



A Bell for Adano Discussion Guide



Introduction:

Why was this book chosen for Staff Sergeants?

This novel reinforces your required doctrinal reading (MCDP 1-2 *Campaigning*). Recall from your reading of MCDP 1-2 *Campaigning*:

No level of war is self-contained. Strategic, operational, and tactical commanders, forces and events are continually interacting with one another. Although we may view the chain of command as a hierarchical pyramid in which directives and power flow from higher to lower, in fact the command structure is often more like a spider web: a tug at any point may have an impact throughout the structure. Information must therefore flow freely in all directions.

This novel also illustrates the single battle concept (see MCDP 1-0 *Marine Corps Operations* pages 6-20 through 6-24), specifically the fact that an area of operations must be viewed as an indivisible entity – not separate rear, close and deep operations. “Operations or events in one part of the AO may have profound and often unintended effects on other areas and events.” Hersey tells a story of dysfunctional command climate, short-sighted fixation on tactics at the cost of the big picture, and the difficulty of integrating conflict termination operations into an unfolding campaign. While Hersey uses an army of occupation scenario, his observations are equally relevant to our current counterinsurgency operations.

1. Identify Hersey’s mission (task and purpose) in writing *A Bell for Adano*.

Hersey’s mission is to use historical fiction to describe the complexity of what happens after the shooting has stopped. The United States had little experience as an Army of Occupation rebuilding countries after we’d defeated them militarily. Since Hersey wrote this book just as World War II ended, the United States was adjusting to its new role as a world power in time of peace. If the military victory over Fascism achieved at such high cost was going to have a lasting impact, if Italy, Japan and Germany were to become prosperous democracies, the United States would have to find a way to use its power to build new states with functioning civil government from defeated enemy dictatorships. This was a brand new problem for the U.S. and we should use Hersey’s own words – words in *italics* are from his Foreword written in 1946 (pages v-vii) - to express the problem:

“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 . . . what he did and what he was not able to do in Adano represented the best of the possibilities.”

“America is the international country.” America can no longer afford to isolate itself from the rest of the world. When we intervene overseas we “may very well be extremely dependent on a Joppolo, not only for language, but for wisdom and justice and the other things we think we have to offer.”

Brilliantly crafted military or diplomatic strategic objectives guarantee nothing. *“Only men can guarantee, only the behavior of men under pressure, only our Joppolo’s.”*

2a. What part of the story drew you in and best accomplished Hersey’s mission?

The part of the story I found most compelling was Joppolo’s decisions after the mule cart episode involving the Commanding General of the 49th Division. Major General Marvin’s order to have Errante Gaetano’s mule shot (Chapter 6)¹ set in motion a chain of events resulting in Joppolo’s relief for disobeying General Marvin’s order to ban all cart traffic on the roads into Adano. Joppolo originally follows the order – even though he believes it to be counter-productive to the mission. He reverses course the next day and orders the MP checkpoints to permit cart traffic. Joppolo’s part of the telephone exchange with Captain Purvis, the MP Commander, follows (pages 62-63):

“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.”

¹This incident is based on an episode involving Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr. during the Sicily campaign: “Stress frayed him. Always irascible when his blood was up, he now seemed erratic and even abusive. Happening upon a narrow bridge where 2nd Armored Division tanks had been delayed by a peasant with a mule cart, Patton broke his swagger stick over the man’s head, ordered an aide to shoot the mule, then had carcass and cart shoved into the creek bed below.” See Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2007) p. 143.





"I know I'm taking a hell of 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 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. . . . People will die. I'm not here to kill people."

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

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

This is interesting because it shows the interconnectivity of events in the single battle concept. General Marvin fixates on the mule carts as a tactical obstacle, a burden on his lines of communications. Major Joppolo understands the mule carts are indispensable to getting services restored to Adano. Without the carts, Adano would become dependent on the allied expeditionary force's logistics throughput and distribution resources for essential supplies. With the carts, those logistics resources would instead focus on sustaining General Marvin's and others maneuver units. A self-reliant, well-governed Adano increases General Marvin's freedom of maneuver – although at the cost of sharing the road with Sicilians. Without the carts, Adano is a dependent entity, siphoning resources from the expeditionary force.

This part of the book is also interesting because of what it says about good and bad command climates. Good command climates permit decentralized decision making to the level with the best situational awareness. Poor command climates stifle initiative and isolate the commander from meaningful feedback. This is a case study in bad command climates.

