

GREAT GAFFA'S GHOST

by Blaine Lee Pardoe

Author's Introduction:

In *Highlander Gambit* and *Impetus of War* (and several other reference books) characters I created have used the curse, "Gaffa's Ghost!" or "Great Gaffa's Ghost!" It seemed to sound sci-fi-ish and rang true as a good exclamation.

A reader contacted me and asked once what it meant, if anything. He assumed of course that I was referencing a real historical curse or phrase. I tend to do this in BattleTech and MechWarrior, tie in to historical people and events. The truth of the matter was that I thought this out many years earlier but there was never a good way to present the material until BattleCorps came into being. Some of the text of this was notes I made almost fifteen years ago (shudder) and was stored in one of my BattleTech binders.

As writers we sometimes overthink things, and this little phrase was one of those. Originally it was going to be General Gaffa Pardoe as the source (as evidenced in the obscure reference in the original Tech Reference for the Star League). That was back in the day when my ego had the better of me. I thought that this version was a little more palatable for the contemporary BattleTech reader.

I recently began doing non-fiction (military history) writing (for the upcoming book *The Cruise of the Sea Eagle*, April 2005) and I was going to do this as the reference article after the short story only. After reading it I figured that people would want (and deserve) a little excitement to go with it. My intent with this was to give readers a wonderful little cross-section of where this phrase comes from, as well as give them something new to watch for when all seems lost on the battlefield.

Blaine "Buck" Pardoe

***Outskirts of Sanyo City
The Brushlands of the Jersey Flats
Caph, The Chaos March
20 July 3058***

"Skipper," came the low and slow drawl of Sergeant Shears over the commlink in his neuro-helmet. "You sure we're in the right place? This place is deader than a possum on a dirt road."

Lieutenant David Longstreet shook his head slightly and felt his mouth clench. Shears was always asking that kind of question. *How did a guy like that end up in Lindon's Battalion anyway?* He knew the answer to that rhetorical question. Despite his verbal slowness, Shears was a calm and collected field commander and was a deadly accurate shot. He just wished he'd stop calling him, "Skipper." It had too much of a naval ring to it. Everyone else in the lance called him by his rank...*as it should be.*



"Shears, this is the vicinity where Bravo Lance picked up the signals. We'll form up here and hold for now," Longstreet replied. Lindon's Battalion had been under contract on Caph to protect the city of Cimмерon from the various warring factions. The Chaos March was a cauldron of unrest with petty little warlords or puppets of various governments attempting to leverage the pandemonium to seize power on their own.

Despite the press releases to the contrary, there were forces on Caph that were there to stir up trouble. When these mysterious raiders appeared, the local government would press Lindon's Battalion into action. If it was possible or practical, they would also ask for assistance from ComStar's garrison. While no one

side claimed to be behind some of raiding operations, nor were they very large, the reality was that they happened and potential threats had to be dealt with.

Bravo Lance had been on patrol earlier in the day in this area and had picked up large object motion on the perimeter of their patrol. Large object motion was the techie way of saying, "BattleMechs." The Jersey Flats was really an area of scrub brush, small dry trees, clumps of tall grasses surrounded by light tan dust and an occasional rock—hardly an area where a chance encounter would be expected. Bravo Lance attempted to confirm their signals but their targets disappeared into the Flats. The intel people had poured over the reports back at HQ in Cimmeron and had said that they read as ComStar Com Guard 'Mechs. That would normally be anticipated since the Com Guard and the Combine had peace-keeping troops on Caph. A cursory check by the battalion's intel officer had shown that the Com Guards were nowhere near these coordinates. Further checks of the signals showed some subtle differences in the IFF transponder readings that were not quite Com Guard readings.

Coincidence? Mistake? *Not very damn likely.*

Longstreet's Alpha Lance had been sent out to see if they could track the possible threats. The troops back at base had been laying down bets. The odds were that Bravo Lance had gotten the signals wrong and had confused farm equipment for 'Mechs. David knew better. Rebecca Yost commanded Bravo Lance. Despite the verbal abuse everyone was giving her, she was damn good. He had put down money that it was Word of Blake. The other officers and troops had scoffed at this, despite the fact that there had been rumors of the Word being on Caph for weeks. Rumors, yes; evidence, no. Still, David Longstreet had a hunch in the pit of his stomach. This was for real.

He applied additional pressure to his right foot pedal, swinging his *Lineholder* to the right in a smooth arc. Checking his secondary display, he saw nothing. *That's odd.* He should be able to pick up his own lance out there. He adjusted the resolution and sensor gain, resetting the range.

Nothing.

Longstreet bit his lower lip. It was a nasty habit. If his mother were still alive, she'd have scolded him. Either they weren't out there, which was trouble, or someone was preventing him from seeing them, which was also trouble. Neither solution was reas-

suring to him. He reached up and switched his comm channel control to the command frequency. "This is Alpha Leader to Alpha Lance. Hold your positions and signal in for comm check," he said as calmly as he could into the mic in his neurohelmet. He listened intensely. Nothing came back. "Shears, Foster, Logan, respond." Again nothing came back.

Crudstunk.

Even if they were out of sensor range, they should easily pick up his communications signal. Pausing for a moment, he considered his options. He knew where they were supposed to be, fanned out over a five kilometer area to his rear. His *Lineholder* was point in the sweep of the area.

I need to cover ground and cover it quickly. Without jump jets the options were limited. Turning slowly, he aimed his *Lineholder* to the east and braced himself in his command console. Then, jamming the throttle control forward, he broke into an all-out run.

There were a lot of misconceptions about BattleMechs and running. Yes, they could do it, they were built for it, but it was a strain on the hardware and the MechWarrior. On holovids it looked cool, 'Mechs running, skidding, even sliding like in a baseball game. It made the public think it was all easy. The truth was that moving all-out was going to press the *Lineholder* up to 80 kph. At that speed it would be trickier to keep balance, firing was difficult, and maneuvers tended to be wide gentle arcs rather than tight turns. Even a small rock, which would be inconsequential at a walking pace, was dangerous to a running BattleMech. It put a pilot's skills to the test.

Especially in this *Lineholder*. It had taken damage two years earlier and was now prone to malfunctions in the hip and leg actuators. The maintenance team blamed stress wear in the actuators and he was advised to keep the running to a minimum until they could find the time to take the 'Mech off-line for a complete overhaul. With the recent increase in patrols to track down the raiders, that overhaul had become a line item on a maintenance sheet that was long overdue.

