



BATTLE OF SEATTLE



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OF SEATTLE

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THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE

DOUGLAS BOND



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For
Gillian, Giles, and Desmond;
Cedric and Ashley;
Rhodric, Tori, Gwenna, and Amelia;
Brittany and Jesse

“When you were born you cried and others rejoiced; live your life so that when you die you rejoice and others cry.”

Native American saying

“I have been called to preach to sinners and you are the chief sinners of the territory.”

Circuit-riding preacher, Joab Powell, speaking to territorial legislators on the eve of the Indian War in the 1850s

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EXPLANATORY

Historical fiction, an oxymoron to some, ought to provide an authentic lens into the life and times of real people living and often struggling through an-all-too-real historical moment. When done well, historical fiction should give us a more accurate and living perspective on the conflicts and challenges faced by historical figures in a given time—my goal in this historical novel.

William Tidd was a genuine, though lesser-known, historical figure who played a behind-the-scenes role as an express rider carrying dispatches in the Puget Sound Indian War (1855–1856). His equally genuine counterpart among the Indians, Charlie Salitat, was known for his daring and tragic midnight ride warning American settlers of the imminent Indian uprising, a ride that earned him the title, “Paul Revere of Puget Sound.”

Woven into the fiction will be an accurate rendering of elements of the history of the Indian War in the Pacific Northwest, including the climactic Battle for Seattle (January, 1856). In the interest of the pace of the story, I have taken

literary license by compressing some historical events into a shorter time period. See the timeline on page 305.

While readers will encounter the struggles of various historical figures in this history, I have also taken the liberty of combining some historical characters to create one of my fictional ones in this tale. Noclas (Chinook Jargon for “Black face”), the aging mountain man neighbor of my protagonist, is a combination of three very real figures in PNW history: George Bush (1790–1864), African American freeman settler near Olympia, Washington; George Washington (1818–1905), another black freeman settler and founder of the town of Centralia, Washington; and celebrated mountain man, Jedidiah Smith (1799–1831), called “The Praying Trapper.” My amalgamation of Noclas acknowledged, I have, nevertheless, attempted to be authentic in the portrayal of the beliefs, values, and contribution of these three lesser-known figures in PNW history.

1

HOT PURSUIT

His heart thundering in his ears, William Tidd's breath came and went in hot frantic blasts. For an instant the pounding in his ears reminded him of a tribal council seated cross-legged on the floor of a smoky longhouse, war drums thud-thudding ominously. He had some experience of longhouses and of drums.

Moments ago he had been minding his own business making his way silently down a game trail in the Douglas fir forest to the southeast of a prairie more than a mile square, now a Hudson Bay Company field for pasturing sheep. William took some pride in his own ability to move with stealth in the forest, the soles of his deer-hide moccasins making mute contact with the narrow track, cushioned with a layer of dead, mineral-hued fir needles, and spongy moss. Walking softly in the forest, minding his own business.

Then came a tingle at the back of his neck. Vague uneasiness crawled down his spine like bedbugs. There was no mistaking it, the rustling chatter of a ground squirrel—but this was a forest, a forest with squirrels in it. Forests make noises, are never silent. “William Tidd, you're a-letting

fear make war on your senses,” he told himself aloud, but his throat felt dryer than it ought to. Without needing to tell himself, he quickened his pace, lengthened his stride. The sooner he got back to where he had tethered Prophet, the better.

Then came the knocking hammer of a woodpecker. “And there’s red-breasted sapsuckers in a forest,” he murmured, nodding as if to reassure himself, “a-hunting for bugs or fixing to attract a mate.” Then the snap of a twig. William halted, sucking in his breath, every nerve in his body taut like a drawn bowstring. He swallowed hard and strained to hear. There was no mistaking what he heard next: the mournful hoot-hooting of an owl. William’s blood ran cold.

That was no owl. He was being followed. There was no denying it now. Behind him was a sound far more ominous than the beating of his own heart. William had read in books that the noble savage makes no noise when moving in the forest. Not this Indian.

The time for a mere quickening of the pace was over and gone. William bolted, running for what he feared would be his life. Authors who wrote books about Indians and said nonsensical things about how they moved silently in the forest ought to be shot. So William thought as he gasped for air. If they have no intimate experience with the vast timbered nave of the Puget Sound wilderness they should stick with writing stories about polite cabins on tranquil little ponds bordering proper New England villages—but not about red flesh-and-blood Indians! He almost shouted the last.

As he vaulted over a rotten stump, William craned his neck searching the undergrowth for his pursuer, his eyes rolling and wide. Why had he dismounted in the first place? On horseback he could easily elude his pursuer, leave him far behind in the forest. It was too late for that; Prophet was tethered to a low branch on a madrone tree—several hundred yards behind him.

Cutting sharply to the right, William abandoned the game trail and plunged headlong into the dense undergrowth, bracken fern and Oregon grape clawing at his legs. It was no good trying to be silent now.

He lunged down a steep gulch littered with decomposing maple leaves, shaley rock, enshrouded with a layer of damp moss leading precipitously downward to the creek bed. It would be impossible for anyone, sure-footed Indian or otherwise, to move silently on such terrain. This one certainly was not. The Indian in pursuit was clamoring and stumbling, and hitching his breath as his footing gave way beneath him, or as a branch from a slide maple snapped into his face, making at least as much noise as was William.

