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Headless Horseman haunts Stones River Battlefield

MIKE WEST, Managing Editor

Sunday, October 18, 2009 7:31 am.

✉ Email 🖨 Print (http://www.murfreesboropost.com/headless-horseman-haunts-stones-river-battlefield-cms-19880-printer)



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Stones River Battlefield is said to be the most haunted place in Murfreesboro.

Does the ghost of a headless horseman still haunt Stones River Battlefield?

Yes, if you believe anonymous witnesses to the sight and postings on the Internet.

The rider in question is said to be the ghost of Lt. Col. Julius P. Garesche, who died near the railroad line at the current site of Stones River National Cemetery. A sign marks the site where he was killed.

On the afternoon of Dec. 31, 1862, Gen. William S. Rosecrans was riding along the Stones River National Forest. Accompanying him was his popular, but humble chief of staff Garesche.

Capt. Henry Semple of Semple's Alabama Battery spotted the officers and took a shot. The shot missed Rosecrans, but struck Garesche, decapitating him. Garesche was a commanding general.

Garesche's horse galloped another 20 yards before his body fell off near the Stones River National Forest. The Chattanooga Railroad.

After dusk, Garesche's West Point classmate, Brig. Gen. William S. Hazen discovered it and recovered his West Point ring and his well-read Catholic Bible.

"I chanced to pass the spot where he lay. He was alone, no soldier – dead man. I saw a headless trunk: an eddy of crimson foam had issued where his head should have been."

"I at once recognized his figure, it lay so naturally, his right hand across his forehead and bent over him, the contraction of a muscle extended the hand slowly and slightly toward me," Hazen wrote.

His classmate found Garesche's hand still warm and lifelike.

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Hazen took the West Point class ring from Garesche's finger and his devotion to the Union. "There was no time for tears," the general wrote.

Hazen and a group of volunteers then buried Garesche in a temporary battlefield grave. He became fodder for newspaper stories in Union states.

A marker near the railroad tracks not far from Stones River National Cemetery was erected.

While it was not rare for soldiers to be decapitated by cannon fire, Garesche's death was preceded by a series of strange omens that preceded his fall moments into his first battle.

Some 21 years earlier, Garesche had just graduated from West Point and was visiting his father in St. Louis, as the tale goes, had just come into possession of 2,000 acres of land lying at the junction of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

Woodcutters and squatters beset the land so the elder Garesche dispatched a patrol the area. After a long search to find a camping site, Julius discovered a place.

Settling in for the night, Julius was awakened by the sudden collapse of the campsite. The patriots barely escaped disaster. When told the story, Julius' brother Frederick took the experience as an omen of disaster.

The comments of Frederick, who was training for the priesthood, made a strange impression. A series of life-ending "near misses" compounded Julius' fears and as the year 1862 drew to a close, Julius was involved in mysticism.

Seeking relief from his worries, Garesche became involved in the Society of St. Vincent of Paul, an organization aimed at relieving the suffering among the poor. But as the outbreak of war approached, Julius found himself on the opposite side from many of his Southern relatives. During a heated discussion, Garesche called his Confederate relatives turncoats and damned them to a living hell.

This out-of-character performance caused Julius to seek out the advice of his brother Frederick, who was now a Catholic priest of some prominence.

This sin caused his brother, Father Frederick, to predict Julius' death in his first battle. Frederick set an 18-month timetable for his brother's demise.

At first, Julius refused to accept his brother's prediction. He was, after all, a man of war. But by April of 1862, he began to seek a field commission. His Point friend, Rosecrans, was appointed to lead the Army of the Cumberland.

On Nov. 5, 1862, Garesche was appointed chief of staff, Army of the Cumberland. He quickly became Rosecrans' closest confidant.

His last day on earth came soon after with the Army of Cumberland marching from Nashville to Murfreesboro the morning of Dec. 31, 1862. Garesche joined in the celebration of High Mass with Father Coon of the 55th Indiana Regiment officiating.

All too soon, it became obvious that the Confederates had beaten Rosecrans. As Rosecrans paused to determine his next move, Garesche was quickly falling back. As Rosecrans paused to determine his next move, Garesche was quickly falling back. He quickly rejoined Rosecrans and quickly rode into his fate months after his brother's pronouncement.

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October 19, 2009 at 9:28am

This is true. As a child we lived at Reynolds Park. On Saturdays we would always go to Roses and shop. One night we were riding with my

mother and grandmother when we noticed a horse at the side of the car riding at the same speed. Me and my sister saw a solid horse, solid body, and a ghost head. If I remember correctly this was right after christmas when my mother was taking back clothes we had gotten that would not fit to Roses department store. I have seen him many times other than this too. he was waving at me back in 1994 near the cannons past the cemetary. I am glad someone finally put this on the internet so I can now put a name to the spirit.

Ponycar (<http://www.murfreesboropost.com/homepage.php?Who=Ponycar>) [Delete (<http://www.murfreesboropost.com/news.php?delResponse=20247&viewStory=19880>)]
October 19, 2009 at 10:53am

I've read the story about Murfreesboro,s headless horseman in a book titled " Dark and bloody ground". This book has many Tennessee ghost stories. The book also tells about the slaughter pen area of the stones river battle ground as being the most haunted part of the battle ground.

Dave42 (<http://www.murfreesboropost.com/homepage.php?Who=Dave42>) [Delete (<http://www.murfreesboropost.com/news.php?delResponse=20257&viewStory=19880>)]
October 20, 2009 at 9:18am

I lived in the Murfreesboro area for a little over 20 years and heard the "Headless Horseman" story from my late ex-father-in-law. I used to work at GE and sometimes would take the old highway to work just to look for this "ghost". Some of us even went out that way to drink beer, and we never saw a single thing. I guess you have to NOT be looking for him to be able to see him. My exfather-in-law never saw it either and he was born and raised in Murfreesboro.

 **SocEtTuem** (<http://www.murfreesboropost.com/homepage.php?Who=SocEtTuem>) [Delete (<http://www.murfreesboropost.com/news.php?delResponse=20479&viewStory=19880>)]
October 29, 2009 at 4:16pm

I am very skeptical of ghost stories, believing many to be the product of active imaginations and the rest to be the result of more earthly phenomena mistaken for something more. They are however fun to tell, and often help educate people about historical events they might otherwise ignore. Everyone loves a good yarn and I am no different. I also know some are certain what they have perceived is indeed supernatural. I remain unconvinced, but thoroughly entertained.

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