including South African National Defence Force.