

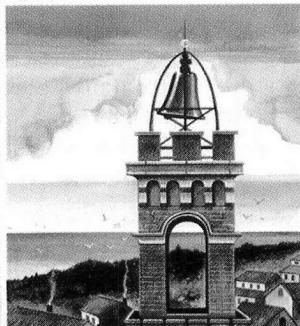
Civil Affairs Redux

reviewed by Paul Turnan

A BELL FOR ADANO. By John Hersey. Vintage Books, New York, 1988 (Reprint Edition), ISBN 0394756959, 288 pp., \$13.00 (Member \$11.70).

JOHN HERSEY*A Bell for Adano*

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE



John Hersey wrote the fictional *A Bell for Adano* during World War II. How things have changed in 60 years—or have they? This work has stood the test of time because its depiction of American ideals and human flaws rings true. Be it Messina, Italy in 1943 or Mosul, Iraq in 2003, this novel reveals an American attitude toward occupying liberated lands that hasn't changed. Read *Iraq for Adano* and this novel is the best illustration I've seen of what the United States should hope to accomplish in Iraq today. The book can still be found in bookstores and on library shelves. Reading this minor classic provides insight on the human nature of a successful American occupation.

This novel relates the experiences and character of MAJ Victor Joppolo, USA—military administrator of the just liberated town of Adano, Sicily. The major's aegis over Adano is efficient, wise, popular, and brief. There's the tragedy.

He successfully resolves chal-

lenges to the military administration of his area of responsibility such as reestablishing the local economy, curtailing a black market, purging old regime party members from authority, silencing subversive rumor mongers, and leading the citizenry to an appreciation of liberty. Occupation duty is shown in a rosy light. There are no improvised explosive devices, no bitter-end resistance fighters, and no friendly troops impatient to return stateside.

Except for the protagonist, MAJ Joppolo, the story is populated with caricatures. The locals are colorful, one-dimensional peasants. Enlisted men are anonymous proles. Field grade officers are bureaucrats.

Despite this simplistic tinge, I found *A Bell For Adano* an engaging story. A good example is when he holds court:

Maj Joppolo's trials were impressive because he managed, by trickery, by moral pressure and by persuasion, to make the truth seem something really beautiful and necessary.

Victor Joppolo is guided, but not ruled, by his desire to be popular. He wants to be liked. This vice among military leaders is a virtue among civil leaders. A military administrator so motivated could easily find himself on the horns of a dilemma.

This novel is instructive, but readers should not expect to discover herein many tactics, techniques, or procedures applicable to governing a Ba'athist village. The lesson of this tale is made plain in the author's foreword:

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 it is important for you to know about Major Joppolo.

The novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1945–59 years ago. The author was an American journalist reporting the war in Europe. When this book was first published the United States was waging a global war. The Allies won the war and the peace too. Americans secured the victories won on the battlefield by their administration of occupied lands. America really did win hearts and minds in Germany, Japan, and Italy. In nearly 60 years the former Axis powers haven't reverted to totalitarian rule, nor have they slipped into economic or cultural

“This work has stood the test of time because its depiction of American ideals and human flaws rings true.”

backwaters. This is victory's legacy. Reading *A Bell for Adano* one realizes that this legacy was accrued town by town and province by province in occupied lands under the stewardship of men like Victor Joppolo.

Classic popular fiction provides us a new perspective on the contemporary scene. This work brims with an idealism and confidence in Americans and American civic virtue that seems in short supply today.

American forces are today administering occupied territories and can anticipate doing so in the future. Today and in months (if not years) to come, the United States will have a critical need of Joppolos. I imagine those men will face the same obstacles and difficulties described in this fictional work and then some. Today's successful military administrators must demonstrate the virtues of MAJ Joppolo and would be fortunate to avoid his flaws. That is why it is important for readers to know about MAJ Joppolo.



>Mr. Turnan, a Marine veteran of Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, lives in Arlington, MA.