Sovereign flags over South Africa from 1488 to 1994

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ABSTRACT: The extraordinarily rich vexillological history of South Africa is briefly described, beginning with the arrival of the first flags at the Cape with the Portuguese explorers c. 1488, through to the 37 sovereign flags that have flown over South Africa during the following five centuries. Each flag is placed in its proper historical context during the period spanning from Bartolomeu Dias to Nelson Mandela.
The illustrations for this paper appear on Plates 12–14.

1 The age of discovery

Portugal initiated the so-called age of discovery through the attempts of Prince Henry the Navigator to find a sea route directly to India. He was not to see the fulfillment of his dream, for he died before Bartolomeu Dias succeeded in rounding the Cape in 1488. Dias discovered the Cape more or less by accident, because he was blown past it by a Cape Northwester. By the time he regained land in the vicinity of present day Mossel Bay, he discovered that the coast was on his port side, not his starboard side as before. As a result of his stormy experience, he called this newly discovered cape, *Cabo Tormentoso.* However, on his return to Portugal, his king thought it was a sign of good hope that they would find the sea route to India, and renamed it *Cabo da Boa Esparança,* or the Cape of Good Hope. The dream was eventually fulfilled when Vasco da Gama reached India in 1497. This was some five years after Columbus stepped ashore on some islands on the other side of the Atlantic, which he thought, was India.

To mark their passage and to claim the sovereignty of the king of Portugal

over all newly discovered territories, the Portuguese erected stone crosses called *padrãos*. Whether Dias or Da Gama and their successors ever planted or displayed a flag anywhere on the shores of South Africa is unknown. It is unlikely, though, as the use of flags as national symbols of identification was not yet well established at that time. The Portuguese identified their ships, for instance, by wearing the red cross of the Order of Christ on their main sails (**Fig. 1**). There is some indication that this was also used as an ensign. If they did use a flag ashore, it might have been the royal standard of King John I (**Fig. 2**). Considering that the Portuguese kings claimed ownership of all the discoveries and trade made by their subjects, it was probably hoisted to confirm this fact. In 1495, King Emanuel I adopted a new *Estandarte Real* or royal standard (**Fig. 3**), which remained in use until 1830. As it was, the Portuguese had a few unfortunate run-ins with the local population at the Cape, which culminated in the death of a Viceroy to India in 1510. From then onwards, they regarded the Cape as too dangerous and avoided it altogether.

The first European power known to have hoisted a flag at the Cape was England. In 1619 two English sea captains hoisted the Cross of St George on Signal Hill and proclaimed the whole territory surrounding Table Bay to be henceforth the property of King James the First of England (**Fig. 4**). King James, a canny Scot who was reputed to be the wisest fool in Christendom, however, would have nothing to do with the annexation and the claim lapsed.

2   Permanent European settlement at the Cape

2.1   The Dutch East India Company

The first serious attempt at settlement at the Cape was by the Dutch, who needed a halfway refreshment station for their trading fleets to the East. On 6 April 1652, Jan van Riebeeck stepped ashore in Table Bay, and changed the history of the African sub-continent forever. He hoisted the flag and proclaimed the territory henceforth to belong to the Dutch East India Company, with himself as the Commander. Which flag it was that he hoisted is something of a controversy. Dutch vessels originally wore the colours of the House of Orange, the orange tricolour, in honour of Prince William the Silent, who was the original leader of the revolt against Spain (**Fig. 5**). The colour orange slowly changed to red, however, but exactly when this happened is unsure. The Dutch authority on flags of the period, Van der Laars, thinks it was still orange when Van Riebeeck stepped ashore. It did change to red later and the orange tricolour was displaced by the present red tricolour of the Netherlands (**Fig. 6**).