The *Lineholder's* cockpit temperature rose with each reassuring thump of the feet on the ground. He squinted after a moment or two, only allowing his eyes to dance down to the tactical sensor display for a millisecond at a time as he fought to keep the fifty five tons of running 'Mech upright. He spotted the signal in much closer than he expected at first. A flicker. Then it disappeared again. Off to his

right. He angled the targeting joystick, activating his waist actuator in the process, and scanned the horizon for signs of anything.

There! Smoke. Not much, a whiff of gray/white smoke rising slightly over the sagebrush. He slowed down the *Lineholder* a little bit and glanced again at the tactical sensors. The readout flickered. A green image and several red. They were faint, almost fading, then came in clear, clear and close.

"Shears, sit rep!" he called out as the transponder signal told him which of his men it was. The red dots began to move—they had picked him up as well. They weren't fleeing, but two of them were moving off to his flanks.

"Skipper, I've got me a world of hurt here," came back a breathy, almost winded voice. "You've got a pair of *Raijins* and two *Nexus* out here. No markings. I've hit one of the *Raijins* hard, but they took out my right leg. I am down."

"Rest of the lance?"

"Ain't heard squat from them, Skipper," he said. "Watch your fanny. These yankees seem to know their shit." His drawl always seemed thicker the more dangerous the situation.

Longstreet slowed to a walking gait and watched his flank. He could make out the fallen and smoking remains of Shears' *Enfield*, the right arm of which was laying some distance away, savaged off at the elbow actuator. The myomer strands lay on the ground like torn muscle tissue. No markings but the 'Mechs in question were ComStar models. *Looks like I win the pot—it's got to be that damn Word of Blake*. The *Nexus* were both moving to his right and left while the *Raijin* seemed to be between him and the fallen Sergeant. Four to one—great odds. He felt his jaw tighten. Someone else might run, but he was a member of Lindon's Battalion so running was a non-viable option. The unit had a reputation to fulfill. That, and he couldn't leave one of his men behind. So it was time to party.

He juked to the right. Better to seize the initiative than react to the superior force. A *Nexus* emerged from the scrub-brush. It was a skinny 'Mech, light, half his own mass, and was built more for speed than long term engagements. On its own, it wasn't a threat. He knew what game it was going to play. It would hold his attention and hang in the fight long enough to allow its compatriots to close on Longstreet. They would hit his rear and flank—just like they'd most likely done with Shears.

Not this time.

He jabbed the throttle full-forward again into a run. He had no intention of firing. He was going to plow right into the *Nexus*.

For a moment the *Nexus* stood, seemingly stunned. The enemy MechWarrior raised his arms, which were nothing more than stubby barrels for their Blankenburg medium pulse lasers. The air between them lit up with crimson spray as both lasers fired. One of the shots went so wide that it almost made him snicker as he bore in on the *Nexus*. The other shot sprayed a series of burn marks on the armor plating of his right torso, ugly little glowing hot holes.

Lieutenant Longstreet had no time to think about that. Only a few meters from the *Nexus* in a full running charge, he saw the jump jets flare on the 'Mech. *Oh no you don't...* He plowed into the *Nexus* as it rose to less than a meter off the ground. The impact was incredible. The *Lineholder* seemed to moan as the internal structure strained under the grinding hit. The *Nexus*, partially off the ground, got tossed back like a marionette that had lost its strings. Longstreet felt his 'Mech lurch and the heat spike again as he regained his footing. The impact had damaged him too, mangling his center torso with the veiled imprint of the skinny *Nexus*. The enemy 'Mech lay on its side, the underbrush igniting from its half-lit jump jets. He felt bad, but only for a moment. He was a MechWarrior, and though he knew what kind of burning death the enemy faced, roasting slowly in a cockpit, his feelings of pity faded with a single beat of his heart.

You shouldn't have tangled with Lindon's Battalion. He turned just as a *Raijin* and the other *Nexus* came into view. The other *Raijin* was still holding back near Shears. They emerged firing and he obliged by moving, running towards their right flank.

A blast of azure energy from the *Raijin's* PPC lashed out and smacked into his right leg. His *Lineholder* quaked under the hit as armor plating splayed off in every direction. The *Nexus's* shot missed but the crimson laser bursts were frighteningly close.

The enemy would expect him to concentrate on the *Raijin* first—take out the biggest threat, then the lighter *Nexus*. Longstreet knew that if you played by the rules you could die by them as well. Sometimes the best thing to do was to catch the enemy off guard. He angled his targeting joystick over so that the reticle locked onto the *Nexus's* cockpit. He aimed right at the cockpit and paused, just for a second, in his stride, dancing the throttle back as he fired.

Two of his medium lasers and his large laser were tied together on the same target interlock circuit (TIC). The warmth of his cockpit rose slightly as he heard the whine of the laser power conduits cycle. The large laser hit in the right torso, burning a deep searching green light into the 'Mech. One of the medium lasers hit the cockpit, blackening the reflective glass there. The other stabbed in right below the other laser hit in the torso, only to stab out the back of the *Nexus*. The skinny 'Mech shuddered, seemed to rattle, then fall. The fine dust of the Jersey Flats billowed up from the fall, swirling like little tornadoes.

The *Raijin* let go with its missiles. Most hit low, below the waist, though at least two of them swept on past him and into the brush. The damage was minimal, mostly armor. Longstreet backed off, putting some distance in, swinging wide of the *Raijin* as he allowed his 'Mech to cool slightly. The move also bought him time to adjust his target interlocks. It was a risky move, substantiated as the *Raijin* fired with its medium pulse lasers, mangling his left arm and leg armor in the process. He held off firing until he was in the right position. Then, pausing again, David Longstreet locked his weapons on the center of the bird-like *Raijin* and fired.

He had tied everything over to the same TIC, so that every weapon fired at once. The wave of heat was roasting as the long range missiles cleared their racks and the large and medium lasers filled the air with their stabbing beams. The shots had drifted to the right side of the *Raijin*. Its torso bore the brunt of the damage as the lasers bored in and the missiles ripped apart the armor, twisting and peeling it back as if the 'Mech had been attacked by a giant can opener.

