



# A Bell for Adano

By John Hersey

## FOREWORD

Major Victor Joppolo, U. S. A., was a good man. You will see that. It is the whole reason why I want you to know his story.

He was the Amgot officer of a small Italian town called Adano. He was more or less the American mayor after our invasion.

Amgot, as you know, stood for Allied Military Government Occupied Territory. The authorities decided, shortly after the happenings of this story, that the word Amgot had an ugly Germanic sound, and they heard that the two syllables of the word, when taken separately, were Turkish words unmentionable in translation. So they decided to call it A.M.G. and forget about the Occupied Territory.

That was later, though. When I knew him, Major Joppolo was Amgot officer of Adano, and he was good.

There were probably not any really bad men in Amgot, but there were some stupid ones (and still are, even though the Turkish embarrassment has been taken care of). You see, the theories about administering occupied territories all turned out to be just theories, and in fact the thing which determined whether we Americans would be successful in that toughest of all jobs was nothing more or less than the quality of the men who did the administering.

That is why I think it is important for you to know about Major Joppolo. He was a good man, though weak in certain attractive, human ways, and what he did and what he was not able to do in Adano represented in miniature what America can and cannot do in Europe. Since he happened to be a good man, his works represented the best of the possibilities.

America is the international country. Major Joppolo was an Italian-American going to work in Italy. Our army has Yugoslavs and Frenchmen and Austrians and Czechs and Norwegians in it, and everywhere our army goes in Europe, a man can turn to the private beside him and say: "Hey, Mac, what's this furniture saying? How much does he want for that bunch of grapes?" And Mac will be able to translate.

## CHAPTER I

Invasion had come to the town of Adano.

An American corporal ran tautly along the dirty Via Favemi and at the corner he threw himself down. He made certain arrangements with his light machine gun and then turned and beckoned to his friends to come forward.

In the Via Calabria, in another part of town, a party of three crept forward like cats. An explosion, possibly a mortar shell, at some distance to the north but apparently inside the town, caused them to fall flat with a splash of dust. They waited on their bellies to see what would happen.

An entire platoon ducked from grave to grave in the Capucin Cemetery high on the hill overlooking town. The entire platoon was scared. They were out of touch with their unit. They did not know the situation. They were near their objective, which was the rocky crest not far off, but they wanted to find out what was going on in the town before they moved on.

All through the town of Adano, Americans were like this. They were not getting much resistance, but it was their first day of invasion, and they were tight in their muscles.

But at one of the sulphur loading jetties at the port a Major with a brief case under his arm stepped from the sliding gangway of LCI No. 9488, and he seemed to be wholly calm.

"Borth," he said to the sergeant who followed him onto the jetty, "this is like coming home, how often I have dreamed this." And he bent over and touched the palm of his hand to the jetty, then dusted his palm off on his woolen pants.

This man was Major Victor Joppolo, who had been named senior civil affairs officer of the town of Adano, representing Amgot. He was a man of medium height, with the dark skin of his parents, who were Italians from near Florence. He had a mustache. His face was round and his cheeks seemed cheerful but his eyes were intense and serious. He was about thirty-five.

The sergeant with him was Leonard Borth, an M.P., who was to be in charge of matters of security in Adano: he was to help weed out the bad Italians and make use of the good ones. Borth had volunteered to be the first to go into the town with the Major. Borth had no fear; he cared about nothing. He was of Hungarian parentage, and he had lived many places—in Budapest, where he had taken pre-medical studies, in Rome, where he had been a correspondent for Pester Lloyd, in Vienna, where he had worked in a travel agency, in Marseille, where he had been secretary to a rich exporter, in Boston, where he had been a reporter for the Herald, and in San Francisco, where he sold radios. Still he was less than thirty. He was an American citizen and an enlisted man by choice. To him the whole war was a cynical joke, and he considered his job in the war to make people take themselves less seriously.

When the Major touched Italian

soil, Borth said: "You are too sentimental."

The Major said: "Maybe, but you will be the same when you get to Hungary."

"Never, not me."

The Major looked toward the town and said: "Do you think it's safe now?"

Borth said: "Why not?"

"Then how do we go?"

Borth unfolded a map case deliberately. He put a freckled finger on the celluloid cover and said: "Here, by the Via Barrino as far as the Via of October Twenty-eight, and the Piazza is at the top of the Via of October Twenty-eight."

"October Twenty-eight," the Major said, "what is that, October Twenty-eight?"

"That's the date of Mussolini's march on Rome, in 1922," Borth said. "It is the day when Mussolini thinks he began to be a big shot." Borth was very good at memory.

They started walking. The Major said: "I have lost all count, so what is today?"

"July tenth."

"We will call it the Via of July Ten."

"So you're renaming the streets already. Next you'll be raising monuments, Major Joppolo, first to an unknown soldier, then to yourself. I don't trust you men who are so



"I don't trust you men who are so sentimental,"

sentimental and have too damn much conscience."

"Cut the kidding," the Major said. There was an echo in the way he said it, as if he were a boy having been called wop by others in school. In spite of the gold maple leaf of rank on the collar, there was an echo.