There is also some opinion that Van Riebeeck may have hoisted the Company flag. This was the orange tricolour with the Company monogram, an intertwined VOC (*Vereenigte Nederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie*), on the white (**Fig. 7**). The possibility also exists that it may have been the flag of the Chamber of Middelburg. The Dutch East India Company was organized into seven Chambers. Each Chamber had responsibility for some aspect of the Company's operations. The refreshment station at the Cape was the responsibility of the Chamber of Middelburg. This Chamber's flag had the colours of the flag of the City of Middelburg, but also bore the VOC monogram surmounted by an 'M' (**Fig. 8**). It is known that the Middelburg Chamber flag also flew over the Castle. It is even possible that the flag of the City of Middelburg might have been displayed (**Fig. 9**).

The settlement at the Cape was originally meant to be a refreshment station only. The Company had no interest in colonisation. Van Riebeeck had to build a fort, establish a garden for the essential greens to allow seafarers to recover from the scourge of scurvy, establish a hospital for the Company's sailors to regain their health, and no more. But, all the so-called free land around the mountain and beyond was too much of a temptation for land-starved Europeans. Within four years of Van Riebeeck's arrival, he received permission from the Company to release Company officials from their service and allocate them grants of land. This marked the start of numerous land disputes in South Africa which continue to this day. Within fifty years the settlement had expanded beyond the mountains and one hundred years after Van Riebeeck's arrival the first trekkers were settling on the banks of the Great Fish River in the Eastern Cape,

The indigenous Khoikhoi, who gave the Portuguese so much trouble during their first contact, were of course not consulted in all this. They, however, soon fell prey to the diseases like small pox and measles brought by the Europeans. Their tribal structures were broken up and the remnants entered service with the settler farmers. The Company tried to control the expansion of the colony because such expansion did not contribute to the Company's earnings. Every time the Governor and his officials at the Castle set a new boundary beyond which there was to be no settlement, it was only to discover that the settlers were already way beyond.

Sometime during the decade of 1760 the trekkers suddenly found that they had run out of free land. Across the Great Fish River they met up with another group of farmer herders - the Xhosa. They were the vanguard of the Nguni migration that had moved into that part of the country a few hundred years before. Both communities wanted the same grazing for their cattle, and trouble was not long in coming. Between 1781 and 1872 no less than nine frontier wars took place between the Xhosa and the Cape colonists, both Boer and British.

The Company by this time was no longer the vigorous supra-national trading organisation it had been one hundred years before. Even if it was so inclined, it could not provide the firm government that the colonists needed to defend them against what they regarded as the marauding Xhosa cattle thieves. They were mainly dependent upon themselves for defence. Thus was the commando system developed, whereby all the men of fighting age in a threatened area would come together to form a commando, elect their officers and take to the field against

whatever caused the threat. They developed a strong sense of independence and self-reliance. In 1795 they finally became tired of the Company's lack of administration and inability to cope with the Xhosa threat. The people of Graaff-Reinet and Swellendam revolted against the Company's rule. They expelled the Company Magistrate and declared themselves independent of the Company's rule.

2.2   French interlude

Until the start of the American Revolution, the Cape had been pretty much isolated from world and European events. During the Seven years War, the struggle for colonial supremacy between Great Britain and Bourbon France had concluded in favour of Britain. France was expelled from North America and lost a large part of her interests in India. When she decided to support the rebellious American colonists, it was also with the purpose of recouping some of her losses from an embarrassed Britain. The Cape came into the picture when France dispatched a squadron of warships under command of Commodore Suffren to the Indian Ocean to cause the British as much trouble as possible. On the way there he landed a French garrison at the Cape. Its purpose was to support France's much-weakened ally, the Netherlands, and to prevent the British from doing the same. Thus the Bourbon flag flew at the Cape for some three years from 1781 to 1783 (**Fig. 10**).

2.3   First British occupation

In September of 1795 a British fleet arrived in False Bay with a letter to the Governor from the Prince of Orange, instructing the Governor to hand the Cape over to the British. This was to prevent Revolutionary France from repeating the action by Bourbon France. The Prince of Orange had been driven from the Netherlands by the victorious French Revolutionary armies. The Netherlands became the Batavian Republic. Governor Sluyskens at the Cape supported the Batavian Republic and was inclined to resist the British take over. He did not have sufficient troops, however, and the senior commanders of the Cape garrison were in any case loyal to the Prince. There was consequently only a minor skirmish at Muizenberg before Sluyskens capitulated and the First British Occupation began under the Old Union Jack (**Fig. 11**). This flag signified the union between the English and Scottish Kingdoms in 1603 by combining the crosses of St George and St Andrew.

