

GHOST OF THE FOX

By Felix Mayerhofer

PART ONE: NONFICTION

Chapter 1: The Fox

“Children! I have an exciting story to tell you,” exclaimed Miss Reader to her attentive class. “You’ve enjoyed the stories about Lincoln, but there’s another great president whose birthday falls in February. Do you know who it is?”

A flurry of hands flew into the air as they blurted out in one voice, “George Washington!”

“I was sure you’d know that, but he was given another name by the British generals during the Revolutionary War in 1776. As the commander of the Continental Army, Washington won very few battles, but was widely respected as a master of retreat, and became known as the ‘Fox.’ These retreats fooled the German Hessians, who

had been hired by the British to fight for them. They let their guard down, causing them a great defeat in Trenton, New Jersey, on December 26, the day after Christmas. This battle was planned in this very area where we live.

“For almost two months prior to Christmas, Washington had been retreating, always one-step ahead of the British, from New York to Pennsylvania. The British thought he would lay low for the winter after he’d again slipped through their fingers. Washington was not only short on supplies, but his troops had signed up for one year and their enlistment was up January first. The British were confident he would no longer have an army to wage war, but they had once again underestimated the ‘Fox.’

“Washington’s generals advised him that if the revolution were to survive, his rag-tag army would need a victory. He convinced close to 3,000 of his troops to remain six weeks longer for \$10 a piece. Since Washington planned to attack the small community of Trenton, New Jersey, he needed to retain as many men as possible. Townspeople from Trenton had reported that the Hessians were going to celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December, and their defenses would be weak.

“It was a terribly cold night, as 2,400 troops started across from the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River in Bucks County. A northeast wind blew viciously against their faces, with snow, slashing rain, and hail. Many of the men were barefoot, their feet tied in bloodied rags, but not a man complained.

“Sixty foot fishing boats called Durhams, pulled from shore into the darkened night, filled with shivering men, and carrying General Knox’s

18 cannon and horses. Large ice slabs crashed into the sides of the crafts, but were pushed off before they could rip the boats apart. Former sailors, now soldiers, whose hands were raw from cold, were manning the oars. Two other American units comprised of 2,300 men, were part of the strategy to attack from the south of Trenton, but were unable to cross the river. Washington was going to attack Trenton with only half his army.

“By four in the morning, Washington’s group reached the shore nine miles north of Trenton. At predawn they marched south in two columns, one along the river, the other along the Pennington road led by General Sullivan. General Greene was in command of the river route group, with Washington riding alongside commanding the entire operation. It was so cold two men froze to death during the march. Washington received word that his men's muskets wouldn’t fire due to being exposed to the storm all night. Washington sent word back with the order, ‘Rely on the bayonet--I am resolved to take Trenton!’

Chapter 2: Attack

“As they approached, the small community lay quiet under the storm with few men on guard. Colonel Rall, commander of the Hessians was asleep. Sometime after 7:30 a.m., nearby Hessians saw the rebels and opened fire. The sentry’s cried out, “The enemy! On your feet!” The battle of Trenton had begun.

“Moving quickly both American columns moved in. The Hessians were caught completely by surprise. Colonel Rall, who had celebrated too much the previous night, was slow to awaken and dress.

“It was too late. There were sounds of loud voices and fighting down by the river and along the Pennington Road, where General Sullivan had kept pace with Washington and Greene. General Knox’s cannon had begun to fire. General Mercer’s men as ordered went in courageously with bayonets.

“The Hessian officers tried to rally and form their troops, but Washington and his men were too fast for them, seeming to be everywhere. The American units constantly disrupted the Hessians, charging in, then moving to cover all routes of escape in or out of town. American cannon were placed on a rise that controlled the two main streets of the town, and the Hessian formations were unable to form properly. They tried to get some of their own cannon into action but these were captured before they could do any damage. The Hessians moved around town trying to make a front, but some orders

were misunderstood, and a very important regiment was separated from the Colonel Rall and Von Lossberg regiments.