His heart pounding in his ears, William leapt forward. Wincing as his feet lost contact with the organic rubble beneath him, he landed hard on his back end, glissading on his posterior for several yards. He clenched his teeth, resisting the urge to scream. Suddenly his feet came in contact with a rotten log, and the momentum snapped him upright, his footing precariously regained. William grabbed at branches of salal as the gulch steepened. If only he didn't begin cartwheeling. He had to get away, but cartwheeling could lead to real damage, broken bones, arms or legs—or a broken skull.

On this terrain, he dared not turn back to look at his pursuer. He didn't need to. By the lumbering and skittering behind him, William deduced that he had little more than a few yards' lead, the gap closing fast. And there was a new sound. The hot, steady blasts of air coming from the lungs of his pursuer. Closer, closer came the Indian's breath. As he gulped in air, William felt that he could smell those hot blasts of air—smoked salmon, steamed clams, boiled camus root.

“Boshton!” hollered the Indian. It was the usual name coastal Indians called white men: Boston, a faraway place they had never seen but that had come to represent the

mysterious fountainhead of all white men. William desperately wanted to turn and look. The voice sounded familiar somehow. But he needed his full concentration on the steep terrain or else.

“Yow!” The Indian squealed. Behind and above William heard more skittering and the sounds of rock clattering like breaking plates, and the Indian’s body plunging and thumping in the moss and rubble, and more hitching of his fishy breath. William figured the sure-footed native had lost his footing on the same obstacle that had nearly overturned him an instant ago.

Leaping downward, William hoped to widen the gap as the Indian stumbled behind him. If only he had his horse, that is, the horse that he wished was his horse. Steep as the gulch was, Prophet would have kept his footing; William knew he would have.

Since arriving in Puget Sound with his pa and sister five years ago, William had taken to horses. It had all been oxen and mules before then. The Indians on Muck Creek knew horses; all the tribes living on the shores of the inland sea were canoe Indians, but the ones who lived on the grasslands and forests watered by the Nisqually River, they were canoe Indians *and* horse Indians. Like no other tribe, the Nisqually knew how to breed horses. Nisqually-bred horses could withstand the perpetual damp and chill of the climate, they could tramp tirelessly through the dense, rugged terrain of the region, and they could plunge in and ford the glacial waters of the rivers that emptied into the numbing cold of Puget Sound. Sure as he was on his own two feet, William had long felt more secure anywhere when riding Prophet.

“Boshton!” There it was again. The Indian had recovered his footing and, by the sounds of it, had made up for lost time. “Boshton!” The Indian was relentless. He was almost on top of him. William’s lungs felt like they were aflame. If only he had a Hudson Bay trade musket. He wouldn’t

be in this predicament if he'd had a primed musket at the ready. Muskets cost too much. Now it would come down to a face-to-face, hand-to-hand (William groped for his bowie knife), a blade-to-blade fight with an Indian.

Worse than the Indian's unflagging pursuit, the clamoring racket of his footfalls coming ever closer, worse than his savage, hot breath, worse than the fear that twitched in William's every nerve, was what he heard next. Laughter. The cackling hilarity of the Indian's laughter was too much. It unhinged William's confidence; his frontier self-reliance shriveled with each outburst.

"Hyuk-hyuk-hyuk!" came the Indian's laughter.

Clamping his hands on his ears to quell panic, William desperately tried to ward off the haunting laughter that seemed to hover on the damp and mist of the forest. Mammoth Douglas firs higher up the gulch had given way to hemlock, then red cedar and alder trees as the floor of the gulch came up to meet him. Woolly green moss blanketed the trunks of alder trees and damp rotting logs and stumps on the forest floor, looking like Fort Nisqually sheep at shearing time after a long winter. The trees, the moss and profuse salal, the huckleberry bushes—all these should have absorbed and muffled sounds, yet the Indian's laughter echoed and reverberated throughout the ravine like the wails of an outcast medicine man.

"Hyuk-hyuk-hyuk!" It sounded maniacal to William's ears. It unnerved and terrified him.

Just ahead, the steep gulch ended in a gravelly streambed. It was time. With a final burst of energy, William flung himself across the creek. He landed on a rotten log, but quickly regained his footing. He spun around and faced his pursuer, feet planted wide, knife at the ready.

For an instant, William heard the Indian, *"Hyuk-hyuk-hyuk!"* but he could not see him, concealed as he was in the dense forest. Any second, the Indian would burst from the undergrowth and be upon him.

William readied himself. He didn't relish a knife fight with an Indian. But he was not one to give up easily. *You may be laughing now*, thought William, planting his feet and gripping his knife more tightly. *But I'll have the last laugh—or take you with me.*

It's 1855 in the Pacific Northwest, and hostility between white settlers and native tribes is rising quickly, leading to deaths on both sides. As tensions mount, young William Tidd joins Charles Eaton's Rangers on a mission to hunt down Chief Leschi of the Nisqually. If they can stop him, they may be able to end the bloodshed before it gets worse . . . but not everyone wants peace with the enemy. Is all-out war inevitable?

Through skirmishes, raids, close calls, and betrayal—William's assumptions, beliefs, courage, and friendships will all be challenged in a few breakneck weeks.

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“Bond’s latest historical novel is a compelling and indispensable addition to a lesser-known chapter in American history. Bond’s fresh and engaging portrayal of the tragic clash of cultures in the Puget Sound Indian Wars of 1855–56 not only confronts today’s cultural and racial tensions but also provides hope for the future. Essential reading for every student of American history.”

—LARRY FAULK, Former Washington State Senator

“Readers won’t even realize they are learning true history—wonderful for young adults, truly for any age. . . . Delightful book, difficult to put down.”

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