

A Bell for Adano

By John Hersey

THE STORY THUS FAR: The American troops arrived at Adano, a seaport in Italy, with Major Victor Joppolo, the Amgot officer in charge. Sergeant Borth, an M.P., was in charge of security. The Major set out at once to win the confidence of the citizens and promised to replace the town bell which the Germans had taken. General Marvin, chief of American forces in that section, was delayed at the outskirts of Adano, by a cart driven by Errante Gaetano. The General ordered the cart thrown off the road and the mule shot. He then ordered Major Joppolo to see that all carts were kept out of the city in the future. The orders were issued against the wishes and better judgment of the Major.

CHAPTER VII

Erba, like the town, had run dry. He turned to his friends. One of them said: "Erba, the proclamation, the matter of being clean."

Erba said: "Oh yes, the proclamation. In one proclamation, Mister Major, I forget the number of the proclamation, there are so many, does the number matter, Mister Major?"

"No, Erba. I am sorry, there are too many proclamations." And the Major turned to Erba's friends, who were a little more intelligent and would understand. "That is the fault of the authorities. I did not wish to post so many proclamations. That is not my fault. I am sorry. The number does not matter, Erba."

Erba said: "The number does not matter. The proclamation says it is necessary to be clean. It says the people must be clean with water, and even the streets must be clean. Our streets, which have been the same since the time of—who was it the time of, Afronti?"

Afronti roared: "Since the time of Pietro of Aragona and of Roberto King of Naples."

Erba said: "The streets have been the same. Now the proclamation speaks of being clean with water. There is much sameness which has accumulated on the streets since the time of those men of whom Afronti speaks. This being clean takes much water. My cart is on the other side of the bridge, Mister Major."

Major Joppolo said: "The cleanliness is very important, Erba. Let us make Adano the cleanest town in the whole province of Vicinamare."

Erba caught the challenge. His eye brightened. "We will do this thing, even if the sameness has piled up since the time of Jesus, Mister Major." Then his eye went dull again. "But my cart is on the other side of the bridge. You have said it may not pass."

The Major said: "Let the next one speak. You. Your name." And he pointed at the third man with his pen.

Erba said: "Thank you, Mister Major."

The third man jumped up. He was quite fat but comparatively handsome. His hair was plastered down with something off the axle of his cart, and his black coat was the newest looking of the four. "Basile Giovanni, Mister Major," he said.

"You wish?"

Basile spoke gravely and slowly. "Mister Major," he said, "the worst of all the things about the carts is the food. You can see, Mister Major—and he ran his hands down over the size of his belly—that I am a man who can speak of food with understanding. This matter of the carts does not hurt me. I am like a man with money in the bank. I have something to draw on in hard times. But there are others in Adano who are not so lucky. Gallio Bartolomeo is so thin that you can count the several teeth of his mouth even when his lips are closed. The nine children of Raffaella who is the wife of Manetto have big bellies, but their bellies are big only with the gas of hunger. Shall I name others who are very thin?"

The Major said: "No, go on."

Basile said: "I am the one to tell you about the food and the carts. You have not seen my cart, have you, Mister Major?"

"I may have. I have seen many of them."

And then, with great craft, Basile said: "There is nothing in all the proclamations, even though it takes you a week to read them, which says that the Americans came to Adano in order to make people die of hunger. And there is nothing in all the proclamations which refers to such things as the dead mule of Errante Gaetano. Why then do we have this thing of the carts?"

The Major reached for the field telephone, cranked the handle and said: "Give me Rowboat Blue Forward."

While he waited for an answer, the Major said to Basile gruffly: "Sit down."

"Hello. This Rowboat Blue Forward? Captain Purvis, please."

"Purvis? Joppolo. Listen."

"No, now this is serious, Purvis. This thing about the carts. I've made up my mind. By one sentence General Marvin destroyed the work of nine days in this town. I know it may mean a court martial, but I've decided to countermand his order. What?"

