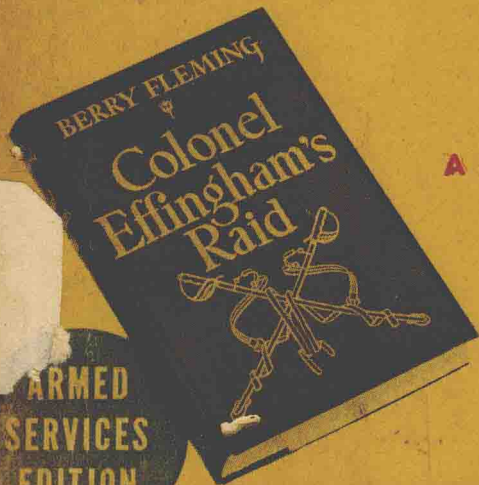


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# Colonel Effingham's Raid



A NOVEL BY

BERRY FLEMING

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DEDICATION

*To the Women of the Town*  
under whose Wing—like slumbering  
Barbarossa in the Kyffhäuser caves—  
slumbers the Valor of Fredericksville

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COLONEL  
EFFINGHAM'S  
RAID

By BERRY FLEMING

*Armed Services Editions*

COUNCIL ON BOOKS IN WARTIME, INC.  
NEW YORK

SOOTHSAYER

Beware the ides of March.

CAESAR

He is a dreamer; let us leave him: pass.

*Julius Caesar*

*Act I, Sc. 2*

*A few gentle readers may need to be reminded that the characters in any novel are eclectic; in this one they are fictitious as well, and are not meant as representations of living persons.*

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## CHAPTER I

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I SHAN'T soon forget that warm April morning in 1940 when the first hint reached us that Cousin Willy had reappeared full-blown in the life of our little Southern town.

Things had begun to show some signs of looking up for us boys down at the *Leader*. It was hardly apparent yet to the naked eye, things having had a long way up to look in those days, but I had worked under Mr. Earl Hoats ("Yank," we used to call him affectionately while he was in the

newsroom with the rest of us—he was a foreigner that the owners had sent us from their Zanesville [Ohio] *Herald*—but it was "Mr. Hoats" now that they had boosted him to the Managing Editor's desk across the hall),—I had worked under him for going on ten years and I detected an unusual sort of satisfied glint in the heavy lenses of his spectacles that made me wonder if perhaps, somehow, somewhere down the line things had at last begun to click.

On this particular April morning, bright with the baleful promise of summer, I even had a definite pointer. I was beating my way back from the Municipal Building when I happened to come upon Mr. Hoats in the shade of the Farmers Bank & Trust, finishing a conference with Bubber Paysinger,—we in Fredericksville mind a good deal of our own and other people's business in the sun and shade (according to the season) of our Broad Street. We walked back to the office together.

He asked me if anything was on the stove at the Municipal Building. "Nothing much," I told him. "They're talking about changing the name of the square."

"What square?" he said, though more as an exclamation than a question; to all intents and purposes there is only one square in Fredericksville, the one out of which rises the hundred-foot shaft of Georgia marble adorned with the figures, generous in coat and beard, of Lee and Jackson and Cobb and Walker, and above them all, the figure of a nameless Confederate soldier,—who, fittingly enough, is equipped only with a moustache.

"Monument Square," I said.

"Changing it to what!"

"Toolen Square," I said. "What do you reckon?"

He didn't turn and stare at me, but he changed the angle of his straw

hat a little, which was the same thing. "But that's a three-alarm fire for the U.D.C.'s."

"It seems the square has never been officially christened anything—"

"Hold up your story on that," he said abruptly, and of course I told him O.K.

Then in the hall of the building, as we were about to separate right and left, he stopped and pinned his spectacles on something beyond a window, in a kind of gesture, as you might lean your shoulder against the side of a door, and spoke past me in a monotone: "You boys watch your step in there for a little bit and I may can do something better for you on Saturdays." (He wasn't a Southerner

but he had lived among us long enough to speak the language.) "What do you get now?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'now,'" I said. "I've got twenty-two fifty for the last seven years."