2.4   Batavian interlude

At the Peace of Amiens in 1803, the Cape was handed over to the Batavian Republic. The new Dutch rulers arrived at the Cape with the old Dutch tricolour, but with a canton displaying a young woman seated and holding an anchor

(**Fig. 12**). She was known at the Cape as the Bataafsche Maagd or Batavian Maiden. This Maiden took up permanent residence at the Cape as the Lady of Good Hope. She was resurrected in the Great Seal of the British Cape Colony and still today represents the former Cape Colony in the national coat of arms.

2.5   Second British occupation

The Napoleonic wars had in the meantime recommenced in Europe and in 1806 the British were back. This time of course under the new Union Jack which they had adopted in 1801 to signify the inclusion of Ireland into the United Kingdom by adding the cross of St Patrick (**Fig. 13**). This flag was destined to fly continuously over parts and eventually the whole of South Africa until 1958. The Second British Occupation lasted until 1816. During the international arrangements and treaties concluded in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, the newly created Dutch Kingdom agreed to cede the Cape permanently to Britain. Britain wanted to ensure that her sea route to the East would never again be threatened.

3   The British Cape Colony

The first civil governor to be appointed to the new British Colony of the Cape, was Lord Charles Somerset. He was an autocrat and was determined to turn the Dutch colonists, who were not quite Dutch anymore, into loyal English speaking British subjects. The new British administration was much more efficient than that of the Company had been and the frontiersmen of the Eastern Cape were forced to pay their taxes also, something they had largely avoided doing during the Company's administration.

In 1816 a brief rebellion flared up on the frontier. A Boer was charged with assault by his servant and resisted arrest after several fruitless summonses, and was killed. His friends and neighbours rebelled, but the rebellion was quickly and bloodlessly suppressed. The ring leaders were condemned and hanged at a place afterwards to become known as Slagter's Nek, or Butcher' Pass.

4   The Great Trek

The hangings at Slagter's Nek set the relations between Boer and Briton in South Africa off on a very bad footing that was to grow steadily worse as the nineteenth century progressed. Somerset aggravated matters by forbidding the use of the Dutch language in the courts and schools and even tried to anglicize the Dutch Reformed Church by importing Scottish parsons. All these factors, but especially the British Administration's vacillating policies towards the Xhosa, combined to persuade the Boers of the Cape Colony to trek to the North to get away from British rule. These Boers became known as the *Voortrekkers*.

4.1   The Voortrekker flags

The Great Trek started in 1835. One group of Voortrekkers under Piet Retief moved into Natal. Here, after much bloodshed between Boer and Zulu, they eventually established the Republic of Natalia, under a flag derived from the Dutch tricolour. This is generally known as the Voortrekker or Natalia flag (**Fig. 14**). The other group, under Hendrik Potgieter, who wanted nothing to do with Natal, moved over the Vaal River further North. Whereas Retief saw that the Voortrekkers needed to trade with the world and therefore wanted to have a seaport, Potgieter's view was that where there was a sea, there one would find the English. He was related to some of the men hanged at Slagter's Nek and carried the gallows beam around in his wagon to remind him of English perfidy! This gallows wood can incidentally, still be seen today in the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria.

Potgieter used a flag known as the Potgieter flag or *Kruisvlag*, meaning 'cross flag' (**Fig. 15**). The origin of this flag is unknown. In the course of the next twenty years the Boers in the Transvaal established four small republics in this area and the Potgieter flag was presumably used by most of them. Potgieter was right about the English though, because in 1843 Natal was annexed to the British Crown and the Republic of Natalia came to an end. Most of the Boers refused to submit to British rule again and trekked back over the Drakensberg to the Trans-Gariep and the Trans-Vaal. After some years of further trouble between Boer and Brit, the British government suffered an attack of anti-colonialism. In 1852 Britain recognised the independence of the Boers in the Transvaal and in 1854 also that of those in the Trans-Gariep.

