

The Legend of the Elmore Ghost Rider

The normally quiet small town of Elmore, Ohio is a hot-bed of alleged paranormal activity during the last week of March 2012, A headless ghost rider is said to prowl the dark streets of town searching for a victim to join him in his eternal ride on the road to Hell. The author and agents of Fringe Paranormal traveled to this sleepy town to investigate the tale of this lost soul. Did the team survive the horror of this phantom menace or did someone wind up as roadkill compliments of the Elmore Ghost Rider?



The Author

Don Collins has had a lifelong interest in all things unexplained and has been actively investigating the paranormal for over five years. He is currently the Director of Fringe Paranormal based in Toledo, Ohio. In addition, he oversees the team website and writes many of the articles and case reports. Don and the Fringe team constantly strive to uncover new evidence and introduce revolutionary concepts and theories in the field of paranormal investigation.

The Legend

The legend of the Elmore Rider is quite familiar to the residents of the town of Elmore. Every year on March 21, the alleged anniversary of the motorcyclist's death, residents and visitors from outlying areas converge at one of several bridges hoping to catch a glimpse of the headless rider. The story is simple yet intriguing and has been around for at least forty years.

Our story begins during the Second World War as a soldier dreams of returning to the arms of his sweetheart. While he serves his country his thoughts linger on his love waiting for him back home. Finally, the day comes when he receives his discharge papers. Soon he they will be together again and make plans for a family and live out the rest of their days in happiness. Alighting from his ship he mounts his motorcycle and starts his drive home. On the way his thoughts again turn to the woman waiting for him. Approaching her house he notices two people engaged in an intimate kiss. He smiles, knowing the love that the two must surely share for each other. But his smile quickly fades as he nears the couple, for he knows the female quite well. It is his betrothed! Unable to think or to speak, he violently turns a corner on a dirt road leading away from the couple. His mind full of confusion and anger he races down the road at blinding speed oblivious to any danger. He does not know what is happening around him, he is lost in the torture of betrayal. He hears an agonized scream and realizes it is coming from his own mouth. Rain starts to fall making the narrow road even more treacherous. Then suddenly there is a curve ahead and beyond that a narrow bridge: speeding over the bridge the anguished rider loses control and is killed as his bike plunges into the deep ravine below the bridge. Later the authorities find his mangled body lying lifeless and a short distance away they find something else: his decapitated head.

The Road (Head)Less Traveled

While this story utilizes some dramatic poetic license, a search for other stories of the Elmore Rider turns up

more or less similar tales with some differences. In one account our intrepid rider is decapitated by a wire strung across the bridge as a prank and returns to the scene every year looking for the person or persons responsible. Other accounts have him plunging over the side of the bridge to his death, minus a head of course. There seems to be no consensus as to the time period of this accident. Tales put the occurrence as either during World War I or World War II. Sightings of headless motorcycle riders are not limited to Elmore, Ohio though. Tulare, California also has its own headless rider. In this story, a cyclist is beheaded by a rope strung across a bridge as a practical joke. The pranksters apparently misjudged the height of the rope leading to the rider's demise and beheading. This incident allegedly took place in 1950's after which the ghost of the victim can be seen as well as heard driving down the road.

This legend is also a subject of debate. Some of those among the living claim to have been closely associated with the victim and place its occurrence in the 1960s. There are also tales of a headless rider traveling the roads of Ojai, California on his vintage 1940s motorcycle. Stories relating to headless motorcycle riders are not culturally bound to the U.S. In the U.K. we have a poor soul who is beheaded while riding behind a lorry carrying a load of steel plates. As the rider attempts to pass the vehicle, one of the steel sheets falls from the lorry and decapitates the poor fellow. The forward momentum of the cycle carries it along with his headless body, past the lorry driver's window. Looking over, the driver sees the headless rider and has a heart attack. One of several things happens to the driver according to different accounts. He runs off the road and dies; he runs into a crowd of people; or he runs off the side of the road takes out a mother and her baby. The aforementioned tales have been passed down for years from person to person and have become part of local legend.

It is rare to have an actual firsthand account from someone who has actually witnessed one of these headless

Myths & Legends.

