

# A Bell for Adano

By John Hersey

THE STORY THUS FAR: The American troops arrived in Adano, with Major Joppolo, the Amgot officer in charge. Sergeant North was in charge of security. The Major was determined to hold the confidence of the people and to replace their bell stolen by the Nazis. Despite orders issued by General Marvin, barring carts from the city, Joppolo recalled the order, to permit food and water to enter the city. Cacopardo tried to furnish the General with information on German troop movements but was tossed out. Tina told the Major about her sweetheart, a prisoner of war, and asked the aid of the Major in locating him. The Major felt some jealousy but promised help.

## CHAPTER XV

Polack said: "A lousy unfair war."

Bill said: "Let's go to bed." So they went to bed. Polack heard Chuck crying in his bedroll, and he said: "Smatter, Chuck, feel sick?" Chuck sobbed: "Hell of a war."

Polack said: "Yeah, hell of a war, Chuck, go to sleep."

When Major Joppolo arrived at his office next morning, two visitors were waiting for him. One was Quattrocchi, owner of the house where Chuck, Bill and Polack were billeted. But Quattrocchi had to wait, because the other was Lord Runcin, one of the Amgot higher-ups. The Allied Military Government was, and still is, a joint British-American affair, and as in the higher echelons of the military command, American and British officers were sandwiched in with each other. Lord Runcin was near the top.

Lord Runcin was a man of about fifty. He had wavy blonde hair and bright eyes which seldom looked straight at whoever he was talking with. He took snuff. Aside from the fact that he had a purely colonial point of view toward the Italians, he was considered to be a pretty good man for Amgot. Not the least of his attributes was his energy. On this particular morning, it was only five minutes past eight, and yet Lord Runcin had been on the road since six thirty, had taken breakfast on American rations in a wheat field, and had been waiting patiently for his Amgot representative in Adano for fifteen minutes. He was making a round of interviews, to try to pick up the best examples of Amgot work from each of the occupied towns.

Major Joppolo showed him into his office. "Wizard quarters," His Lordship said. Lord Runcin affected the slang of his subordinates, but he always seemed to use American slang when talking to his British men, and vice versa, so that many of them understood very little of what he said.

This was the first time Major Joppolo had ever had a tete a tete with a real honest to goodness Lordship. He was surprised to find him wearing shorts and an open collar and no hat at all. His Lordship's deferential manner, as he sat on the other side of the Major's desk asking questions, made Major Joppolo, who had once been a clerk in the Sanitation Department of New York City, feel quite important.

By way of making conversation, His Lordship pointed a thumb in Quattrocchi's direction and said: "Your Italian friend is in quite a flap."

The former Sanitation clerk said: "What was that, Lord? I didn't get that."

"Never mind," said His Lordship. "Well, what kind of a job have you been doing here, Joppolo?"

The former Sanitation clerk said: "Well, I've been doing all right."

"Doing all right, eh?" His Lordship smiled and made a note of the expression in his notebook, for future use. "What are the best things you've done?"

Well, to show how the town was financing itself, there was the muslin. A Liberty Ship had come into Adano harbor, and had discharged a cargo of war materials—bulldozers, bridge girders, tents, and some ammunition. Down in the bottom of one hold the unloaders found six bales of white muslin. The skipper of the ship said he had to unload it. The Quartermaster on the beach would not take it. There were no papers for the muslin, no consignment. The muslin had U. S. Treasury markings on it, so it was obviously Lend-Lease, and it was obviously lost. Major Joppolo heard about it, and seeing the rags on the people of his town, he said he could use it. He called his Civil Supply director and told him about the muslin, and the director gave permission to sell it at a fair price. Major Joppolo put two rolls up for sale, and held the other four in reserve. There was such a shortage of cloth in the town that the two rolls were gone in that many hours.

"Good work, Joppolo," His Lordship said. "What else?"

There was the refugee problem. On the day of the invasion, there were only six or seven thousand people in the town; the others had all run to the hills. Within a few days there were thirty-two or -thirty thousand. The town got badly crowded, and one reason was that there were a lot of refugees from the town of Vicinamare. These people had come down to Adano because the Allies had been bombing Vicinamare pretty hard before the invasion. Now that the battle had gone beyond

Vicinamare, they wanted to go home, but there was no transportation. One day the Major saw a German bus driving down the street. An American soldier was driving it. Major Joppolo said to himself: "I could use that bus." He asked around and found out it belonged to the Engineers. So he called the Motor Officer and said: "I'd like to use that bus of yours one day a week." The Motor Officer said it would be okay with him if the Major had proper permission. So Major Joppolo called the Adano base commander, who said it would be all right. And a few days later one busload of cheering, laughing people had started home. Now Colonel Sartorius, head of Amgot for the Province of Vicinamare, heard about the bus a few days later, and he got sore, and told Major Joppolo not to do that any more. "Sometimes," Major Joppolo said, "I think Colonel Sartorius is an awful dope."

Lord Runcin said: "Do you mean you think he takes harmful drugs?" And his Lordship dipped into his snuffbox.

Major Joppolo said: "Oh no, I just mean he's stupid."

"Dope, eh?" His Lordship said, and put the expression down in his book. "Very good, what else?"

Well, Lord, the people of Adano were so contented under the Americans that they offered of their own accord, without anybody suggesting it, to maintain the little American cemetery on the outskirts of town. So they built a fence around it and painted it white, and Russo the old stonecutter was making headstones, and every Sunday the people took flowers up and put them on the graves of the boys who had died taking the town.