4.2   Flags of the major Boer republics

In the Trans-Gariep area, between the Orange and Vaal rivers, the Boers created the Orange Free State Republic. They wrote to King William III of the Netherlands to grant them a coat of arms and a flag. Thus they received from the King a flag reflecting the connection with the House of Orange, called the Free State *Vierkleur* or four-colour (**Fig. 16**). It remained the sovereign flag of the Republic of the Orange Free State (O.F.S.) until 31 May 1902 when the Orange Free State was annexed for the second time to the British Crown at the end of the Second Anglo-Boer War.

The Boers in the Transvaal took much longer to find unity. Eventually they established the South African Republic and in 1860 all the small republics recognised the flag of the united South African Republic (S.A.R.). Their flag was an indigenous design, but also reflected their continued regard for the Dutch tricolour (**Fig. 17**). This flag became known as the Transvaal *Vierkleur* or four-colour.

This flag had a more turbulent history than that of its companion in the Free State. In 1872 the S.A.R. elected a new President, T. F. Burgers, who did not like the *Vierkleur*. He proposed a return to the *Kruisvlag*, suitably fimbriated to conform to the rule of tincture. After acrimonious debate in the Volksraad or National Assembly, this so-called Burgers flag was adopted in 1874 (**Fig. 18**). As soon as the President departed for Europe to negotiate a loan for a railway scheme, the Volksraad changed its previous decision and reinstated the *Vierkleur* in 1875. The Burgers flag was declared to be the President's flag to be flown alongside the *Vierkleur* whenever the President should be present.

4.3   The first Anglo-Boer War

In 1877 the British annexed the Transvaal in an abortive attempt to bring about a Confederation of all the states and colonies in South Africa, naturally under the Union Jack. Having vainly tried for three years to persuade the British by peaceful means to undo this annexation, the Transvaalers rose in revolt on 16 December 1880 and inflicted a series of sharp defeats on the British Garrison and a relieving force from Natal, culminating in the Battle of Majuba on 28 February 1881. The British Government was now faced with the prospect of a long war in a remote corner of Africa with no discernible economic advantage, because this was before the discovery of the gold reefs on the Witwatersrand. The Gladstone Government in Britain decided to cut its losses. At the subsequent Conventions of Pretoria and London, the S.A.R.'s independence was restored and with it, of course, the Vierkleur. The flag retained its sovereign status until 31 May 1902 when the Transvaal was also annexed to the British Crown for the second time, at the end of the Second Anglo-Boer War.

5   Minor Boer republics

The Boer propensity for establishing republics wherever they went in Africa did not end with the establishment of the Orange Free State and South African Republics. There were indeed four other short-lived small republics established in various parts of the sub-continent during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

5.1   The Republic of the Klein Vrystaat

During the early eighteen-seventies a number of Boers bought land from the Swazi King along the Pongola River in what is now the Piet Retief district of Mpumalanga Province. Here they established the Republic of the Klein Vrystaat, or Little Free State. Their flag looked like the Transvaal Vierkleur except that all the bars had the same proportions. In the Vierkleur the vertical green bar is one-and-a-quarter the width of the other horizontal bars (**Fig. 19**). This small republic was incorporated into the South African Republic in 1892 and one of the smallest republics in world history ceased to exist.

5.2   The Nieuwe Republiek

After the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, King Cetswayo of the Zulus was banished to Robben Island by the British and Zululand subdivided into 13 Chiefdoms to remove the Zulu Kingdom as a threat to the British Colony of Natal. This was a recipe for strife and disorder. Eventually the British allowed Cetswayo to return to try and restore order in Zululand. He died shortly after his return and his son Dinizulu had to deal with a very serious rebellion against the power of the Royal House. To help him overcome this, he called in the help of some 800 Boers from the O.F.S., S.A.R. and Natal. Having successfully dealt with the rebels, they took their pay in land. Eight hundred farms were allocated to them in the Northernmost part of Zululand and on this territory they established in 1884 the *Nieuwe Republiek* or New Republic with the town of Vryheid as their capital.