“These two regiments were forced out of town and regrouped in an apple orchard. Rall ordered them to attack back into town, trying to open a hole on the road to Princeton. Like the Americans, the Hessian’s guns were wet from the storm and had a hard time firing. When they again ran into the streets of the town, some civilians from the town joined the American troops with their guns now dry. Both groups fired at the Hessians from buildings and from behind trees and fences, causing great confusion. At the same time American cannon broke up their formations. Colonel Rall still dazed from his holiday celebrations, raged up and down the main street bravely trying to rally his men. He then went down, mortally wounded, and resistance faltered. The remnants of the garrison retreated back to an orchard, but were soon surrounded by Washington’s men. The Hessians surrendered to Washington, and the event became known as the ‘Battle of Trenton.’”

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PART TWO: FICTION

Chapter 3: Off-Limits—That Means You!

“Isn’t that a great story about our fight for freedom?” said Miss Reader. “The entire Battle of Trenton lasted no longer than 45 minutes, and saved the Revolution. As a point of interest, there were two other officers in the battle: Captain Alexander Hamilton, the future first Secretary of the Treasury, who’s picture is on the ten dollar bill, and Colonel James Monroe, wounded in action, later to become the fifth president of the United States.

“Well class, the bell is going to ring any minute, so we’ll continue this discussion tomorrow.”

Eric Kloss, one of Miss Reader’s students, couldn’t wait to get home from school to tell his mother about Washington and the Battle of Trenton. “Did you know that George Washington was called the ‘Fox?’ he breathlessly asked his mom, as he ran into the house.

“No, I didn’t,” she answered in surprise.

“Can I ride over to Washington Crossing and look around?” Eric asked, “I remember seeing a sign there about the Revolutionary War.”

“How about a fresh baked cookie before you leave?” offered his mom, placing a plate of warm cookies before him, “and I want you to come home before it gets dark.”

“Sounds good!” he said smiling ear to ear as he took a couple of cookies with him. His dog Spot came up to be petted and to get her share of the cookies. “Come on Spot,” he said, “you’ll need exercise if you’re going to eat these cookies.” Eric sprang onto his bike and took off with the brown and white Springer Spaniel running close behind.

It didn’t take long for Eric to arrive at the edge of town where he’d seen the sign. As he looked at it he thought in awe, *Washington and his men must have been in this very area.* Further down the road, a large wooden sign came into view that said, SLUMPLY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION. Underneath in bold letters was an unfriendly warning, NO TRESPASSING--STAY OUT!

Eric noticed an old abandoned farmhouse in the wooded area behind a split rail fence. Ignoring the sign, he slowly rode toward the house. Spot shot passed him and ran right into the broken down building. “Spot!” he called, “come out--come out right now! Darn! I hate to go inside, it looks like it’s about to collapse.” As he walked up to the porch, he noticed the door hung loose from one hinge and every window was broken. With empty cans strewn everywhere, it looked like the homeless had lived in it. “What a mess,” he said, talking out loud to himself. “This has to be the oldest place I’ve ever seen.” Looking inside, he saw one large room that at one time was a combination living room and kitchen, where the original inhabitants had cooked in the fireplace, ate and lived. On the backside were two rooms without doors, probably used for firewood by derelicts.

Chapter 4: Hair Raising Chills

Spot came up to him and licked his hand. “You shouldn’t have come in, you bad dog,” reprimanded Eric. Spot suddenly reared back and growled, her hair bristling like she’d put her nose into a light socket. Eric looked at her and said, “What’s wrong girl?” Turning around, every ounce of blood drained from Eric’s face. From a moving spiral-like mist appeared a statuesque man in a blue and white uniform. With the little strength left in his body and wracked with fear, Eric and Spot tore out of the house. Half jumping half running onto his bike, his legs seemingly unable to work, couldn’t move fast enough. Spot shot way ahead leaving him in a cloud of dust. Eric went a short distance and found himself in front of a construction trailer as Spot returned to his side. Running inside, he interrupted two men talking and burst out, “ I just saw the ghost of Washington in the abandoned farmhouse by the trees.”