This understandably broke up the conversation; he left me unceremoniously and I went on into the news-room.

I didn't see quite what was on his mind. I knew that in the old days, under Mr. Hoats's predecessor, what I had told him would probably have been the inspiration for a leading editorial calling on the United Daughters of the Confederacy to, as it were, gird themselves for battle; I saw no evidence of any such inspiration now,

but beyond that, I couldn't see.—And I frankly didn't put much thought on it because it was a good deal easier to think of maybe an even twenty-five a week.

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But I didn't get much chance to enjoy that vision either. For, somewhat like two hostile squadrons destined one day to lock in combat but now distantly sighting each other for the first time, in the midst of my contemplation of the twenty-five, Dewey Sluster at the City Desk growled "Number three" at me and I picked up the telephone and heard a strange voice say, "Hello, Albert; this is your Cousin Will."

I couldn't remember at the mo-

ment any "Cousin Will." But it is a rash Southerner who will forswear a Cousin Will, and I greeted him cheerily enough. I thought I did recall a tough little egg down in Oglethorpe County twenty years ago when my mother and I went down there one summer to visit her people, but I couldn't remember much more about him than that he had been losing his front teeth and learning, undismayed, to smoke a corn-cob pipe at the same time.

I reckoned the voice I heard belonged to this young prodigy now grown to manhood, and when he asked me out to supper I said I'd be glad to come,—which of course I was, as any other of Cousin Jennie's boarders would have been.



The address he gave me was on the Flowing Wells Road, the first house on the left after you cross the city boundary. "My name's on the mailbox," he said.

I took a Mechanics Hill bus out to the end of the line, got off and walked along a sandy road through a stand of second-growth pines with an occasional glimpse off over Horse Creek Valley at a bank of low hills about the color of a pair of sun-faded overalls. I supposed Cousin Willy had got married, sold the old Effingham place and moved to the city to make his fortune; there were a few things that didn't add up about this idea of him, but that was pretty much the state of my mind when I walked round a slight bend and saw the new

mailbox.

I felt I hardly needed to look at the name, so certain was I that this was the house, but as I entered the gate I did glance casually at the freshly-painted letters. They halted me right there like a sentry's challenge and I stood off spelling them out, certain now that something was wrong but not knowing just where it began: "W. SEABORN EFFINGHAM," the first line read, which was all right, but underneath it were the words, "Colonel U. S. Army, retired."

Then, far back out of the dusk of childhood there began to emerge a vague Great-uncle Seaby on my mother's side who had a son about my mother's age they all referred to as Willy,—when they referred to him

at all, which was seldom because he had graduated at West Point and long since disappeared from our lives, though I remember he did send us boys a Christmas present once that arrived about the first of December and turned out to be nothing less than a machete out of the jungles of Panama, from the shock of which I am not at all sure my mother ever recovered—

“Is this Albert Marbury?” a big voice said from the edge of the porch.

I lifted my eyes to the sunburned face of a somehow formidable-looking figure, spare and erect and, seeing him thus above me on the steps, of an apparently prodigious height; a pale cravat was twirled loosely under the liberal collar of a good linen shirt,

out of which rose a really distinguished Adam's apple. Matching it for prominence, was a high and rather delicately-boned nose, beneath which a pair of aggressive yet disciplined gray moustaches turned briefly to either flank. In the same key, a pair of wiry and mobile eyebrows seemed almost to impair the vision of two brown eyes that could have belonged only to an Effingham. They were my mother's eyes and though it was curious to see them there under the pink expanse of a cranium as bald as the top of his mailbox, it was heartwarming too, in a way; what, in my mother's eyes, had been a personal kindness, seemed to have become in his something that might be a sort of stern solicitude for the troops

in his command, but in both cases it was an outward look unobstructed by much consideration of self. His bony shoulders were neatly clad in a nice-fitting jacket of some light-colored cotton stuff which, as it later turned out, he had brought home with him from Manila.