The *Volksraad* of the New Republic approved a flag with the same basic colours as that of the Transvaal *Vierkleur*, but with the green and blue bars interchanged, that is the blue is the vertical bar next the hoist (**Fig. 20**). The New Republic was incorporated into the S.A.R. in 1888 and the flag lost its sovereign status. It is, however, still used today as the municipal flag of the town of Vryheid.

5.3   The Republic of Stellaland

The Western boundary of the S.A.R. was at the time of the Pretoria Convention in 1881 still largely undetermined. Internecine war broke out among the tribes living in the area in 1882 and again the help of white volunteers was sought for pay in land. The S.A.R. government eventually managed to bring about peace in the area. The peace treaty of August 1882 ceded a substantial tract of territory to the volunteers. On this they established the Republic of Stellaland with their capital at Vryburg. The name of the country came from the appearance of a very bright comet, called the Great September Comet of 1882. This comet also featured strongly in the three flags that this ephemeral republic had during its short existence. The first was apparently a green field with the coat of arms in the centre surmounted by a star (**Fig. 21**). Not long afterwards, the design was changed to a green field with a six-pointed star in the centre. (**Fig. 22**). A little later still another design appeared, in which the field was green and red from the hoist with a six-pointed star in the centre (**Fig. 23**). It is not known what occasioned all these changes, although I have heard it suggested that it was the President's wife who made them up on her sewing machine as the whim took her!

5.4   The Republic of Goshen

Shortly after the establishment of Stellaland, a similar situation developed a little further to the North. Once again the volunteers received land in payment for their services and established the Republic of Goshen. Their flag was similar in design to that of the Transvaal, but with black, white and red horizontal bars (**Fig. 24**).

Neither of these two republics lasted for very long. Both interfered with British imperial ambitions in the area. They lay right across the only route to the interior of Central Southern Africa not yet under Boer domination. Cecil John Rhodes was at this time appointed as British Commissioner for the area. He was then already planning and dreaming of a British Africa from the Cape to Cairo and these two statelets were in the way of this dream. A crisis was created and after a show of force by the British, the S.A.R. Government, who had attempted to annex Goshen to its own territory, had to back down. Both were instead annexed as Crown colonies in 1885 and later incorporated into the Cape Colony.

6   South Africa in the twentieth century

The Second Anglo-Boer War, which raged from 11 October 1899 to 31 May 1902, devastated the territory of the two Boer republics and they lost their independence. The most important, but invisible, result of the war was the deep scars it left on the psyche of the Afrikaners. Not only did they lose their hard-won independence, but in addition to their battle-field losses, they had to deal with the death of thousands of women and children in the badly mismanaged British concentration camps. Coupled with the deep sense of bitterness caused by these losses, Afrikaners developed for the first time in their history a fierce spirit of nationalism, based on pride in the way they had been able to resist the might of the whole of the British empire for three years. All these factors taken together were to bedevil South African politics for most of this century.

The constitutional outcome of the war was that for the first time the whole of South Africa was under the Union Jack. The former S.A.R. became the Colony of the Transvaal, and the former Orange Free State, the Orange River Colony. They were granted internal self-government in 1906 and 1907, respectively. They then followed the general British imperial practice of the time by being granted coats of arms, which were placed on the fly of the British Blue Ensign to serve as colonial flags. The other two colonies of the Cape and Natal already had such flags.

6.1   The Colony of the Cape of Good Hope

The Cape Colony had its arms granted to it on 29 May 1876 after gaining fully representative government. Shortly thereafter the flag, commonly know as the

Cape Government flag, was taken into use **(Fig. 25)**.