At the corner of the third alley running off the Via of October Twenty-eight, the two men came on a dead Italian woman. She had been dressed in black. Her right leg was blown off and the flies for some reason preferred the dark sticky pool of blood and dust to her stump.

"Awful," the Major said, for although the blood was not yet dry, nevertheless there was already a beginning of a sweet but vomitous odor. "It's a hell of a note," he said, "that we had to do that to our friends."

"Friends," said Borth, "that's a laugh."

"It wasn't them, not the ones like her," the Major said. "They weren't our enemies. My mother's mother must have been like her. It wasn't the poor ones like her, it was the bunch up there where we're going, those crooks in the City Hall."

"Be careful," Borth said, and his face showed that he was teasing the Major again. "You're going to have your office in the City Hall. Be careful you don't get to be a crook too."

"Lay off," the Major said.

Borth said: "I don't trust your conscience, sir, I'm appointing myself assistant conscience."

"Lay off," the Major said, and there was that echo.

Borth said: "Maybe it was a crook's house, how can you tell? Better forget the house and concern yourself with that." He pointed into an alley at some straw and melon seeds and old chicken guts and flies. And Borth added: "No question of guilty or not guilty there, Major. Just something to get clean. You've got some business in that alley, not in that house there."

"I know my business, I know what I want to do, I know what it's like to be poor, Borth."

Borth was silent. He found the seriousness of this Major Joppolo something hard to penetrate.

They came in time to the town's main square, which was called Piazza Progresso. And on that square they saw the building they were looking for.

There was a clock tower on the left hand front corner. On top of the tower there was a metal frame which must have been designed to hold a bell. It was baroque and looked very old. But there was no bell.

On the side of the clock tower big white letters said: "Il Popolo Italiano ha creata col suo sangue l'Impero, lo feconda col suo lavoro e lo difendera contra chiunque colle sue armi."

The Major pointed and said: "See, Borth, even after our invasion it says: 'The Italian people built the Empire with their blood, will make it fruitful with their work and will defend it against anyone with their arms.'"

Borth said: "I know you can read Italian. So can I. Don't translate for Borth."

The Major said: "I know, but think of how that sounds today."

Borth said: "It sounds silly, sure."

The Major said: "If they had seen any fruit of their work, they would have fought with their arms. I bet we could teach them to want to defend what they have. I want to do so much here, Borth."

Borth said: "That sounds silly too. Remember the alley, clean up the alleyway, sir, it is the alley that you ought to concentrate on."

The Major walked across the Piazza up to the big black door of the Palazzo, put his brief case down, took a piece of chalk out of his pocket, and wrote on a panel of the door: "Victor Joppolo, Major, U.S.A., AMGOT, Town of Adano."

Then both men went inside and up some marble stairs, looking all around them as they climbed. They took a turn and went through a door marked Podesta. The office on the other side of that door took Victor Joppolo's breath away.

In the first place, it was so very big. It must have been seventy feet long and thirty feet wide. The ceiling was high, and the floor was marble.

"Say," said Major Joppolo, "this is okay."

"Looks like that office of Mussolini's," Borth said. "Come to think of it, you look quite a lot like Mussolini, sir, except the mustache. Will it be okay with you to be a Mussolini?"

"Cut the kidding," the Major said. "Let's look around."

They went out through the white door at the end of the room and walked through several offices, all of which were crowded with desks and files and bookcases. The files had not been emptied or even disturbed. "Good," said Borth, "lists of names, every one registered and all their records. It'll be easy for us here."

The Major said: "What a difference between my office and these others. It is shameful."

All Borth said was: "Your office?"

When the two went back into the big office there was an Italian there. He had evidently been hiding in the building. He was a small man, with a shiny linen office coat on, with his collar buttoned but no tie.

The small Italian gave the Fascist salute and with an eager face said in Italian: "Welcome to the Americans! Live Roosevelt! How glad I am that you have arrived. For many years I have hated the Fascists."

The Major said in Italian: "Who are you?"

The little man said: "Zito Giuseppe. I have been well known as anti-Fascist."

Major Joppolo said: "What do you do?"

Zito said: "I greet the Americans."

Borth said in an Italian which was heavily accented: "Idiot, what was your job before the disembarkation?"

Zito said: "Zito Giovanni, usher in the Palazzo di Civita, native of Adano."

Major Joppolo said: "You were the usher here?"

"Every day from eight to eight."

"Why did you work for the Fascists if you hated them?"

"I have hated them many years, I am well known as anti-Fascist, I have lived under a great suspicion."

The Major said: "Usher, I love the truth, you will find that out. If you lie to me, you will be in very serious trouble. Do not lie to me. If you were a Fascist, you were a Fascist. There is no need to lie."

Zito said: "One had to eat, one had to earn a living. I have six children."

Major Joppolo said: "So you were a Fascist. Now you will have to learn to live in a democracy. You will be my usher."

The little Zito was delighted.

The Major said: "Do not salute me that way."

Zito bowed and said: "The fascist salute, no sir."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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