Major Joppolo's moral courage to do the right thing makes him a true minority in the 49th Division. The reactions of others in the chain of command are worth discussing. Captain Purvis covers himself in every direction – he follows Major Joppolo's orders to let the carts into town, but orders Technical Sergeant Trapani to prepare a report for the Division G-1 on Joppolo's decision to countermand the order. Trapani prepared the report for Purvis' signature and buried in Purvis' inbox because "I hate to see a guy get in trouble when he's trying to do right."





Purvis later discovers the report only by knocking over his inbox. He forwards it to the Division G-1, Colonel Norris. Norris received and forwarded the report to Colonel Middleton, General Marvin's chief of staff. Lieutenant Butters intercepted Colonel Middleton's copy and rerouted it, hoping it would get lost "by mistake." Butters justified his action by his dislike for General Marvin, a man who had chewed him out for something he hadn't done. Butters admitted "I wish I had thrown it [the report] away. I didn't have the guts."

The correspondence eventually reaches General Marvin who orders Joppolo relieved and reassigned. Colonel Middleton's suggestion that Joppolo might have had sound reasons for his actions were dismissed with "Goddamn you Middleton, you're getting too goddamn independent minded."

2b. What other discussion points can you draw from this part of the story?

Marines often refer to command climate. Although there is no official definition of command climate, we periodically survey and measure it. Metrics associated with command climate include:

- Non-EAS attrition
- Equal Opportunity/Sexual Harassment surveys and incidents
- Non-Judicial Punishment rates and
- Quality of Life surveys

This list is consistent with a business management adage that "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." We all know good and bad command climates when we're in one, and we all miss good command climates when we don't have one. Discuss some features of good command climates and bad command climates. Here is a partial list of their features:

Good command climates –

- Depend upon individual effort, particularly efforts by leaders
- They are perishable; if you don't work at maintaining it, it goes away
- In good command climates, you walk the talk
- Good command climates empower subordinates – they force responsibility, accountability and decision making down the chain of command
- Good command climates do not feature micro-management
- Tolerate honest mistakes by subordinates that contribute to their growth as leaders
- In good command climates, information – both good news and bad news – flows freely





Bad command climates –

- Are often the result of staffing goals – the person placed in a leadership position as the result of manning the table of organization billet with a Marine with insufficient experience (one up / one down – do we ever really see a billet filled by someone senior in grade to the T/O billet description?). This places Marines with insufficient maturity as leaders into leadership positions and has a negative impact on command climate.
- Micro-management is more prevalent.
- Communication is one-way (dictating) rather than two-way (feedback not asked for or considered).
- Leaders display a lack of compassion for those they lead – “mission first, people rarely.”
- Is the result of “mirror imaging” – leaders believe “a good Marine is a Marine who looks like me.” Leadership is more about personality matches rather than professionalism and result in leaders displaying favoritism.
- Discipline is forced, not willing. Do the acceptable thing to avoid punishment rather than do the right thing because it is the right thing to do.
- Double standards are evident

Tolerate “Retirement on Active Duty” Taking care of your career is more important than taking care of Marines.

**3. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?
Does the author validate these assumptions in the book?**

Since World War II was just ending as Hersey wrote this book, he assumes his readership is familiar with the historical context of what happened in the Sicilian campaign. For example, General Patton as a symbol of “Blood and Guts” Patton would have been instantly recognizable to the first Americans to read this book – Patton was often profiled in the magazines and newspapers of the time. The temper Patton displayed in Sicily – to include slapping patients in hospitals – is only familiar to readers today if they’ve seen the movie version of *Patton* with George C. Scott. Unless today’s reader has made a study of the Sicilian campaign, the difficulties the allies encountered in execution are not apparent in the book.

4. The part of the book that is most relevant to what we do is:

In addition to the points made above about single battle concept and command climate, I would encourage the readers to pay attention to the sub plot involving Sergeant Leonard Borth and the Fascist former Mayor Nasta. Borth





shows the benefits of investing in human intelligence networks and information operations. Major Joppolo trusts Borth to operate within his spheres without micro-managing. This is a great representation of a “Strategic NCO” in action.

5. Identify the author’s specified and implied conclusions:

Hersey specifies the United States will be engaged in military governments overseas for the foreseeable future, that we have the people who can do the job in a manner that reflects well on us as a democratic nation and a free people. He implies that the people best qualified to do these military operations may not be the kind of people who work well in a rigid military hierarchy.

Submitted by: S.D. Griffin

