

Elliott Springs Wrote Fiction

Elliott White Springs of Fort Mill was one of the best-known writers of fiction during the 1920s. His stories were usually semi-autobiographical, blending fiction and factual episodes.

His best work centered on his World War I aviation exploits. Some critics credit Springs with establishing a cycle of wartime aviation stories.

Springs had his first story published by his prep school magazine when he was 12 years old. *The Lancaster News* was given a copy by his father. The title was "A Son Saves His Father," and it told of a 12-year-old boy slipping through enemy lines during the Civil War to rescue his father from an enemy prison. He wrote with a flair unusual for one so young.

Springs came out of World War I as America's fifth-ranked flying ace. He wrote about his experiences in "Warbirds and Ladybirds," initially titled *Diary of an Unknown Aviator*. The book started as a privately printed, 210-copy edition. He printed a copy for each of the men with whom he served or for their families.

Twenty years later, Springs wrote about the original "Warbirds" publication: "My father-in-law (Harold Ley) saw possibilities in it, and arranged with George H. Doran for it to be published in book form. Before I knew it, "Liberty" got hold of it and decided to publish it serially. "Liberty" only intended to print excerpts from it in three installments but, after the first one appeared, they realized they had a valuable piece of property and ran it in 15 issues. It did not bring a great deal of money, actually, but I gave my share of the proceeds to Mac's (his friend John MacGavock Grider) two boys."

For years, Springs tried to convince people that the writing was that of Grider, who had been killed in action. Grider had written a skeletal diary that Springs used, but most of the writing was Springs' own. A major reason Springs insisted on the fiction of Grider's authorship was for Grider's children to receive the royalties.

"Warbird" is still in print and has become an aviation classic popular in England.

When "McClure's" magazine published "Big Eyes and Little Mouth," a narrative of the American Expeditionary Force's exploits in World War I, Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell praised it as "one of the most dramatic and accurate pictures of modern warfare published since the war."

Springs' short stories, which numbered in the hundreds, appeared in "Cosmopolitan," "Redbook," "College Humor," "Smart Set," "Liberty," "McClure's," "U.S. Air Services" and other aviation magazines. He also wrote plays and Hollywood screen scripts.

In addition to "Warbirds," Springs wrote the following books: "Nocturne Militaire," "Leave Me With a Smile," "Above the Bright Blue Sky," "Contact," "In the Cool of the Evening," "The Rise and Fall of Carol Banks," "Pent-up in a Penthouse," and "Cotton Mills in 1931."

"Clothes Make the Man" was written in 1948 as a Christmas gift for his friends and employees. The book, bound in cloth woven in his mills, contained mill history reprinted from the "Springs Bulletin," a company newspaper for which he frequently wrote but never under his own name. "Clothes Make the Man" also had some short stories he had never

had printed and odds and ends of his correspondence over the years, much of it dealing with Springs' Springmaid advertising campaign.

The famous Springmaid ads created a tremendous demand for Springs sheets and pillowcases. It is interesting that Springs made about \$250,000 during the 1920s from his books, short stories and film plays, but 20 years later he made millions off his one line: "A buck well spent on a Springmaid sheet," and its advertising sequels.

Louise Pettus is a local historian. This monthly article is presented by the Fort Mill Downtown Association. Check out its Web site at www.fortmilledowntown.com for more information.