He grasped my hand in his lanky brown fingers. "Come in, my boy; it's good to see kin people again."

I had never felt that way about kin people, but I reckoned you picked up stranger ideas than that in a lifetime spent in the army and I didn't argue the point; I hadn't been as starved of them as he had.

"This is a nice place you found," I said.

"Comfortable quarters," Cousin

Willy said modestly.

He showed me through the rooms of what we call a "sand-hills cottage," a one-story building with a wide hall connecting the front and back porches, and two or three rooms on each side, with a kitchen wing and perhaps a corresponding wing for an office or an extra bedroom. It was an office in this case, clean and bare, with a portable typewriter on a simple desk between the window and the fireplace. I said something about maybe he was going to write his memoirs now.

"My critique of the action?" he smiled a little. "I don't know; I've been here only a week. In fact I hardly know whether to consider this garrison or bivouac area."

“But you are retired,” I mentioned, “you won’t be moving—”

“I am retired, yes,” he said. “But any one of us, you know, may receive his transfer orders in any mail.—Oh, orderly!” then turning to me, “What may I offer you to drink?”

We settled on something; I forget what it was, because when the “orderly” appeared I recognized him, in spite of the stiff white coat, a little too long for him, and the newly-creased sleeves that he obviously sort of hated to break, as Ninety-eight, a lean colored boy I used to go fishing with on Uncle Jerry’s farm up in Twiggs County. (He was named after his father, who claimed that was the temperature that stirred him to his

greatest efficiency,—which wasn’t saying much.)

“Well, Ninety-eight!” I said to him standing there in the doorway with his heels together and his shoulders thrown back so far they pulled his coat into a great wrinkle across the top of his chest. But he just grinned tolerantly at me, the uninitiated civilian, looking straight to the front.

Cousin Willy told him to bring our drinks out to the gun emplacement.

“I beg your pardon!” I said.

“This is a very extraordinary position,” he interrupted me, leading me out through the back door and into a yard that began to drop off quite rapidly into the valley. He paused on

a freshly-made path through the rank Bermuda grass and lifted his open hand in a gesture at the crest of the hill; I didn't know whether to expect a Revolutionary cannon or a machine-gun nest. The only thing observable to the eye was some grass-covered mounds about ten feet high on the lower side of the hill and circling round with their tops almost level until they disappeared. "Confederate breastworks," said Cousin Willy.

We climbed up on top where two or three sacrilegious cedar trees were ignorantly growing and sat down on a pair of camp stools with folding backs. "A very canny strongpoint," he said with a smile of pride for the profession. "You see that road over

there?" He handed me a pair of Zeiss glasses.

In a far break of the trees on the ridge you could see the pink road over which one of Sherman's columns had been expected to advance on Fredericksville, but had not,—to the, at heart, considerable chagrin of the citizens, who believed that their town was of just as great military importance as Atlanta and who, I suspect, have never, since the invaders passed some forty miles to the west, felt quite the same toward the capital, having toward it some of that semi-dormant malice that a spinster is likely to have toward a wayward sister who has, so to speak, been through the mill.

I gave the road a polite glance; it was as deserted as it had been in '64. But when I handed the glasses back to Cousin Willy he steadied them against one of the cedars and gave the road a thorough going-over.

When Ninety-eight brought our drinks, he passed round behind the tree, not to interrupt the colonel's field of vision. "There could be a Cossack post in those woods to the right," he said; then possibly hearing my thirsty rattle of the ice, he put the binoculars away.

"Well," I said, "there's hardly much danger of that now."

He looked at me in silence for a moment, then he said portentously, "Any populated center, Albert, is always in danger. Call in your sentries

and the enemy appears."