The Headless Horseman is by far the most famous paranormal figure from American literature, and although a fictional story it was based on an actual ghost story from century's ago. An unearthly and spectral vision of a headless horseman, riding a dark horse and waving a rapier, sometimes with a jack o-lantern (*as a head*) was reportedly seen in the Eighteenth Century. The legend of the Headless Horseman begins in a town near North Tarrytown, New York named Sleepy Hollow. The Horseman was supposedly a Hessian soldier of unknown rank; one of many such hired to suppress the American Revolutionary War. During the war, the Horseman was one of 548 Hessians killed in a battle for Chatterton Hill, wherein his head was severed by a cannonball. He was buried in a graveyard outside an Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow. Thereafter he appears as a ghost, who presents to nightly travelers an actual danger (rather than the largely harmless fright produced by the majority of ghosts), presumably of decapitation. He carries his own head on his person or that of his horse and uses it as a weapon, though he also carries a sword.

The headless horseman has appeared in many forms of literature throughout history and throughout the world. Many different countries have their own unique version of the legend in which some form of the headless horseman appears. In the United States, various states have their own version of a headless horseman tale: Texas' version of the legend, written by Thomas Mayne Reid in 1865 or 1866, tells of ghosts of beheaded horse thieves, who roam the countryside.



riders. However, here is a tale from India which is told by someone who actually claims to have experienced such a sighting. Kasara Ghat is a valley in India with narrow winding roads. This well-traveled area is well known as it is the route to the Shridi Temple. This holy temple was built for the spiritual guru "Sai Baba". Thousands of people visit this site every year. The narrow road leading to the temple is very dangerous and cars cannot pass each other safely so one must back down the road so that the other can pass safely. Two cars passing on the road can lead to disaster as one bad turn would find one crashing into the valley below. One early morning at about 1:00 am a driver noticed a cycle behind him honking so as to get him to move aside.

The driver ignored the biker; only a fool would try to pass on so narrow a road. The honking continued and finally the frustrated driver slowed with the intent of cursing out the biker as he passed. Imagine his surprise as a headless rider sped by and disappeared into thin air in front of him and his passengers. Upon reaching the temple the astonished witnesses told a villager about their experience with the headless entity. The villager informed them that years ago a biker was killed while trying to overtake a truck. Since that day people who traveled that road often saw this headless biker. Legend has it that if you do not let him overtake you, you yourself will have a horrific accident.

Perhaps one of the most well-known local stories relating to Elmore's headless rider involved Richard Gill. A former teacher, Mr. Gill had heard the legend of the ghost rider and decided to investigate for himself.

On the evening of March 21, 1969 he and a friend drove out to what is suspected to be THE bridge. Now, legend has it that in order to witness the rider one must perform a certain ritual. Park your vehicle at the bridge, flash your lights three times (some accounts instruct you to honk your horn as well), and soon the rider will appear coming towards you.

Mr. Gill and his cohort performed the ritual and allegedly found success; the single headlight appeared and passed them by. They attempted the ritual a second time but this time had a string tied across the road. Again the headlight appeared and passed them by, seeming to pass through the string leaving it unbroken. Excited, the pair decided on a third attempt to summon the rider. This time Gill's friend would stand in the middle of the bridge as Mr. Gill performed the procedure yet again from a distance away. As Gill did his part the headlight appeared. When Gill went back to see his friend he noticed that he had disappeared. Fortunately, or unfortunately depending upon how you look at it, he found his partner lying in a nearby ditch semi-conscious. His friend could not remember what had happened to bring him to such a state.

The Information Highway

Now that we have explored the stories about the ghost rider let's take a look at the facts. Let's start with the most obvious question: Who is this ghostly rider? No one knows. During a fact checking visit to the Elmore Public Library the author, the director of Fringe Paranormal, discovered that there is no evidence that there even

An informative website:
<http://muskitty.com/>

Myths & Legends.

The more noted and recognizable headless horseman of today imitates the one that appears in Washington Irving's short story, which was published in 1820. The story is set in America, within a 1790's Dutch settlement that residents nicknamed "Sleepy Hollow". Its protagonist is a schoolteacher named Ichabod Crane, whose apparent demise results from a meeting with the horseman. The horseman himself is allegedly a Hessian soldier from the Revolutionary War who was decapitated by a cannonball and now roams Sleepy Hollow on the back of his horse, with his severed head resting upon the pommel of his saddle. He is therefore covalently called the 'Galloping Hessian'. The Horseman is said to be incapable of crossing the bridge (a possible reference to the belief that ghosts cannot cross water), although he is shown throwing his head across a river to strike down Ichabod Crane. Ichabod's fate is left ambiguous; some of the background characters allege that he has been "carried off" by the Horseman, while others suggest that he has been frightened out of the county by the ghost and by the prospect of facing his landlord, later to become a lawyer in Philadelphia. It is implied later that the Horseman was in fact Brom Bones, Ichabod's rival for the hand in marriage of the local beauty Katrina van Tassel, who imitated the legend of the Galloping Hessian on purpose to kill or frighten away his competitor. The fact that a shattered pumpkin is found beside Ichabod's abandoned hat supports this, in that the pumpkin may easily have been used to simulate the Horseman's severed head. Intriguingly, there is no mention of a severed head in the story heard by Ichabod, though it is prominent in his own encounter with the Horseman.