6.2   The Colony of Natal

The Natal legislative Assembly in 1870 adopted a Blue and Red Ensign of the same pattern, but with a very complicated design on the fly **(Figs 26 and 27)**. Because of the lettering, the design had to be sewed on both sides. In 1875 a dictum of the British Colonial Office caused the design of the badge on the fly to be much simplified. It was only used on the Blue Ensign, as there was apparently no Red Ensign version approved **(Fig. 28)**.

6.3   The Colony of the Transvaal

The Blue Ensign of the Transvaal had a lion *couchant contourné*, which was a device taken over from the old republican coat of arms **(Fig. 29)**.

6.4   The Orange River Colony

The Orange River Colony's Blue Ensign had a 'Springbok proper on a mound' in the disc on the fly **(Fig. 30)**. All these colonial flags fell into abeyance when the Union of South Africa came into being in 1910.

6.5   The Union of South Africa

As soon as the two newly conquered colonies, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, were granted internal self-government, pressures started to mount for unification. The main reason for this was economic, as they were engaged in cut-throat customs and railway tariff wars between themselves. At the initiative of the Transvaal Government, a National Convention was convened in 1908, which eventually drafted a unity constitution for the country. The delegates to the Convention represented only the white inhabitants, Afrikaans and English. It was to take another eighty-three years of strife and struggle before another Convention was convened that would represent all the country's inhabitants.

The British Parliament adopted the South Africa Constitution Act towards the end of 1909 and on 31 May 1910, the Union of South Africa came into being. The Union Jack remained the official national flag, but a British Admiralty Warrant dated 28 December 1910, authorised both a Red and a Blue Ensign with the country's new coat of arms on the fly **(Figs 31 and 32)**. As can be seen, the coat of arms was placed directly on the field without fimbriation. On 25 March 1912 the Admiralty amended the Warrant so that the arms would be displayed on a white disc **(Figs 33 and 34)**.

These ensigns were, as is the general British practice, meant mainly for use at sea. The Blue Ensign is for government owned non-naval vessels and the Red Ensign for the Mercantile Marine. At the time of Union, South Africa had very

few of either. There is some evidence that the Blue Ensign was used on South African offices overseas. The Red Ensign came to be regarded as a national flag and was used to a certain extent in this capacity. Its most prominent moment was probably when General Louis Botha hoisted it in Windhoek in 1915 after the town was surrendered by the retreating German Governor. It did remain the South African Merchant Marine flag until 1951, when it was replaced at sea by the then National Flag in terms of the Merchant Marine Act of 1951.

Neither of the white groups in the country was satisfied with the flag situation. When the so-called Pact Government, which was an alliance between the Afrikaner National Party and English Labour, came to power in 1924, it decided to tackle the issue of a distinctive national flag for the Union. The Government tabled a Bill on 22 January 1925 in Parliament making provision for a national flag for the Union. This created an immediate uproar. Because an Afrikaner government tabled the Bill, the English speakers were convinced that all their cherished British symbolism was about to be done away with. An official competition was held, but did not produce a design acceptable to any of the political parties. The political storm grew in intensity. At political meetings pitched battles took place between opponents and proponents, leaving broken heads and furniture. The Province of Natal, even today still sometimes known as the Last Outpost of the British Empire, threatened a referendum on secession from the Union.

Eventually, after three years of turmoil and near civil war over the issue, a compromise was reached and Parliament finally passed a compromise into law in October 1927. This compromise was the old Dutch orange, white and blue tricolour (now called the Van Riebeeck flag) with, on the white, the flags of the two Boer republics and the Union Jack in miniature. It was a quite clever compromise tying together the interests of the two white population groups **(Fig. 35)**. In addition, the compromise agreement made provision for the Union Jack to be flown everywhere on an equal footing with the new national flag. Thus, for the next thirty years until the practice was discontinued in 1957, South Africa had two national flags! The new flag was ceremoniously taken into use on 31 May 1928.