The *Raijin* carried less armor than his own *Lineholder*, but was a tough customer. As smoke billowed from the hole in its side, it seemed to steady itself. It twisted at the waist and fired its ER PPC at him. Like a bolt of lightning the blast hit his left arm. The limb was tossed back under the force of the hit. The wrenching nearly tipped him over and David's damage display flared red on the shoulder joint. The arm dropped down in a sagging motion. He tried to lift it and the myomer muscles strained, but the arm made a sickening noise, a grinding sound near the cockpit. The actuator in the shoulder was damaged. The weapon was still functional, but aiming it was going to be next to impossible. *Might as well be a club, at this point.*

He licked the salty sweat from his upper lip as his 'Mech continued to vent heat. "Come on, you robe-wearing bastard," he

muttered, checking his tactical display. He could see that the other *Raijin* was starting to move in to finish the kill. Longstreet took the missiles and large laser off of the TIC, tying them onto their own circuit. He then split the medium lasers onto other target interlocks, allowing him to fire them one at a time and manage his already excessive heat.

He walked sideways, keeping his torso facing the *Raijin*, firing each medium laser one at a time. The first hit the center torso, marking it with a dull flat-black scar. The second hit its legs. The *Raijin* turned to fire back. It let go a wave of six short range missiles, all of which hit his legs. The *Lineholder* shook under the thunder-like rumbles of the detonations but he kept her upright.

His next laser hit started on the arm and moved over the earlier hole in the *Raijin*'s torso. The shot dug deep. Suddenly, the *Raijin* stopped as if it had locked up. It shuddered for a moment. A flicker of flame rushed from the hole as if a flamethrower was in use, followed with a black billowing cloud. He knew the signs—sympathetic explosions. Internal ammo cooking off, probably from the Streak SRM ammo there. His teeth clenched. Internal explosions of this type could rip a BattleMech in half. Longstreet's muscles clenched, bracing for the blast. The MechWarrior attempted to fight it, but that battle was over. The *Raijin* dropped face forward into the scrub-brush.

"Holy crudstunk, sir," said Shears.

He must have been down to his last salvo... Longstreet allowed himself a smile, but it was short-lived. He felt his 'Mech lurch slightly from the rear, a hit from behind. Twisting around, he saw the remaining *Raijin* step out of the low brush cover, still more than a viable threat. The Blake 'Mech moved like a running bird, an ostrich-like gait.

He tried to raise his large laser but the shoulder joint was still fused, fractured, or broken. Switching to the two long-range missile packs, he let go with a twin salvo. The LRM's didn't do a great deal of damage, but they left pock-marks all over the *Raijin*. The 'Mech charged forward and he heard a voice over the broadband scream, "Blake's Blood!" There was a flash of light as the jump jets of the *Raijin* lit and soared up at him like a wave of metal and death.

Longstreet turned and wanted to run, but the heat had slowed his *Lineholder*. He got three broad steps in when he saw the flash orange of the jump jet plumes hit his shoulder. Death from above.

The *Lineholder* lurched hard and went down, as the horrible grinding noise of shattered armor plating filled his ears. He felt a ripple of nausea come over him and tasted either blood or bile in his mouth. Everything hurt. He wanted to move but couldn't. Darkness loomed for a moment in his cockpit as the natural light was obscured by dust and smoke.

The damage display was not forgiving. The *Lineholder's* arm was gone. Its torsos were crushed, mangled beyond recognition. His gyro had been damaged and his fusion reactor's outer core had taken some damage to the insulation, adding to the heat he was already fighting. He closed his eyes in a painful wince. His own ribs were broken, at least two of them, and maybe his shoulder was torn. Longstreet's vision was blurry, as a mix of sweat and possibly blood crept into the corner of his eyes. *I must have come down a hell of a lot harder than I thought.* Sparks danced from the remains of his sensor controls, then the lights flickered out in the cockpit as if to confirm what he was thinking. His BattleMech was dying all around him.

He heard a rumble and saw the foot of the *Raijin* distant from his own downed cockpit. The enemy 'Mech was standing but its feet were badly damaged from the jumping attack. Armor was missing, torn upward and off, and one of the footpads was gnarled upward, but the 'Mech was still standing.

"Infidel," the voice of the MechWarrior said. "You will pay for your arrogance."

"Skipper, you gotta punch out," came the crackling sound of Shears in his neurohelmet. Longstreet found his eyes drifting to the ejection V-ring. It was tempting, but given the angle of his 'Mech and the proximity of his enemy, the V-ring might as well be on another planet.

His thoughts should have been solely on survival. But he couldn't escape one screaming fact. It was the Word of Blake that had been doing the raid. Only they would use a word like "infidel." *Fat lot of good it does me knowing that now....*

The *Raijin* rotated its left arm up and leveled it right at his cockpit. For Longstreet, it felt as if it were aimed right into his brain. There was no thinking. He braced for the death that was about to come.

Without warning, a flash filled his field of vision. Then things started moving in slow motion. He saw the *Raijin* drop down in

front of him, but he didn't feel the impact of the 'Mech on the soil. Dust billowed up. A low roar filled his ears as if he was swimming and they were clogged with water. An image appeared, almost in a fog. A *Highlander*, a shimmering light green outlined in the dust. The paint scheme was different, older. The lines of the 'Mech were not like the contemporary *Highlander*—this one seemed more like a museum piece. The number was barely readable on the torso, as if the paint had been chipped away over the years. He stared at it for what seemed like a minute. The 'Mech did not fire on him. It seemed to have taken out the *Raijin*. Lifting up his good arm, Longstreet reached out towards the 'Mech, as if to wave or even touch it. The antique 'Mech pivoted and walked out of his field of vision.

"What the hell..." he muttered. He hadn't seen a *Highlander* like that except in history books.

"Did you get a look at that, Skipper?" drawled Shears.

"Damn straight. Who was piloting that 'Mech? I owe that MechWarrior a beer."

Shears voice seemed stunned still, ringing with dismay. "I'm—I'm not sure what I saw."

"What was it? From my angle here I only saw a blur. Was that a 'Mech or VTOL?"

"You didn't see that? It was a *Highlander*, old model," Longstreet yelled back.

"Couldn't tell for sure just what it was. There was a lot of dust out there. Was it one of the militia? Maybe the Com Guards sent someone over."

"Damn it, Shears, I saw a *Highlander*. All green. It saved my sorry ass."

"Sir..." there was a long and uncomfortable pause. "Sir, then that was it. I mean, him. I'd heard the legends. I mean, we talked about it at the academy but dad gum it I never thought I'd see the day when...sweet Jesus. That was it, I mean, him. You saw him."

"What?"

Shears paused. "Great Gaffa's Ghost, sir."