"I say," His Lordship said, "touching. What else?"

Food was pretty good. In the first days, the Major had found five cars



"Can't afford to let these people be too happy, you know."

of wheat on a siding at the railroad station, had had it ground into flour, and had been able to spare some for the neighboring hill towns, which were starving. He had given one baker a very heavy fine, three thousand lira, for baking soggy bread, for refusing to sell it on credit, for refusing to take American invasion lira, and for having dirty hands; and since then the bread had been pretty good from all the bakers. He had taken steps to send the fishermen out. He had arranged for the people to have pasta, which they had not had for eight months. Food was all right.

"Good," said Lord Runcin. Every time His Lordship took snuff, Major Joppolo's eyes nearly popped out of his head and he almost forgot what he was talking about. "Anything else?"

"Oh sure, Lord," he said, "this town is much better off than it was before we came in. You can't imagine how these people were ground down. Why, they're so used to being afraid of officials, and so used to making out forms and being hauled up to court and having carabinieri ask them their names, that they all put their last names first and their first names last, the way it goes on official papers, all the time. Just like the Chinese.

"Lots of them have told me that they're better off now than they were before. For one thing, they can congregate in the streets any time they want and talk about whatever they want to. They can listen to their radios. They know they can get a fair trial out of me. They can come to the City Hall and talk to me any time they want. Mayor Nasta had office hours from twelve to one each day and you had to apply for an audience weeks in advance. I told you about the streets being clean. Oh, there are lots of ways, Lord, and if I have anything to do with it there'll be lots more."

His Lordship was getting a wee bit bored. He dipped more and more frequently into his snuffbox and looked out the window. "Fine show, fine show," he said. "Anything bad in this town?"

"Yes, there is, Lord," the Major said. "One thing."

"I wish all of our towns had just one thing wrong, Joppolo."

"Well, this isn't exactly bad, Lord, and maybe it'll sound a little silly to you."

"My job," said Lord Runcin, taking snuff grandly, "is to make sense out of silly things. What is it, Joppolo?"

"Well sir, this town needs a bell."

"A bell? Why, Major, I heard such a jangling of bells at eight o'clock this morning, you might have thought it was Christmas day."

"Yes, but this is a special bell, Lord."

"I didn't know they had any special bells."

"This one was seven hundred years old. It was just about the most important thing in the town, to hear these people talk. Mussolini took it away . . ." And Major Joppolo told how the bell had been crated up and shipped away to make gun barrels, and how the people had come to him about it, and how he had tried to track it, and had found that it was almost certainly melted down, and at any rate was in unoccupied territory.

Lord Runcin's colonial attitude cropped up. "Surely," he said, "these people can get along with the bells they have. We can't afford to be too sentimental, you know, Joppolo. Can't afford to let these people be too happy, you know. Can't afford to let discipline get too loose."

"Lord, I can't see that happiness and discipline don't go together."

"Young man," said His Lordship, taking a sniff for emphasis, "I think I've had a little more experience in these things than you have."

"Every time I've done something for these people," Major Joppolo said, "I've found they did two things for me just out of thanks."

"Well, what do you want me to do about this bell?"

"I just wondered, Lord, if you could suggest a way to get them another bell. Not just any bell, you know, but one that could take the place of the one they lost."

"Every time I need something out of the ordinary," His Lordship said, "I make application to the United States Army. They have the most extraordinary things, you know. They gave me a jeep. They gave me my choice of pipes, good briar, too, went from Scotland to the U.S.A. and all the way back here to Algiers, by way of the U.S. Army. Some one told me about these electrical razors, and they even got me one of those, but I can't use it because of this Italian current, wrong current, you know, not like our current. I suggest you try the U. S. Army, Joppolo."

"I haven't had quite the same kind of luck with the Army, Lord. You got some friend, or something? Who do you ask for all these fancy things they get you?"

"Just write General Wilson, W. B. Wilson, Quartermaster Depot, Algiers. General Wilson told me he'd try to get me anything I wanted. Just use my name, Joppolo, he'll find you a bell. I'm sure of it."

Major Joppolo wrote down General Wilson's name and address. "Thank you, Lord," the Major said. "That sounds like it might work. I sure want to get a bell for this town."

Lord Runcin clapped his snuffbox shut and stood up. "Well, Joppolo, sounds to me as if you were doing a wizard job here. Keep it up. If you have any troubles, just give me a buzz." And His Lordship left, on the verge of a delicious sneeze which he had been saving in his nostrils for ten minutes.

Major Joppolo stared out of the window, and he was wonderfully happy, with the double happiness of accomplishment and praise for it. He was drawn back from his pleasant daze by a torrent of Italian.

It came from Quattrocchi. "You Americans think you are so civilized, you think you are doing us a favor by disembarking on our shores. You are no better than the Germans. The Germans never did anything in this town such as your men have done. I gave you my house. I did not mind giving you my house. I thought the Americans were civilized. You are the one who told me they are civilized. You said they would take care of my house as if they owned it. You are a liar."

Having been praised so recently, Major Joppolo was stung by this disparage.

"What do you want?" he said sharply. "Stop this babbling and tell me what you want."

"I don't want anything. What I have lost I can never get back, so how can I want anything?"

"If you don't want anything, why are you taking up my time?"

Quattrocchi spoke sarcastically: "I'm sorry if your time is so valuable, Your Worship." And then he spoke angrily: "I have lost some things which were valuable to me, too. I went to my house this morning, to get some things I had left behind. And what did I find?"

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