

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Rescue workers dug frantically today for possible survivors in the earthquake ruins of dozens of towns and villages in northeast Italy and it was feared the death toll would reach at least 300

Art treasures apparently escaped damage, however, in the massive shock Thursday night that was felt in half of Italy and at least six other countries, causing panic among millions. There were no reports of casualties or major damage outside Italy or in major Italian cities.

At midday today, national police headquarters in Rome reported 243 bodies recovered in 19 towns, with scores feared trapped under the

wreckage of leveled buildings. More than 1,000 persons were injured, a number of them seriously.

A US. Army base in Vicenza sent out six helicopters to shuttle the injured to hospitals and to ferry medicine and water.

The worst quake in the last 10 years in Europe and Asia Minor was in eastern Turkey in 1966 when 2,529 were killed. More than 17,000 died in Guatemala in a quake last February

Thursday night's quake rocked an area from Venice to the Yugoslav border in the east to Milan in the west and tremors were felt as far south as Naples, as well as in sections of Yugoslavia, Austria, Czechoslovakia, West Germany, The Neth-

erlands and Belgium. Hundreds of Belgians fled from high-rise apartment houses.

Floods in November 1966 heavily damaged Florence's art patrimony

and accelerated the decay of churches and other buildings in Venice.

But after an intensive check of buildings in the lagoon city today by the Venice fire department, a city official reported that not one church or historic monument "suffered the least bit of damage "

The 325-foot bell-tower in St Mark's Square swayed during the shocks, but a careful inspection by the specially trained fire squad showed no damage

The tower. built originally in 889 and rebuilt in 1514. fell without warning in 1902. to be rebuilt again in 1912.

The most important of the hundreds of churches and monuments in Venice have had small mirrors imbedded on the end of long pipes in their walls and foundations by shining lights down the pipes, it was found today that not a single mirror had broken, indicating there had been no shifting in the structures.

Most of the damage was in towns and villages along both sides of the Tagliamento River which flows from