Like most compromises, the new flag was not popular, to begin with. With the passage of time it became established as the unique and accepted national flag of the Union and later the Republic of South Africa. However, for the black and brown majority of the population, who had no say at all in the process leading to the adoption of this flag, it was eventually to become a symbol of oppression.

The 1928 national flag survived three wars and two constitutional changes. The first constitutional change took place on 31 May 1961, when the Union became the Republic of South Africa (R.S.A.). So was realised the dream of President Kruger, the last President of the Transvaal, for a Boer Republic over the whole of South Africa. The constitution of the Republic of South Africa was still on the Westminster model with a ceremonial State President and a

Prime Minister who was the Head of Government. On 31 May 1984 a new constitution was adopted which created an Executive Presidency and a Tricameral Parliament, one for whites, one for Coloureds and one for Indians. The latter two groups were for the first time in the history of the country represented in parliament, but still separately. The vast black majority was still entirely excluded.

7   The new Republic of South Africa

The struggle for political rights for the black population in a central parliament continued. In the nineteen-sixties the black opposition groups abandoned their, until then, relatively peaceful methods and took up arms. It was a long, low-level insurgency that never threatened the Government's control of the country, but led to the increasing isolation of the country internationally. The R.S.A. was at the same time involved in a border war in present-day Namibia and in the Angolan Civil war. This forced the R.S.A. to built up its armed forces and create an armaments industry in the face of international sanctions. As a result the economic burden grew ever heavier. It was only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, whom the R.S.A. government had regarded as the primary threat and supporter of the black opposition, that the National Party Government found the courage to reverse its obnoxious policies.

On 2 February 1990 President F. W. De Klerk made his historic announcement on the release of Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners and the unbanning of black political groups. The eventual outcome of this act was the convening of a Convention for a Democratic South Africa, known by the acronym CODESA. CODESA devised an interim constitution, which came into force in 1994. The first general elections in the history of South Africa in which every adult could participate were held on 27 April 1994. On 10 May 1994 President Nelson Mandela was sworn in as the first President of the new Republic of South Africa. He was so sworn under a new national flag.

The Multi-Party Negotiating Council which succeeded CODESA had appointed a commission to investigate new national symbols. *Inter alia,* they invited public participation for a new flag design. Some seven thousand designs were received from the public at large, of which six were chosen for presentation to the Multi-party Negotiating Council. None of these found favour with the delegates nor the public at large. After much frantic behind-the-scenes activity, a design was finally published which, to general astonishment, found almost immediate and universal approval. This flag was promulgated in the *Government Gazette* of 20 April 1994 as the new national flag of the Republic of South Africa **(Fig. 36)**. It was officially hoisted country-wide immediately after midnight on 26 April 1994.

I am an optimist and believe that now, after three and half centuries of much bloodshed, intermittent warfare, political strife and general turmoil, South

Africa has finally found a national flag that, for the first time in her history, is accepted by the vast majority of South Africans. May it long remain so.

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Commodore A.P. Burgers retired from the South African Navy in 1990. His interest in vexillology was stimulated by the fact that he specialised as a Signal Communications Officer in the Navy with a particular interest in signal flags. His main interest is still the origins and development of flag signalling at sea, all over the world. His other main interest is the history of flags in South Africa. He joined the South African Vexillological Association in 1993 and is a founder member and the current chairman of the Association's Cape Chapter.

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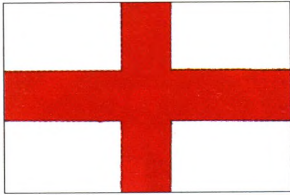
Plate 12

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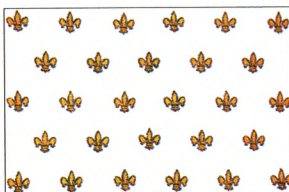
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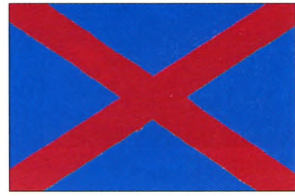
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Figure 29

Figure 30

Figure 31

Figure 32

Figure 33

Figure 34

Figure 35

Figure 36