Longstreet reached out to the emergency comm panel and activated his homing beacon so that the rest of the lance would

hopefully pick up the signal. "Gaffa's Ghost."

"Just like my daddy used to say."

Longstreet tugged at his neurohelmet. "What the hell are you talking about, Shears?"

"My God, the stories, they're true..."



"THE LEGEND OF GREAT GAFFA'S GHOST"



SLDF Historian Adept Karl Vosteral

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Part One: Introduction

Every war has its share of stories of the strange and unexplainable. The Angel of Mons in the Great War, the Foo Fighters of the Second World War in the wars of ancient Terra. In more recent years, the Vandenburg White Wings and the sightings of the battlecruiser *Ticonderoga*, and the Ghost Riders Lance are all examples of apparitions that warriors in battle claim to have seen. Extreme events and pressures and the fog of war create strange visions and tales that are difficult if not impossible to account for. The mind can play tricks with soldiers in the field, distorting their impressions, changing their perception of reality.

Such is the story of Gaffa's Ghost.

It is a curse muttered by some MechWarriors in battle. "Great Gaffa's Ghost!" is an exclamation that is as prominent as, "Great Scott!" in many Warrior circles. But like most such expletives and statements, its true origins are often lost or confused. However, in the case of Gaffa's Ghost the story is still told, often with relevance, from one generation of MechWarriors to another.

My research as an archivist for the Second SLDF brought this matter to the surface when I was approached by a doctor I knew in a Veteran's hospital on Terra. He told me of a patient who relayed a story that he had heard legend about.

The patient in question was a former SLDF MechWarrior, Barton Vale. He had been attached as a courier to the Northwind Highlanders during the operations against the Smoke Jaguars. At the time, he was nineteen years old and this was his first (and last) combat experience. On Virentofta he found himself ambushed by a Star of Jaguar defenders that were unaware their commander had already lost possession of the world. He was alone in the flat open plains, when they had emerged from their hidden encampment and struck. What happened next is best described in his own words:

"They came at me from three different directions at once. I swung my *Bushwacker* wide of them and tried to run. There were five of them. I didn't have a chance. One fired at me. I turned and fired at the closest one behind me, a Clan *Rifleman*. I didn't realize it but he wasn't the one that had shot at me. The next thing I knew, all of them opened up. Damned Clan rules of engagement!

"I wanted to fight them. I really did. But I was outnumbered and outgunned. Staying meant suicide. Everyone knows that. Even my CO admitted it. I tried to signal for help. I really did.

"I tried to run. I came to a clump of brush out there, a little haggard pile of weeds and short trees. You couldn't hide a turd there, but I hoped it would cover me for just a second or two. I took a laser up the back side and a Gauss slug in the back of the my knee-cap. I could barely make that 'Mech walk after that. There was a red flash across my cockpit. I remember the smell of electrical fire and my left arm went numb, almost like it was frozen. I saw the sky flash by from my cockpit and fell backwards. My *Bushwacker* went down and went down hard. The gyro was a lump of metal and I felt like I was in a sauna from the reactor venting.

"The Jaguars stopped at a distance. They didn't shoot or anything. I stared at them. It seemed like five minutes but was probably only a second.

"Then it happened. Something out of my field of vision fired. I saw a blur of green and sky blue. The *Jaguar Rifleman* was hit with a PPC shot right smack dab in the cockpit. I watched the sparks from the residue hit dance all up the front of it. It fell faster than a drunken recruit on their first three day pass.

"The Clanners turned to face the threat. The blur seemed to move behind them. They tracked it. They fired. It fired. I saw them outlined in a wave of fireballs and smoke. They stood there outlined in the flames, just silhouettes, black. There was more firing. I could hear it. Light...PPC shots. Armor plates from one of them, a *Dasher*, landed right by my cockpit. I figured that the Northwind Highlanders garrison force had arrived to help. I remember praying and thanking God that they had come. Still, I figured I was dead.

"Suddenly it was over. Flames and balls of dark gray smoke still rolled up. I remember struggling with my restraints, trying to get free, trying to get a better view. The *Jaguar* 'Mechs were gone. They were not just gone, but were a mound of debris. I never knew 'Mechs could be twisted that way. I saw a 'Mech arm, reaching up in the flames. I cried. I shouldn't have. I was a soldier. But they were dead.

"Then I saw it. It moved right through the flames. It was a light green monster, huge. A *Highlander*. The old models, the ones that they'd stopped making years ago. The ones that swapped out the Gauss rifles for a killer particle cannon. It didn't make a sound as it moved. I saw it towering over me. Green with the shoulders painted a blue. I had seen the paint scheme before, in a book. It was from the SLDF. Not my SLDF, but the *original* SLDF—Kerensky's army. I could make out the Cameron Star on it. Its number was 05 on the chest. It had three yellow stars under the cockpit. I couldn't see the MechWarrior.

"Damndest thing. It stood there and saluted. One of those that crosses the torso of the 'Mech with the right arm. Old SLDF stuff. I remember staring at it for a long time. It seemed to glow. Then the wind changed direction and the smoke obscured my vision. I didn't hear a thing. When the smoke cleared, it was gone. I was alone again with the dead."¹

My doctor friend who wishes to remain nameless had piqued my interest. This description of events was not new. It had been happening for centuries, on countless worlds. I researched the event in question. The official investigation showed that Barton Vale had been ambushed but command had credited him with the kill of five Smoke Jaguar 'Mechs. His *Bushwacker's* battlerom had been fried and no one had bothered to check the damaged Clan 'Mechs. He had protested and claimed that the mysterious *Highlander* had done the killing, but all evidence seemed to point to him. They had awarded him a combat citation and since then he had been hospitalized, for trauma both physical and mental. He was marked as a hero and sent off to the hospital where he has remained since.

Barton Vale couldn't have killed the Smoke Jaguars though. Not just because he was a wet-behind-the-ears MechWarrior. No. His left arm had been severed at the shoulder by a laser hit to the cockpit. His hip and right hand were shattered in the fight. It would have been impossible for him to move or shoot his *Bushwacker* enough to take out these enemies, even in single individual combat. Analysis of loadouts after his recovery showed that he still carried almost a full load of autocannon ammo and his LRM's had blown out during his fall as a result of CASE deployment.

1. Taken from oral interview transcript, April 8, 3066, Walter Reed Annex 104, MechWarrior Barton Vale, SLDF SN 1660551-400J. ComStar Registered.