“What are you talking about? Are you trying to ruin my business with a tale like that?” asked the owner of the development company, Craig Slumly, in a threatening voice. “No one will buy a house if they think it’s haunted. This is private property, I want you off this land and don’t you ever come back!” Taken aback by the man’s anger, and not wanting to get into trouble, Eric quickly left the trailer.

As he walked down the steps, the other man in the room followed him out and said, “Excuse me, my name’s Billy Press and I’m a

reporter for the 'Liberty Gazette.' What's all this about seeing the ghost of George Washington? And what makes you think it was him?"

"Even though it was a fast glimpse, I recognized him from the pictures at school," Eric answered.

"Wow!" responded the man, "I'll get a raise with a ghost story like this. You're not making this up, are you?"

"No! Why would I do that?" Eric replied slightly annoyed.

"Okay," answered the reporter, "let me have your name, then give me all the details." Before Eric left, Billy Press took a photo of the boy and his dog in front of the old farmhouse. Spot's tail was still tucked between her legs.

Eric's parents were amazed when he told them what happened and never doubted his story. "Incredible!" his dad said. "I've never heard of a place around here being haunted. I wonder what he wants? They say that ghosts usually make an appearance when a murder has been committed, or when they're trying to tell you something."

"Maybe he doesn't want the farmhouse torn down," suggested Eric.

"You may be right," answered his dad.

"Have you seen Spot?" asked his mom.

"No," laughed Eric, "she hasn't come out from under my bed since we got home."

"She will when she smells the turkey I'm roasting," his mother replied.

Chapter 5: Talk of the Town

The news about George Washington hit the small town like a bombshell. The phone at the Kloss home wouldn't stop ringing. Mr. Grimm, a Bucks County supervisor with a roly-poly face and a body to match, came to the Kloss home and demanded that Eric's parents stop him from spreading false rumors. "There must be something wrong with your son for making up a story like that," exclaimed the supervisor, "has he ever done this before?" When an angry Mr. Kloss came towards him, Mr. Grimm wisely made a hasty exit.

From the Kloss home, Mr. Grimm immediately went to Slumly's trailer office. "What do you think we should do about that kid?" asked Slumly.

"I've already begun to spread the word there's something wrong with him and he can't be believed," answered the supervisor. "Our community has too much invested in this development to have a crazy kid cause our project to fail."

"You should bring him before the Board of Supervisors and scare the truth out of him. He'd never say another word after that," suggested Slumly.

"I've got it all figured out, responded the supervisor. We've sent his parents a letter telling them their son has to show us proof that he actually saw something, or make a public apology that he lied. That will stop him!"

When Eric arrived at school, the first person he ran into was his best friend, Jack.

“Wow!” Jack exclaimed, “That was some story in today’s paper with the headline, BOY SEES GHOST OF WASHINGTON. And there was your picture on the front page with Spot! Did you really see Washington’s ghost?”

“That’s what it looked like to me,” answered Eric. “I think Washington stayed at the farmhouse before the Battle of Trenton. Why else would he suddenly appear there?”

“Beats me,” responded Jack. “Are you going back?”

“Not if I can help it,” answered Eric, “but I’d like to see something done about that farmhouse.”

“My dad recently read a story in the newspaper that the farmhouse was going to be destroyed for a new development,” said Jack. “Maybe we should petition to save it as an historical site.”

“I like the idea,” responded Eric, “homes over 200 years old shouldn’t be destroyed.”

When the kids in the class got wind of Jack’s idea, they crowded around both boys volunteering to help. Miss Reader thought it would be a wonderful civic project for the class.

Billy Press, the reporter, decided to do a follow-up story and interview the kids at Eric’s school, and was glad he did. The captions in the next day’s newspaper read, SCHOOL CHILDREN BEGIN PETITION TO SAVE FARMHOUSE.