"I know I'm taking a chance, but I've got to do it. We can't let these people starve."

"I have to do it, Purvis. This town is dying. No food can get into the town if the carts don't come. The town depends on the carts for

water; there isn't any running water here, you know that. The people can't go out into the fields to work in the morning. Taking carts away from this town is like taking automobiles away from a country town in the States. You just can't do it all at once. People will die. I'm not here to kill people."

Captain Purvis evidently put up an argument.

Finally the Major said: "Purvis, I order you, on my authority, to start letting carts back into the town, beginning now. I take absolute and complete responsibility for countermanding General Marvin's order."

"Listen friend, if we never took chances around here, this place would go right on being a Fascism. All right, it's on my responsibility."

The three cartmen sat through the telephone conversation not comprehending. To judge by their faces they seemed to think that Major Joppolo was devising some punishment for them. They had the habit of fear, and they thought that this man of authority would of course be exactly like the men of authority they had known for so long.

Major Joppolo hung up. He turned to the three cartmen and said: "You may bring your carts into the town."

For a long moment they did not understand. Then they stood up and began shouting and waving their caps.

"We thank you, we thank you and we kiss your hand," they roared.

"Oh, Mister Major, there has never been a thing like this," the fat one named Basile shouted, "that the



"Their bellies are big ones with the gas of hunger."

poor should come to the Palazzo di Citta, and that their request should be granted."

"Especially," shouted the loud one named Afronti, "especially without a wait of two to three weeks."

"It was not necessary to write you a letter," Basile shouted.

"The police did not even examine us," roared Afronti.

The slow one named Erba finally got out a sentence. It was one of the few beautiful sentences he ever managed to say, and one of the longest. He said: "When the people come and take water from my cart to drink for their thirst, I shall say to them: 'Thank the Mister Major, my friends.'"

Major Joppolo said: "Get out of here. You are wasting my time and the time of all the people who are waiting outside that door." And he gestured impatiently at the men.

The cartmen went out, shouting and congratulating America.

The command post of the M.P.'s was housed in the Fascio, the one-story building which had been the headquarters of the Fascist Party. It was simply a string of rooms facing on the Via Dogana, just off the Piazza. The walls of the rooms were covered with pictures of various Fascist heroisms. Each room had a couple of desks, a filing cabinet, three or four uncomfortable chairs, and that was all. The building made a very convenient headquarters for both the M.P.'s and especially for Sergeant Borth's security detail, because the filing cabinets contained complete records on practically everyone in town, both party members and anti-Fascists.

On the morning when Major Joppolo called about the carts, there were three men in the main office of the M.P.'s. Besides Captain Purvis, there were Technical Sergeant Frank Trapani, who kept Captain Purvis's records and was more or less his secretary, and Corporal Chuck Schultz, who was the M.P. on guard.

Captain Purvis put down the telephone and said: "That Joppolo, I think he's nuts."

Sergeant Trapani said: "What's he done now, sir?"

"Oh," the Captain said, "he's always talking about democracy like

it was his mother. He ought to relax and have a little fun. Bet he's never been drunk in his life."

Corporal Schultz said: "He can have this Dago wine." He put his hands over his belly and made a face.

The Captain said: "Besides, he's going to get us all in trouble."

Sergeant Trapani said: "What's he done, sir?"

An Italian stuck his head in the door just out of curiosity.

"Get out of here, Trapani, tell that wop to get out of here and stay out." Captain Purvis did not speak a word of Italian, and it made him feel frustrated. Trapani told the curious one to move along.

"The carts," Captain Purvis said. "Joppolo has the nerve to tell General Marvin he knows where he can stick the carts, he wants them to come back into town."

Sergeant Trapani said: "It wasn't a very wise order in the first place, I think maybe the Major's right."