His mental distress, written off as post-traumatic stress disorder, had kept him hospitalized for years. But part of it was the result of his story.

In his mind, he had seen Gaffa's Ghost.

The mysterious *Highlander* has been seen many times over the centuries. The descriptive elements seem to hold true—the number 05 and the three yellow stars marking it as a general's BattleMech. It always appears when the odds are desperate. It fights beyond the skills of those involved, salutes (in many cases), and disappears.

Impossible? Maybe. Perhaps Barton Vale and others simply were victims of battlefield trauma. Perhaps this was their way of mentally compensating for horrific yet brave deeds. Maybe he *did* kill those Smoke Jaguars. Perhaps his mind simply filled in a blank for him with something easier to deal with than his killing those MechWarriors. Perhaps a MechWarrior that scored a 78% on his gunnery tests the month before had somehow become a master marksman and could take out genetically engineered and trained-from-birth Clan warriors, outnumbering him five to one.

Or perhaps the tale of Gaffa's Ghost is true.

If it is, the truth must be traced to the first appearance of the legend. And for that, we must turn the pages of history back to a dark time before a darker time. Back to the first Star League and the fighting on New Vandenburg.

Part Two: Birth of the Legend

The war between the Star League and the Taurian Concordat in 2765 was nothing short of outright rebellion against the League. It was the worst kind of brutal guerilla warfare and the bloodbath of fighting on New Vandenburg was the epitome of that conflict. For the SLDF it was a whetstone, it sharpened skills and fighting for the war to come against Amaris and the coup that destroyed the First Star League.

At the start of 2765 General Stephen James Gaffa was in command of the 364th BattleMech Division, commonly known as the Zulu Division. His record was impeccable for an officer in the SLDF. He had come up through the ranks, attending OCS at the age of seventeen, having shown incredible initiative during operations in the Rim Worlds on a dangerous string of peacekeeping assignments. He had been awarded the Medal of Valor just after the outbreak of the fighting on New Vandenburg for saving a mobile hospital unit by drawing enemy fire onto him and his command company while they evacuated. It was the first Medal of Valor won by the 19th Army in that epic campaign.

His 'Mech was a *Highlander*, marked with 05 on the upper left torso. He preferred a green camouflage pattern with the shoulder blades of the 'Mech trimmed in light blue, as was the style of the Zulu Division. There are no archival images of his 'Mech on file, most of those were lost with the fall of the Star League, but the style common in the SLDF indicated that his rank would have been painted on below the cockpit canopy. The use of a single star would have designated a Division commander. Why did General Gaffa use three stars? The loss of many of the SLDF personnel records over the years does not give us an insight. The three stars did serve to make it easy to identify and distinguish, but so would a single star. Like so many parts of this myth it is difficult to decipher the meaning, if any.

General Gaffa was a front-line commander who led by example. Such was the case in operations outside the town of Lyon on November 4, 2765. Separatist forces led a company of 'Mechs against an SLDF convoy that had been providing relief to the local civilians. General Gaffa ordered his company into the fight. In reality, it was an ambush, and he was their target. Well concealed artillery locked onto his command 'Mech, one of the classic *Highlanders*, and tracked him as the rebels pulled back.

In a small ravine area over Sander's Creek, the trap was sprung. The sole survivor of his command lance, Colonel Jack Grierson, described the events in his after-action report:

"There was a dip in the ravine and the General was forced to traverse deeper into the creek-bed. I offered to take point, but he refused. He always did. Moving about seventy-five meters in front of us, he signaled that he had a magnetic anomaly contact on the outer marker. I tried to adjust for it.

"Suddenly the ground erupted all around him. Artillery rounds, anti-'Mech mostly—cockpit-crackers—rained in right on top of him. My estimate was that at least three Long Tom pieces were ranged in on the ravine and had pre-targeted that location. A mix of HE and AP rounds hit the area. Indirect fire from at least 100 LRM's poured in.

"At the same time, a lance of 'Mechs moved to the high ground and poured fire into his position. The General couldn't move and from our angle, thanks to a bend in the creek, we couldn't lend fire support. Through the tree limbs I could see the waves of long range missiles pour in. Lasers, multiple types and densities, came as well. He fired back—I saw his PPC discharge up the hillside. It was a missed shot but it told us that he was still alive. It gave us hope. We loved that old man and there wasn't a man in the lance that wouldn't have gladly taken his place in that crater if we could have.

"I swear I got a signal from him on the direct laser comm-link. It was not clear but I thought he ordered us to stay back. I remember him saying he'd hold them off. His exact words were lost on me. At the time I thought that it was a mistake. But he was General Gaffa and his word was like the word of God and Kerensky himself.

"The ground shook hard enough to force me to manually compensate. The firing kept up for two minutes as we enfiladed and began to provide cover fire from the right flank. We attempted to signal him, but all that we saw was a pop-flash so bright and hot that it charred my commlink and my primary Battlecomputer core. We knew that his reactor had been critically breached even before we confirmed that the area had the usual radiation signature from a blown engine. We'd all seen that happen before, all of us knew what it meant too. No one could have survived that.

“Damn those bastards. Damn them all to hell.”²

He didn’t survive according to the official records.

As the separatist forces retreated, his company moved in to attempt to rescue their commanding officer. What they found was a smoldering crater, the sandy soil literally melted from the heat of his blown fusion reactor. There was little that could be traced to his BattleMech and there were no organic remains. General Stephen Gaffa had died in the ambush, horribly but quickly. Memorial services were held and General Kerensky himself attended, referring to Gaffa as “a close personal friend and colleague.”³

Like so many that died on New Vandenburg, most would have thought that the death of General Gaffa would have been nothing more than an obscure footnote in history. Events that occurred two weeks after the General’s death changed that. An SLDF patrol near Lyon was attacked by a mobile lance of rebel BattleMechs. The SLDF patrol, led by Lieutenant Sarah Fuller, pursued the rebels to the same general vicinity where General Gaffa had died. Her story, popularized in several books in later years, has been exaggerated. The discovery recently of new archival documents still provides a chilling and detailed description of what occurred:

“In the underbrush and growth we separated and spread out. I realized that this might be exactly what the enemy wanted and signaled for the lance to reform to our rear, regroup, and begin the search anew. My *Crab* picked up several signals, mag readings, to the east and west. Their transponders marked them as EM [Enemy ‘Mechs]. I was flanked.