Mr. Slumly choked on his coffee when he opened his morning paper and read the headline. He telephoned Grimm the supervisor

immediately to get his take about the story. “We’ve got to stop that kid, now,” Slumly screamed.

“Don’t worry,” replied Grimm, “I’ll ask Kloss to bring his son to this week’s board meeting and we’ll straighten him out,”

When Eric arrived home from school, his father said, “I got both a letter and a call from Mr. Grimm today. He wants you to attend the Board of Supervisor’s meeting tomorrow night to answer questions about the ghost.”

“I don’t know what I’m going to say other than what I saw?” answered Eric.

Chapter 6: Historic Find

When Eric went to bed that night, he was thinking he might have to go back to the farmhouse and look around. He was scared of the thought, but what could the ghost do to him? He had to have some sort of defense at the board meeting or they'd make a fool out of him. His school friends believed him, but the supervisors didn't. He had to do something, now!

Getting dressed, he checked his flashlight. Spot wagged her tail knowing that Eric was up to something. Carrying the dog in his arms, Eric carefully walked down the stairs so they wouldn't squeak, and let himself out. If his parents knew what he was doing, he'd probably be grounded for weeks. Riding his bike silently out of the yard during an eerie, moonless night with Spot at his heels, he soon got to the farmhouse. When Spot realized where she was she shied away from going in. But when Eric entered, she followed slowly, pressing against his legs.

Maybe Spot is the normal one and I'm crazy, Eric thought. No one in his or her right mind would go into a haunted house in the middle of the night. He couldn't stop shaking, as he tried to steady his hand so the light wouldn't wobble. First directing the light around the large living area, he then went to both bedrooms but saw nothing suspicious. Without warning, Spot gave one loud bark and dashed out. Eric felt a rush of cool air as the same multi colored spiral-like

mist appeared, with Washington coming into view. Eric thought of making a fast exit, too, but controlled himself. George Washington pulled his sword from the scabbard and walked towards the fireplace, then placed the point of the sword on the hearth. He's trying to tell me something, Eric thought. "Are you pointing there for a reason?" he asked Washington. Now I'm talking to a ghost! I really am crazy! Eric began to calm down and got his trembling under control. The dignified ghostly figure of Washington then soundlessly tapped the sword on the same spot.

Running to the fireplace, Eric touched the brick that Washington had pointed to, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. Taking a Swiss knife out of his pocket, he poked around the edges and realized it was dirt holding the brick, not mortar. Slowly digging at the edges of the brick, two centuries of packed dirt began to loosen and come out. Carefully lifting the brick, he felt blood rising to his head when he saw a small warped box covered with dirt. Excitedly brushing off the dirt, he pulled out the box and placed it on the hearth. After years of being closed, Eric had to pry it open with the knife, and saw what looked like a thin package. Gingerly unwrapping the canvas-like covering, it disclosed a couple of sheets of yellowed paper with hand written names scrolled in ink. Upon careful inspection with his flashlight, the fancy lettering on top said TRENTON PATRIOTS. Underneath was a list of about 10 residents of the village of Trenton, who had assisted Washington with information about British and Hessian troop movements. Eric gave a low whistle when he read it. No wonder Washington hid it. If he had been captured or killed with this information on him, those Trenton spies would have been executed. It

suddenly hit Eric that he was in possession of a valuable historical document, and had to be careful not to damage it. "I think I have all the evidence I need to defend myself against Mr. Grimm and the Board of Supervisors," whispered Eric. When he looked up, the see-through image of Washington had replaced his sword in the scabbard, and in the blink of an eye disappeared. What an honor to have found this historical treasure, thought Eric. My guess is this will be the last time George Washington makes an appearance in this old farmhouse.

Chapter 7: Good Against Evil

Spot was hiding behind a large tree waiting for Eric as he came out. When they arrived home, Spot was so happy to be back, she was wiggling from one end to the other. Eric woke up his parents and told them what he had done. They were angry, as he knew they would be, and reprimanded him for sneaking out of the house late at night. “Don’t you ever do that again!” said his mother. “We’ll decide your punishment after this ghost business is settled.”

