

Italian Influence in South Africa - part 2

Written by Andre Martinaglia

Tuesday, 23 November 2010 18:46 -

"In Kwa-Zulu/Natal at the beginning of 1838 Piet Retief and his party were murdered by direct order of Dingaan to his Impi warriors at their encampment, in what was supposed to be a honouring of a signed peace deal treaty for land ownership. Thereafter the Impi warriors were ordered to advance on all the Voortrekker Lagers at Bloukrans, Moordspruit, Bushman's River, Malanspruit and Doornkop.

On that terrible night of the 16th-17th February, 1838, near Bloukrans a small group of Piedmontese Italians, who were trailing behind the Voortrekkers on their journey northwards, selling to them their necessities on the way, like gunpowder, metal utensils, salt fabrics, tea, coffee and sugar, had settled in for the night camped together within a short distance of the Bloukrans lager, when they heard gun shots and the Zulu Impi war cries. Without hesitating for a second thought Teresa Viglione, saddled her horse, riding down the Bushmans River, despite the possibility of wild animals in that still untamed part of the country, and the presence of Dingaan's Zulu Impi warriors who were flooding the area, stopping briefly at each Voortrekker lager warning them of the imminent danger facing them.

After a week long battle all the lagers bar the Bushmens River, when finally reinforcements arrived from Doornkop, who were able to force the Zulu Impi to retreat. Teresa Viglione was doing here utmost in treating the Voortrekker children with salve and balsam she has brought up with her from the coast, which she used to heal their wounds. She despite the fact that she and her two male companions were Italian and Roman Catholics were loudly cheered in gratitude by the entire Voortrekker lager, which included the famous leader Gerrit Maritz. Dominees Erasmus Smith recorded in his diary the following:

"Woensdag 28 Februarie, "Ik bezoght de gewonden die ik tamelik beter fond. Dank zij God! 26 Februarie,"Er is 'n Italiaanse juffrou Teresa Viglione met drie Italiaanse manne, Antonio Chiara, Giovanni Batista Pizzola en een ander, by hare drie negootie wagens, in ons lager. Zy hewt zich in de aanval de vijand aanval waarschuurd, om op te kume hoed te zijn. Zy heeft de gewonder kinderen daarna in hare tent genomen, en met haar medicijnen, zalven en balsams bediend: en zij heeft descurege feel lof in de lagers verworven".

With the opening of the Voortrekker Monument in 1938, she was not forgotten and a base relief, panel number 15 was dedicated to her. Ironically the marble used for all the base reliefs was Carrara Italian marble, chipped out by Prof. Romano Romanelli and his team of workers, who were also responsible for the bronze statues at the monument, and the casting done in Rome, as well as the Paul Kruger Monument and statues on Church Square, designed by

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Anton van Wouw. They were a team both Romanelli, van Moerdijk, and Van Wouw, combining their talents in perserving our South African heritage.

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