“I tried to signal the rest of my lance but got static back and realized I was being jammed. Turning, I found myself facing an *Archer* and a pair of *Phoenix Hawks*. They hit me from both sides at once. I went evasive but the underbrush hindered my movement and was soon burning as a result of errant fire, adding to the confusion of the field.

“I caught the *Archer* with both lasers in the legs, but it was not enough. The missiles from that EM hit me and I sus-

2. Battle-Damage-Assessment, BDA-20847-A, Lyons Sector, File 208897. Colonel Grierson Submitting.

3. Davidson, Douglas. *Zulu Warriors All—The History of the 364th Division*. St. Martin’s Press, May 3025.

tained damage on my right hip that inhibited movement. I discharged my emergency flare and held my ground as was SOP for locked hip. Damage was running high on my *Crab*. I only had a few moments of battle-worthiness left.

"I suffered a cockpit hit and breach from a missile volley from the *Archer*. My cockpit was compromised and tactical systems failed. Backups went online but my Targeting and Tracking system was off-line and I had to rely on manual firing procedures.

"From behind the *Phoenix Hawks* I saw another SLDF 'Mech emerge. It was a *Highlander*—a command model. It did not show on my sensors, which I attributed to the damage. It fired, taking out one of the *Hawks* from nearly point-blank rear range. I assume they were having problems detecting it as well. It punched then kicked the next *Phoenix Hawk*. Both that 'Mech and the *Archer* fled the field of battle.

"I attempted laser signaling and radio but the *Highlander* did not respond. I am unsure if it was damaged or if the problems were with my comm system. The damage inside of my cockpit was severe.

"I wish to formally acknowledge that the kill of the *Phoenix Hawk* should be credited to the pilot of the *Highlander*. It was marked as 364th Division. Tracking number was either 105 or 05. My sensors were off-line and battlerom did not pick up the engagement. Please consider this confirmation of that MechWarrior's kill and extend to him my thanks."⁴

There is no record of any other units operating within 25 kilometers of Lieutenant Fuller's lance at that time. Her story reached a reporter for the *Terra Herald* (Jacob Best) who reported it was a "Ghost Sighting." In a rather loose coverage of the facts, Mr. Best reported, "It was as if General Gaffa himself, killed only a few days before, had risen to save one of his comrades."⁵ He further played up the evidence that General Gaffa's body and 'Mech had never been recovered from the scene of his death. Some pundits point-

4. After-Action Report, December 14, Lieutenant Sarah Fuller, 177th Mechanized Infantry Division, File Submission 90003040-J

5. "Ghost 'Mech Saves Officer," *Terra Herald*, January 30, 2765.

ed to this as propaganda on the part of the SLDF, that Gaffa was not dead but leading a covert unit on New Vandenburg. Others saw it as a sign that General Gaffa was indeed haunting the SLDF, an avenging angel of sorts.

The legend was clouded even more when Lieutenant Fuller became officially listed as Missing in Action in February of the next year. There was no way for anyone to confirm or validate what she alleged she saw. The media had a heyday with the material and the constant denials from the SLDF only seemed to add fuel to the mystery.

Matters became worse after the Amaris Coup when another sighting of Gaffa's Ghost made the press.

Part Three: The Ghost Returns

There were at least five incidents that occurred where people claimed to have seen the ghost *Highlander*. Three of these incidents were easily proven as deliberate falsehoods, while two were left as open cases (“undetermined”). In one of the more popular cases, battlerom footage was “leaked” to the press showing an eerie green *Highlander* in a jarring sequence of footage. Referred to as the Donaldson Footage, from a Sergeant Tom Donaldson who claimed to have recovered the images, this has been universally touted as a fraud but ironically the public acceptance of the story was unshaken. With the outbreak of the Amaris Coup, Donaldson was killed in the Rim Worlds Campaign and never was able to recant his involvement in the fake footage. This only seemed to perpetuate the myth with the civilian population. People claimed to be assured that Gaffa’s Ghost would come and save them all. Even modern review of the footage shows that it was falsified, but the story lived on.

The next “tangible” sighting took place in the spring of 2779 during Operation Liberation. A vehicle commander named Francis Holland was piloting a Nightshade VTOL on patrol outside of Frankfurt, Germany. The Nightshade suffered a mechanical malfunction and made a forced landing along the battle lines. Holland, a Lieutenant in the SLDF, barely got out of the wreck alive before it was pounded with artillery from the Republican forces. Armed with only a sidearm laser pistol, he attempted to grope his way to friendly forces when he encountered a platoon of Republican infantry. The events that unfolded are best recounted in his interview with the media shortly after the event:

Reporter: “I understand you took quite a blow to the head Lieutenant. How are you doing?”

Holland: “Fine. They’re keeping me here in the hospital under observation. I’ve been told I’ll be released in the next week or so.”

Reporter: “I’m sure your parents are going to be concerned. Would you like to say something to them?”

Holland: “My family was in the Americas. I received word a few years ago that they were killed during the occupation.

We get these reports from the Republicans all the time—real morale inducers.”

Reporter: “I see. You have my sympathies. I’m here to talk to you because I’ve heard you have an interesting story to tell our viewers about events unfolding along the lines near Frankfurt. From what I heard from my sources, you’re quite lucky.”

Holland: “Lucky as hell. My Nightshade had gone down. The hydraulics had clocked out over the front in just about the worse possible place. I put it down but in the process turned it into a pile of scrap metal. That’s how I got this. [gestures to head bandage]”

Reporter: “What happened then?”

Holland: “I got clear of the wreck and pulled my sidearm. I was pretty dizzy...I remember puking my brains out for a few minutes. I then started towards where I figured our lines were. I had made it about 300 meters or so when I came to an open field. I started across it and suddenly I saw a Republican patrol emerge from the tree line at the edge of the field.”

Reporter: “You must have been pretty scared.”

Holland: “I was more pissed off than frightened. Survive a freaking chopper crash and I get captured by Pubs. Damn it, I was mad.”

Reporter: “You’re lucky they didn’t just shoot you on the spot.”

Holland: “Some of the platoons capture prisoners to use to barter for surrender. Some just like torturing us. I had my pistol drawn as they approached. They didn’t shoot and I held my fire. I mean, there was over twenty of them. What was I going to do after the clip was empty?”

Reporter: “What happened then?”