Above: Elmore Bridge.

was such an accident in Elmore involving a motorcycle. Past interviews with Mr. Gill reveal that he may have stumbled upon evidence of a similar accident in a nearby community but evidence of this cannot be located. One of the easiest questions to answer about the legend is whether this tragedy could have happened during either of the World Wars. We find that yes it is possible as the motorcycle was invented in the latter part of the 19th century and was in production within the early part of the 1900's, before either war broke out.

Most people hoping to see the ghostly rider in Elmore, Ohio head (no pun intended) to the small bridge that crosses Mud Creek on Fought Road. This is generally thought to be THE bridge where our doomed cyclist met his demise so many years ago. We must also call into question the alleged location of this legend. No one is quite sure of the exact location of the alleged accident which produced the legend. There are several bridges in the area frequented by those looking for the headless rider. The bridge in question which is thought to be "the spot" was built in 1874 and crosses Mud Creek at a location which spans about twenty feet across. The bridge crosses the creek at a height of about ten feet. Now that we know the stats of the bridge the question becomes "Is it possible for someone to be decapitated in a motorcycle accident?" Total decapitation resulting from an accident is rare but is possible. Take the following informative examples from the PubMed.gov website:

'This is a rare case of complete decapitation involving a 20-year-old motorcyclist. The motorcyclist sustained a heavy blow in the region of the neck against the right-side edge of a car compartment which resulted in his complete decapitation. The head of the motorcyclist was 37.5 m away from the car in the direction of the motorcycle movement. The collision speed of the motorcycle was about 133 km/h. Literature survey and the examination of injuries in this case have allowed us to conclude what the decapitation causing mechanism was and the force necessary to have complete decapitation. In our case the basic mechanism for decapitation was the direct trauma in the cervical region. The force needed for the complete decapitation ranges between 400 kgf and 800 kgf.'

'We describe a case of complete decapitation following a motorcycle accident in which the victim was wearing a full face helmet. A young man lost control of his motorcycle and was thrown about 20 m, hitting his head against the barrier separating a tramline from the road. The resulting trauma caused his decapitation, the only fatal wound ascertained by the various forensic investigations. The authors present this rare case and compare it against the other two cases reported in the literature, providing some observations on the ways in which this injury can come about. The absence of abrasions or signs that the wound edges came into contact with a metal structure, the presence of signs of impact on the side of the helmet and the finding of a transversal fracture at the base of the skull point to the violent action of a side-to-side opposite force, due to the resistance provided by the lower edge of the protective helmet.'

'An 18-year-old male driving an off-road motorcycle died from complete decapitation when his motorcycle tore a roadblock chain from its attachment. The decapitation injuries of the head and the torso corresponded perfectly,

without apparent loss of tissue. The severance plane passed horizontally through the upper cervical region and C4, which sustained a comminuted fracture. The sharply delineated severance edge had a band-like abrasion. The decapitation resulted from the rotational movement of the unstrung chain, which struck and strangled the driver's neck. We were able to explain the movement of the chain and the decapitation mechanism. This case emphasizes the importance of discussing dynamics with experts to clarify a causal mechanism'.

End of the Road

So let's sum up what we have discovered during our trip down Hell's highway. During our investigation we have found evidence that it is possible for a person to be decapitated in a motorcycle accident. We have also confirmed that the bridge commonly thought to be THE bridge was in existence during the time period our anti-hero is thought to have perished. Motorcycles were available to the public during the time period in question. What we do not have, however, is evidence of a deadly accident involving a motorcyclist during this same period. Current details of the bridge such as reflecting markers, which may be mistaken for lights from a distance, also add to skepticism as to the ghost rider's existence. During the author's investigation at the main bridge and several other locations he did not witness any sort of unexplained activity. While we have found no hard evidence to support his existence, the Elmore Ghost Rider will continue to enthrall those who hear his deadly tale.



More information can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18504940>
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21269787>
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18795312>