

Why Muslim contribution should be acknowledged in the renaming process.

On the 2 October, 1805 a piece of land in the Bo-kaap, was granted by the “Raad der Gemeente” [the council at that time] as a cemetery for the Muslims of Cape Town. This official land grant, the first of its kind, was an expression of goodwill extended by the Batavian Republic following the granting of religious freedom on 25 July, 1804. This freedom was accompanied by two privileges: the right to build a mosque and the granting of this burial site. This action of the Batavian administration was an attempt to secure Muslim loyalty in the eventuality of a British invasion of the Cape. After 150 years of slavery and relentless religious persecution, Muslim gratitude of these privileges was expressed by the formation of two "Javaansche Artilleries".

Under the command of Imam Frans of Bengal and a Frenchman J. Madlener, these artilleries were deployed at the **Battle of Blaauwberg in 1806**. They were well trained and fought so graciously that they earned the praise of their British adversaries. According to some historians, the Muslim artilleries could have won the battle had General Jansen not retreated. Because the Muslim fighters suffered heavy casualties; this altruism confirmed their readiness to sacrifice for the protection of this city. According to the South African Military History Society, the Muslims totalled 158 men; this included 54 gunners assisted by 104 auxiliaries, almost a third of the total Cape fighting force. These artillerymen were volunteer citizen-soldiers and members of the freed slaves of Indo- Malay origin. The corps was initiated in 1804 to operate the Castle's guns, but served as foot artillery at Blaauwberg, firing Indonesian cannons known as 'lantakan', the first and last time these weapons were used on African soil.

On the 4TH May 1846, Muslims again volunteered to form the “Cape Malay Corps” to do service for the British Crown on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Colony during the **Battle of the Axe**. In exchange for their gallant military services, a religious site was granted and the “Queen Victoria Mosque” also known as the Jameah Mosque was built in lower Chiappini Street in 1850.

From the World War of 1939 -1944 comes the story of Private Salaiman Johaar, certificate no M11448 who was shot; captured and imprisoned in Italy. As a volunteer in the Cape Corps infantry, he fought bravely on the side of the British Crown. Although he spent most of his life at No 4 Cardiff Flats in Newlands, he died an unsung hero in February 1982 in Mitchells Plain. Salaiman, the recipient of 5 military medals could not stop the Apartheid government from confiscating his home in Newlands where 6 of his children were born. He was buried as he lived, quietly, at the Mowbray Muslim cemetery.

It is shameful that those who fought and died alongside others to secure the city of Cape Town in several historical battles continue to be disregarded. There is no official memorial, not even a plaque on any wall, to commemorate these sacrifices. Muslim heroes are not mentioned in history books, and their contributions are continually dismissed. It is, as if Muslims who participated, never existed even though thousands of their descendants continue to live in Cape Town to this day.

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