Holland: “I felt this cold wind whip up behind me. They just stopped where they stood. It was just at sunset. I figured a VTOL was moving in behind me for recover, you know one of our rescue units. They just stood there, mouths hanging open. I figured, ‘Good for you, [expletive edited for on-air broadcast] dickheads. Now you can pay the piper.’”

"Suddenly all hell broke loose from behind me. A PPC fired, then some lasers. A rack of missiles poured down on them too. They tried to run, but the shots were dead-on. Finally there was just three left standing. They dropped their weapons."

Reporter: "Didn't you turn around to see where the firing was coming from?"

Holland: "My brains were spilling out of my head wound and the Republicans were getting mopped up. I honestly didn't *care* who was firing at the time."

Reporter: "I see. Go ahead."

Holland: "The last ones surrendered. I remember stepping towards them. I had a big shit-eating grin on my face. I figured they deserved what they got. Then all of a sudden they just fell down. I made my way across the mud and muck of that field to them. They were laying there, eyes open, dead as a roadkill on a backwoods dirt road. Their mouths were just hanging open. I checked them over. They were cold, like they'd been dead for hours."

"I turned around then. I couldn't figure out what happened to them. *Weird*, you know. I saw it then. A *Highlander*. Green. It was one of ours, SLDF, but it didn't look like any *Highlander* I had ever seen. First off, it had one of those deep command cockpits, and they stopped making those years ago. And it was weird, like it had a glow about it, not exactly blending in with the terrain, if you know what I mean. I saw the insignia on it and I nearly wet myself. It was number five—General Gaffa. I'd been hearing rumors about people seeing him and his 'Mech for years. There it was, standing there right in front of me. I felt so stupid. I mean there it was, right there, only 20 meters away."

Reporter: "Are you sure it was the General's 'Mech? Not to doubt your word, but I'm sure my viewers are going to question what you saw."

Holland: "They can have their doubts. I know what I saw. It was there, plain as day. I took a step forward and lost my footing. I got up and looked and it was gone. That field was huge. I was down for only a split-second. I would have seen a real 'Mech trying to leave. I would have felt a hundred

tons thumping around, even if it was walking. This was no ordinary *Highlander*. This one was gone like a will o'wisp."

Reporter: "So you attribute your rescue to Gaffa's Ghost then?"

Holland: "One of our squads arrived about twenty minutes later. They found me and I showed them the dead Republicans. They couldn't find what killed those last fellows, but I know what it was—they were scared to death. The battle damage assessment reported the dead, but not the causes. My commanding officer tried to write it off as a result of a head injury, but I know the truth. He saved my life."⁶

Unlike others that witnessed the sighting of Gaffa's Ghost, Lieutenant Holland survived the war and liberation of Terra. He came back to the muddy field where he had his encounter and purchased it, putting together a small shrine. In the small stone structure was a homemade homage to General Gaffa and several artifacts he recovered from the field, which he claimed were evidence of his story. While many discounted him as a sad and injured veteran of the war, deluded by an open head injury, dozens of people visited his small shrine each day until his death some fifteen years later. Eventually the small shrine was turned into a conventional church, sanctifying the ground and adding an air of validity to the myth. It further solidified the legend of Gaffa's Ghost.

6. Transcript of embedded reporter Drake Mathews, Globestar Network, 16 April 2779, File Number 4445-JGSN.

Part Four: The Healing

With the departure of General Kerensky and the Exodus fleet, the sightings of Gaffa's Ghost seemed to slow, if not stop. Even with the carnage of the First and Second Succession Wars, there were only two reported cases of an SLDF *Highlander* 'Mech emerging and saving people—both in desperate battle situations, both unconfirmed. The story was told in many of the Academies, a bit of lore passed on from generation to generation. It was seen as many such battlefield apparitions—intriguing yet at the same time, illusionary.

Matters changed during the Fourth Succession War with a new twist to the old story. This time the appearance took place on Northwind during the time of the Highlanders return to their homeworld. The fighting with the Sword of Light regiment on Northwind was swift and dangerous and many brave fighters from the Northwind Highlanders were casualties of the fighting.

One such fighter was a MechWarrior named Matilda Ferguson. In the fighting outside of Cromarty City, her BattleMech had been crippled and she had been forced to eject. Matilda lay in a field that was contested by the enemy for hours. Rescue by the Highlanders was hampered by the constant thrusts of the Sword of Light forces. Her ejection seat transponder signal was a constant reminder during the fighting that they had a man down that needed recovery.

When they arrived at the ejection seat, the recovery forces were dismayed to find it empty. A search of the area did not show any vehicle or infantry footprints. Simply a seat and an open restraining harness. It was feared for a while that she had punched out without her harness on and may have been thrown clear of the seat. The entire field was searched between her fallen BattleMech and the ejection seat. No sign of Matilda was found.

In the aftermath of the fighting, a team was assembled to attempt to account for the losses by the Highlanders. The team was surprised to find a woman in a coma in a field hospital some 30 kilometers from the Cromarty battlefield. Her DNA matched her as Matilda Ferguson, much to the relief of the investigation team.

In interviewing the Chief Medical Officer of the field hospital, Major Walter Hoff, it was determined that he was the officer on duty when Matilda was brought in. On the night that she had ejected from her crippled 'Mech, the Major was stirred from his tour of the ward when an orderly indicated that a BattleMech was

approaching the facility. The Major stepped outside and in the low fog, saw the form of an older model *Highlander*. He assumed it was a friendly 'Mech—no warnings ever were traced to the perimeter sensors.

What made the 'Mech stick in his mind was the fact that it was not painted for the Highlanders, but seemed to be a very old 'Mech. He remembered a Cameron Star on it and three stars under the cockpit. He assumed that someone had broken into a museum and had “liberated” the 'Mech for use in the retaking of Northwind from the Draconis Combine. Such a 'Mech had not been fielded in decades.

The 'Mech stopped, bent slightly, and lowered its hand. Rolling out of the hand was the limp form of Matilda Ferguson. Upon seeing a human gently roll to the ground, he ran out and began to check his patient, all but ignoring the 'Mech. When the Major did glance up he saw the *Highlander* in the distance, standing in the fog, seeming to give him an across-the-chest salute. Major Hoff was so busy with his duties that he all but forgot the incident.

The investigators interviewed the sentries that spotted the approaching 'Mech initially, even noting it in the hospital's security log. Further investigation showed that no such *Highlander* was used in the operations on Northwind at the time. Conjecture was that it was a benevolent Combine MechWarrior, bringing a kindred Warrior to medical attention. One of the investigators, Major Annette Shenus, remembered the legend of Gaffa's Ghost and made a note of it in the records.

