ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

HISTORICAL

A Sheepish Man
Maurice Segal
AuthorHouse
978-1-4567-8949-7
Two Stars (out of Five)

World War II stories continue to hold appeal for book lovers and filmgoers alike. *A Sheepish Man* is yet another title that capitalizes on the fascination with the period.

This is the story of Colonel Robert Thornton White, a seasoned World War I veteran with the South African Air Force (SAAF), and Joan Tyler, a Canadian nurse twenty years his junior. Some may classify Maurice Segal's book as a romance, but his novel places strong emphasis on strategic and military minutiae to the point of overwhelming the reader.

Spliced into the book are cumbersome chunks of military narrative, along with italicized correspondence containing technical expertise on the operation of aircraft. In this example, Robert speaks with his son: "The Tiger Moth does not carry guns. It has a 120 h.p. engine, but is not quite as fast as the Sopwith Pup with its 100 h.p. engine and its Lewis machine gun that I had flown 22 years earlier. So much for progress."

High in moral character, the colonel is opposed to the targeting of civilians often practiced by Britain's Royal Air Force. He works in an advisory capacity, determining the extent of SAAF participation in missions. Though an outstanding hero on whom to build a story, his character is not developed enough to warrant the reader's empathy, and his relationship with Joan remains a bond that is merely stated at times, rather than demonstrated. For her part, she must choose between Robert and a past boyfriend, a plastic surgeon who intends to regain her affection.

In need of rigorous editorial assistance, the novel falls short of industry standards. The author is knowledgeable and bases his descriptions on research, but allows the situation and setting to take precedence over the story.

Encountering elements such as "A Short History of the South African Liberator Squadrons" interrupts the creative and natural flow a reader expects in a work of fiction: "On August 8/9 and August 13/14 of this year, 34 and 31 Squadrons together with the U.S.A.A.F. and the R.A.F. 178 Squadrons flew to Warsaw to deliver supplies of armaments during the

uprising of the Polish resistance… . The Liberators were flown with flaps down to reduce air speed to 215 kilometres per hour at a height of 150 meters above ground level."

In addition to its textbook-style content, Segal's novel is also hindered by inappropriate packaging. The front cover depicts a tiny sheep in the cockpit of a military plane, an attempt at symbolism that will lead the reader to question whether the book was written with serious intent. The back-cover copy is riddled with basic errors a proofreader should have corrected—another strike against credibility and a common peril in hasty production methods.

Maurice Segal has drawn from his own air force experience to write this book. *A Sheepish Man* is his first novel. The plot and the protagonists show potential. This story, which appears to be in the draft stage, could be a winner with proper development.

Julia Ann Charpentier