"Right?" Captain Purvis put his palm against his cheek in a gesture of amazement. "Why, man, General Marvin'll shoot him and us too. What do you think this man's army would be like if everybody just did what he wanted and went around countermanding orders every day? We got little enough discipline in our army anyhow without going around ignoring orders, especially from generals." Captain Purvis had been commissioned just eight months. He was very military.

"Yes, sir," Sergeant Trapani said. He knew what to say when his Captain started lecturing on discipline.

"Well, I got my orders," the Captain said. "I got to go out and take the guards off the road by the bridge and the sulphur works. But listen, I'm not going to burn for this guy Joppolo. He's all right, but he's just too serious. I'd sure like to see him high just once."

Corporal Schultz said: "Last night, oh, I'll never drink that stuff again."

"Listen," the Captain said. "I don't want to get in trouble and you don't either. We got to carry out this order and let the carts back in, but if General Marvin should drive back through this town, we'd all get hung for it. Just to cover ourselves, we'll make out a report saying just what happened, that General Marvin ordered us to keep the carts out, Trapani, and send it to G-one of the division."

"Yes, sir," Captain Purvis left. Sergeant Trapani said to Schultz: "That's a fine note, General Marvin's liable never to come back here, and if he did he'd probably never notice the carts. But once you get the thing on paper, it's just a sure way to ruin the Major. And he's so right about these carts anyway."

Corporal Schultz said: "Don't bother me, I got a headache of my own this morning."

Sergeant Trapani rolled a slip of purple paper, off a Fascist pad, into his typewriter. He wrote: "For Lieutenant Colonel W. W. Norris, G-1, 49th Division. 'From Captain N. Purvis, 123rd M. P. Company, Adano. 'Subject: Mule Carts, town of Adano.'"

"1. On July 19, orders were received from General Marvin, 49th Division, to keep all mule carts out of the town of Adano. Guards were posted at bridge over Rosso River and at Caepardo Sulphur Refinery. Order carried out."

"2. On July 20, guards were removed on order of Major Victor Joppolo, Civil Affairs Officer, town of Adano, because carts were essential to town and town was in bad shape without same."

Sergeant Trapani read over what he had written.

Then he said: "Schultz, listen to this, do you think this'll get the Major in trouble?" And he read the report out loud. "I thought that part about the town needing the carts might make it okay for the Major."

"What's this Major to you?" Schultz said. "If he can't have any fun, what's he to you?"

Sergeant Trapani said: "Oh, nothing. I just hate to see a guy get in trouble when he's trying to do right."

Schultz said: "Well, then, why don't you let the order get lost in Captain Purvis's papers? Don't bother me, I feel awful."

Sergeant Trapani looked hard at Corporal Schultz. Then he stood up and went over to Captain Purvis's desk and put the purple slip in the middle of a disorderly pile of papers which Captain Purvis touched only in adding to it.

"Good idea," Trapani said. "You're Eytalian," Schultz said, "what do these Eytalians put in their booze?"

Early the next week, Giuseppe the interpreter came to Major Joppolo in some embarrassment.

"I'm a sorry, boss," he said. "About what?" the Major said.

"Boss, you say you want a go out with a blonde Tina. I'm a sorry, boss."

"I never said any such thing, Giuseppe. What's got into you?"

"Boss, you tell a me other day you want a see Tina's old man."

"Yes, I do want to see him."

"I'm a sorry, boss."

"Well, what's that got to do with going out with the blonde?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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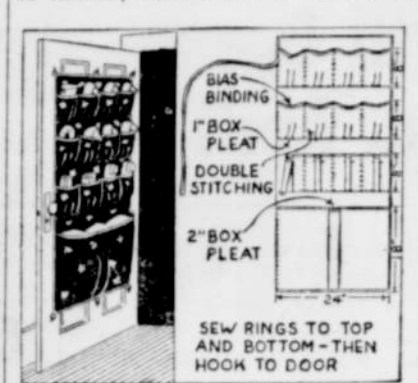
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