Clarion Review

General

APO 123
John Henry Brebbia
BookSurge
978-1-4392-7050-9
Two Stars (out of Five)

Part *M*\A*S*\H*, part* Catch-22*, John Henry Brebbia's* APO 123 *seeks to capture the mundaneness of life on a post-Second World War army base in France, from the point of view of a group of junior officers in the army's legal division.*

Brebbia, who served in the Judge Advocate General's Corps at the end of the 1950s, offers his story through the persona of Lt. Marc Anthony Bertolini, who defends (and eventually prosecutes) members of the military for various crimes, both petty and major.

The bulk of the nearly 600-page novel deals with the base-life activities of Bertolini and his colleagues, including martinet, spit-and-polish superiors, privateers, indigenous neighbors, and even the occasional courtroom-related activity.

Brebbia aptly describes the drudgery of military conscription, especially in a non-war situation. Bertolini and his cronies band together to infuriate their superiors with a discernible lack of respect and cooperation, and bring their adversaries to exasperation in pitched legal battles. But, like the members of the 4077th, they also have too much time on their hands, and spend many hours drinking and playing *cherchez la femme*.

Many of the secondary characters are straight out of central casting. One in particular is written in a heavy New York accent, although no one else is given distinguishing vocal qualities. It's inconsistencies such as these that prevent *APO 123* from reaching its potential.

Brebbia is obviously well-versed in his subject, perhaps too much. There's a great deal of jargon, and certain lengthy sections do not advance the story, other than to drive home previously-made observations. There's little in the way of life-and-death tension, but perhaps that's the point: military life goes on without a lot of fanfare (as opposed to actual war-driven storylines). Otherwise, some readers might find the lengthy list of characters at the beginning of the novel a bit off-putting. Brebbia might have considered substantially shortening his book, or

at least spent more time re-writing and editing; certain readers might also get the distinct impression that the author has run out ideas over the last 100 pages or so.

In spite of its imperfections, *APO 123* is a painstakingly crafted combination of research, sentiment, and storytelling that will appeal to many fans of this genre.

Ron Kaplan