“Your mother’s right,” son, his father agreed, “but what you’ve discovered is overwhelming. Our town will get lots of publicity and make more money in the long run than the housing development would generate. We’ll keep it to ourselves until you speak to the board tonight.”

“It’s going to be rough for me to keep it a secret at school today,” said Eric, “I know that Jack is going to ask me what I’ve been up to.”

The Kids in Eric’s class were excited about the petition and told him they were going to be at the meeting to support him. A few had made signs that said, SAVE THE FARMHOUSE. It was all Eric could do not to tell them what he’d discovered.

As Eric and his parents entered the supervisor’s chambers that night, Mr. Grimm sat smugly in the chairman’s seat, and Mr. Slumly had taken a seat in the front row. But when a group of Eric’s classmates entered with signs saying the farmhouse should be

preserved, both men's faces turned red with rage. They knew they had to make this young troublemaker look bad.

Grimm brought the meeting to order. Without wasting any time he announced, "Due to the seriousness of tonight's meeting, I've changed the order of business, we will proceed to the immediate questioning of Eric Kloss. Will Eric Kloss please step to the podium."

Eric stood up and all eyes followed him as he walked up to the front before the jury of supervisors. Somehow the word had gotten around that this youngster was going to defend himself at the meeting, and there was standing room only in the chambers.

Mr. Grimm glared at Eric saying nothing. He slowly raised his hand and shaking his long finger said, "Do you know the serious damage you've done to our community with your reckless lies?" Everyone was stunned by this opening charge directed at this young boy. Grimm continued, "I feel it is my duty to show our townspeople, that we can't have the likes of children like you ruining the good works of our local businessmen, who have made sacrifices so we can all live better lives.

Chapter 8: The Tables Are Turned

Eric was immediately taken aback by this unfair assault by one of the community leaders, but taking a big breath and gathering his courage, he interrupted the supervisor and said, “Excuse me Mr. Grimm, but you’ve got it all wrong!” The supervisor almost fell out his chair at the audacity of this delinquent. Getting encouragement from his friends and parents, Eric went on. “I didn’t make up the story, it’s true. I returned to the farmhouse last night to try to uncover evidence and I’m happy...”

But before he was able to utter another word, the supervisor cried out, “That’s twice you’ve broken the No Trespassing law? Didn’t you see the large NO TRESPASSING sign? This boy has no regard for the law and should pay the penalty. I think...”

This time it was Eric’s turn to interrupt. “If you don’t mind sir, I’d like to finish what I was about to say.” Smiling at his parents and growing in confidence, he said, “George Washington appeared to me again last night, and showed me where a box was hidden under one of the bricks of the hearth.” The audience and Mr. Grimm gasped at this new revelation. Billy Press the reporter couldn’t write fast enough. Placing the evidence on the podium Eric related what happened. The longer he spoke, the paler Mr. Grimm became, especially when Eric carefully pulled the old

papers out of their box and began reading the names of the “patriots.” When he finished there was silence, then explosive applause and screams erupted from his friends. Without anyone noticing, Mr. Slumly had quietly slithered out of the boardroom.

Another supervisor stood up and said, “I think we not only owe Eric Kloss, our local boy “patriot” an apology, but our thanks. I’m sure the other supervisors--as he looked down at Mr. Grimm in disgust, will agree that we should rebuild the farmhouse and turn it into an historical site.” The spectators in the room were in total agreement, especially the petitioners. “I’ll also make a motion that the new development be renamed George Washington Heights.”

When the meeting came to an end, Eric left with a feeling of satisfaction, knowing that he and his friends had helped the community. And with his discovery at the farmhouse, the ghost of George Washington, known as the “Fox,” could now rest in peace.

THE FOLLOWING ARE REFERENCES USED IN PART 1 OF THE STORY:

- History of the British Army by Sir John Fortescue
- The War of the Revolution by Christopher Ward
- Battle of Trenton from Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia
- The American Heritage History of the American Revolution by Bruce Lancaster