This was getting pretty technical for me and I turned the conversation to his retirement.

"Yes," he said cheerfully, "Uncle Sam has turned the old horse out to graze,—or I suppose nowadays one ought to say 'put the jacks under the old armored car.'"

"Oh, no," I said deprecatingly, not wanting him to be dejected that his active service was over.

"In a way, I've been looking forward to it."

"You have a lot of old friends here, Cousin Willy," I said.

"Yes, there's Clyde Manadue and Sterling and Jesse Bibb and—"

"Enough for a good Saturday afternoon poker game," I suggested.

“I look upon retirement, Albert, as merely being assigned to a new post,—and there are few more salutary prescriptions for a man’s health than the one contained in his transfer orders: a new command means a new point of view, new problems, new solutions—”

I felt, in truth, a little sorry for him. I supposed he, naturally enough, wished to put the best face possible on it for his own peace of mind, but I could not see how being assigned to the Fredericksville station offered, to say the most, much opportunity for advancement. This was a quiet sector; I had lived there all my life and was accustomed to it and even I was fondly hoping to get time some day to write a novel that would call me

away. But to somebody like Cousin Willy, who had touched upon most of the inhabited world in his duties, or at any rate most of it that was civilized enough to require the presence of the militia, a tour of duty in a theater as inactive as Fredericksville would have seemed to me a considerable letdown. I felt that the story of Fredericksville was epitomized in those earthworks the Home Guard had thrown up there: the expected action seemed always to pass us by, some forty miles to the north, south, east, or west.

He questioned me about the city, as if I had been a scout with blackened face just in from reconnaissance. I surprised myself at how little I was really competent to tell him; I knew

the specific Fredericksville that crossed a reporter's path, but I couldn't help him out much with the Fredericksville that was one of hundreds of American cities.

"There are about sixty thousand people in Fredericksville," I said in the voice of the guidebook; "twenty or twenty-five thousand colored. Most of the white population are native Americans of Anglo Saxon origin and we live under the democratic form of government," I smiled, hoping, frankly, to disguise the nakedness of my ignorance by the confusion of humor, a little trick as natural to us Southerners as the clouding of the water to a competent octopus.

"How many Citizens voted in the last election?" said Cousin Willy

persistently.

"Oh, four or five thousand," I guessed.

"Do you mean fifty-five thousand took no part in the action!"

"Well," I said, "I shouldn't put it exactly that way—"

"Why was there such a shattering percent unfit for service?"

I couldn't answer that and I was glad Ninety-eight rescued me with the announcement of supper; discussing our local democratic form of government is a very ticklish proposition at best. We get round the difficulty by creating a sort of halo for the adjective "non-political," which puts politics in about the same category as many other elemental functions not usually considered po-



lite conversation for mixed company.

“Perhaps Fredericksville has been neglecting its history,” he said as we sat down at table, without much apparent connection to what we had been talking about. “History is an ennobling study,—ennobling, as a man usually seems ennobled in death. History is humanity’s death mask and on it even our errors assume some dignity. In times when you are hard pressed, to remember that your grandfather fought through strengthens your arm; I don’t see why it wouldn’t be the same with a town.—That’s rice Filipino style, Albert; help yourself. It looks very good, orderly.”

. . . Altogether, I enjoyed the evening. I didn’t know just what to make of Cousin Willy, but I didn’t try to

make anything much beyond the general belief that he had been instinctively right in choosing to return to the South to pass the rest of his life. It has long been my conviction that, whereas most places upon this earth are forced back for their distinguishing characteristic upon some inanimate geological or architectural peculiarity, such as the springs at White Sulphur or the bay at San Francisco or the skyline at New York, the South on the other hand, being predominantly coastal plain and sand hill and red clay, and without many breath-taking dispositions of terrain or masonry, offers more simply breath-taking dispositions of character, and abounds, from sea island to Smokies, in all manner of startling configura-