This sighting was unique in that there were multiple people that had witnessed the anonymous BattleMech. Their descriptions were very close to that of other individual sightings of Gaffa's Ghost. A security check was run of the satellite tracking data and oddly enough there was a blank spot on the data recorder during the time of the sighting, while the satellite was overhead. This was the result of a faulty imaging system that had been damaged days before in the fighting, but to those that wanted to believe in the visage of Gaffa's Ghost, it was further proof of its existence.

Matters were further complicated when Ferguson regained consciousness two days after her discovery. Her last conscious thought was sitting in her ejection seat, in the grass and mud after it landed, the battle raging all around her. An errant artillery round had deafened and knocked her unconscious. She had no idea how she had arrived in the field hospital.

Ferguson became something of a celebrity as her story broke, leaked by one of the investigation team members. She shunned the attention but was constantly hounded by the media and semi-religious people seeking her enlightenment. The thought that a person may have been saved by an infamous Ghost seemed to be a magnetic draw. She eventually quit the Highlanders militia and became a nun in the church, many say to dodge the public attention. Her death four years ago was uneventful except for a small group that attended her funeral. Claims that her rescue had driven her to a higher calling only seemed to propel the illusion of Gaffa's Ghost even further.

The Public Affairs Office for the Northwind Highlanders has shunned inquiries regarding the entire affair. At the same time, they have ordered the records of the incident sealed for security reasons. These are the only records from the liberation of Northwind that are still sealed to this date. The feeble claim of security reasons has not stopped the story from leaking out and launching further rumors. It is said that other Highlander MechWarriors may have had the vision—and that those that do have such sightings of Gaffa's Ghost receive preferential treatment both in terms of their careers and assignments. It has even been hinted that membership in the once elusive and secretive Black Watch may be linked to such visions and sightings.

Part Five: Reality Check

There are some common threads in the tellings of this tale, though it is important to point out that none of these alleged sightings have ever been substantiated. General Gaffa was a highly decorated and distinguished member of the Star League Defense Force. The appearance of this supposed Ghost 'Mech seems to occur with some commonalities:

- Incidents take place with personnel that have some tie, either directly or indirectly, with the Star League Defense Forces. All of the individuals who are tied to these incidents either were on duty with the SLDF, tied to units that were SLDF core units, or had blood relatives that were officers in the SLDF.
- These sightings almost all involve the loss of a 'Mech or injury to the individual involved in the incident. This is often leveraged as the excuse for the event—citing that it was a result of head trauma or other life-threatening injury.
- Ground soldiers, infantry, and MechWarriors only are involved with the incidents. Aerospace fighters, even those flying air support, have never reported sightings of a mysterious ghost BattleMech.
- The description of the 'Mech has strong common themes—the green color and eerie glow about it. It is silent. In more than one case, it salutes those that witness it. The paint scheme on the BattleMech almost always involves the number five and the General's stars. Oddly enough, the 'Mech in question is an older model *Highlander*—regardless of the year or the availability of such 'Mechs.
- Sensor data is lacking. In every instance where Gaffa's Ghost is allegedly spotted, there are malfunctions or battle damage that prohibits someone from gathering or obtaining corroborating evidence that could prove or disprove the incident.
- When the ghost does appear, the number of people that confirm the sighting is never more than three. The vast number of sightings that take place with a lone witness.

Is this to say then that these events didn't happen, that they were all illusions? That over the course of several centuries people have made mistakes time and time again? Did people see what they wanted to see in a time of pressure?

Yet oddly enough their descriptions of events seem to coincide with each other. There is a thread that weaves this tapestry together over the years. There have been efforts to find the spot on New Vandenburg where the General fell. With the war over, the hope was to recover enough of the fallen 'Mech to prove that indeed General Gaffa had not passed on into the ether but had died in a bloody ambush on New Vandenburg.

The team went to the planet under diplomatic approval from the governments in 3060 led by Doctor Emil Graufson of the Lyran Alliance. The archaeologists combed the ravine area of Sander's Creek outside of Lyon. With the passage of centuries, the area was difficult to navigate, having grown in thick with native cedars and pines. Several large crater areas were found, now nothing more than shallow depressions in the soil. Radiation readings in two of the holes indicated that a reactor could have breached there years before and diggings were done throughout the summer.

Some metallic objects were recovered, including what appears to be pieces of 'Mech armor that were badly burned and melted. Melted sand in the holes was also recovered, as well as a number of artillery shell fragments. The digs were extensive, and despite illnesses brought on by the mosquito season, the archaeologists continued their work into the fall.

The results were disappointing and as such only seemed to make the case for Gaffa's Ghost even stronger. While some unidentifiable debris, obviously from battle, was recovered at the site, it was not anywhere near enough to account for the General's *Highlander*. Dr. Graufson was quick to point out that there were other craters in the area and the often distorted records from the period may have had the team digging in the wrong place. The Doctor wanted to press for additional excavations once money was raised.⁷

7. Graufson, Emil. "In Search of the General Gaffa of the SLDF." *Modern Battlefield Archaeology* (New Vandenburg Press, University of Thorin, Lyran Alliance), August 3061, 4-10.

Conclusion:

What makes this battlefield vision different than many others is twofold. First; this sighting is not tied to a place but seems to move throughout the Inner Sphere. Such ghost images from previous wars seem tied to a location while this one seems somehow tied to the icons and blood of the Star League. Second, this image keeps resurfacing. Battlefield visions, angels and ghosts all fade over time and drift in obscurity. This one remains and comes back war after war.

In the end the question should be: does any of this matter? The utterance “Great Gaffa’s Ghost!” is well known with people throughout the Inner Sphere and there is a thread of a story behind that expression. It is an intriguing tale of not just a brave man and leader, but of faith and miracles. Attempting to prove a miracle scientifically is impossible—such is the nature of miracles to begin with.

The individuals that have alleged sight of the ghostly green *Highlander* coming to their aid in their time of greatest need don’t care about sensor readings and faulty satellites. What they care about is that they have survived. If that survival has come at the hands of a man that has been dead for centuries, it doesn’t matter.

Perhaps that is the point of this article and my weeks of research. The reality of the matter is that the illusion of Gaffa’s Ghost is more powerful than the physical presence of it. If it is an apparition back from the dead, then it is a powerful story. That so many people are willing to *believe* in it—that, is a more powerful story.