

Lawrence R. Berardi

World War II - U. S. Army

June 1943 - December 1945



A Story of Lawrence R. Berardi & His Son, Wolfgang Oude Aost

by Linda Cunningham Fluharty
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Corporal Lawrence R. Berardi
U. S. Army, 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion 5th Armored Division

In this year, 2013, Internet Message Boards abound with posts by children who are looking for their fathers. During times of war - and peace - after their military service in foreign countries, many veterans return home, leaving pregnant women behind, sometimes unknowingly.

Tens of thousands of children were fathered by American military men in Europe during World War II. Many children were given up for adoption, some grew up in orphanages, and others were raised by their mothers. Adopted and orphaned children are sometimes looking for both of their biological parents, but fathers are the focus here. Although the Internet has made the search far easier, for most of those children, hope has faded. The majority of World War II veterans are dead, and locating siblings and cousins has become a more realistic objective.

But before there was an Internet, one particular child in Europe faced the daunting challenge and found his American father.

In May 1945, near the end of World War II, German Nazi occupation was ended in the Netherlands. The country was liberated mainly by Canadian troops, but they were assisted by Great Britain, Poland, the United States and France. Following "Liberation Day," the Netherlands had an estimated 7,000 "liberation children," in addition to the children, perhaps as many as 50,000, conceived by Dutch women during the German occupation that began in May 1940.

Another young Dutch woman met her American soldier in Germany. She had rented a cottage in Gertenbach to be near her younger sister who had married a German soldier after becoming pregnant with his child during the German occupation in the Netherlands. Following Germany's surrender at the beginning of May 1945, U. S. Army tanks entered Gertenbach, and the American soldiers were stationed just across from the Dutch woman's cottage. She became acquainted with a "very nice" American soldier. On August 15, 1945, she witnessed the soldiers acting "crazy and delirious with joy" when they learned that Emperor Hirohito had announced the surrender of the Empire of Japan to the Allies. -- The war was essentially over! The soldiers wouldn't have to move on to fight in the Pacific, and they would soon leave Gertenbach and return home.

Nine months later, in May 1946, Wolfgang Oude Aost was born to the Dutch woman. She hadn't known she was pregnant at the time her American soldier departed, but when another member of the army battalion returned to the village, she told him about her pregnancy. He provided her with the soldier's home address in the United States. She already had a photo of him and his army tank.



Lawrence R. Berardi

The Dutch mother and her son, Wolfgang, made their home in Apeldoorn, Netherlands. She never married, and Wolfgang had no siblings. At the age of eight or nine years, when he asked his mother why he had no father, she gave him the photo of the soldier and the tank. The photo had a profound impact on his life.

The U. S. Army soldier was Lawrence Rudolph "Larry" Berardi, a resident of 1026 High Street, Benwood, Marshall County, West Virginia. Upon graduating in the Union High School Class of 1943, Larry enlisted in the army at Clarksburg, West Virginia on June 11, 1943, to serve for the duration of the war. He left for Fort Hayes on June 26, and by December, he was in Scotland-England. In August 1944, he entered combat in France with his unit, the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion 5th Armored Division. In 1945, he was stationed in Germany, where he met the Dutch woman who later bore his child. Following his discharge on December 6, 1945, he returned to the family home in

Benwood, and got a job at Wheeling Steel's Benwood mill, where his father was also employed.

Larry never married, and he lived with his parents, Italian immigrants, Vincenzo (Vincent) and Maria (Rossi) Berardi, until their deaths. The family belonged to the St. John's Catholic Church in Benwood, where Larry had been baptized as Lorenzo Rudolfo Berardi in 1926. Larry lived in the close-knit, multicultural mill town, with his lifelong friends and relatives, until he was nearly forty. Then, in April 1965, the family sold their

property in Benwood, bought in 1914 from Maurice Donovan, to the State Road Commission. They moved across the river to 3552 Noble Street, Bellaire, Ohio. Larry's mother, Maria (Mary), died in Ohio on December 30, 1968. Vincent died at Ohio Valley Hospital in Wheeling on May 9, 1969.

For the next twenty years, Larry continued to live in Bellaire, only a short distance from Benwood. He didn't drive, so he might have walked to work at the Benwood mill by crossing the Bellaire Bridge that spans the Ohio River between Bellaire and Benwood. At one time, he had an apartment above Hap's Bar & Grill on Belmont Street, but he also resided in at least one other apartment in the area. He retired from the mill in 1976, at the age of 52. He enjoyed gambling, drinking whiskey, and playing poker, but he was also well-read, and regularly borrowed books at the library. He was affiliated with the Sons of Italy in Bellaire, and he was a member of the Blake Brothers American Legion Post #46 in Benwood. Although he once went to Las Vegas with a friend, one of the owners of Undo's Restaurant in Benwood, his world was the Benwood-Bellaire-Wheeling area, and he didn't venture very far from there.

Meanwhile, Larry's son, Wolfgang Oude Aost, was across the Atlantic.

As stated, the photo of his father he received when he was eight or nine years old, had tremendously impacted the young Wolfgang Oude Aost. When he was fourteen, he sent a letter to Larry at the Benwood address, but there was no reply. When he was twenty-three, he sent Larry an invitation to his wedding, and he wrote again when his children were born. Despite not receiving a reply, Wolfgang felt very strongly that his father knew about him....

Wolfgang's beloved mother died in 1976. Prior to her death, he did not seek to reunite with his father, but when he was thirty-nine, about 1985, he felt desperate to find him. He had a successful career as a police detective, he was very happily married, and he had two fine children - but not knowing his father had left a void in his life that overwhelmed him.

The old Benwood mailing address for Larry Berardi proved to be outdated, and for the next few years, Wolfgang wrote letters, and even enlisted the help of the F. B. I. He eventually learned that Larry lived somewhere in Bellaire, Ohio. He wrote to the Sons of Italy organization in Bellaire, and asked that his letters be delivered to Larry, if they knew him. He received no reply from Larry.

Finally, in the fall of 1989, Wolfgang and his wife, Ina, decided to travel to the United States to attempt to locate Larry Berardi. With the assistance of the Bellaire, Belmont County, Ohio Police Department, they learned that Larry had recently moved from Bellaire to an apartment at 23-8th Street in nearby Wheeling, West Virginia.

Larry knew the day was coming that his son would find him, but he didn't know precisely when his son would come to his door. He had received Wolfgang's letters via the Sons of Italy, and the F. B. I. had informed him that his son had good intentions and only wanted to meet him. One can only imagine the range of Larry's emotions, but, surely, he had a fear of judgment and animosity, and perhaps he felt guilt.

When Wolfgang and Ina arrived at Larry's Wheeling apartment, he was not there. So they waited. Eventually, they saw a man walking down the sidewalk, and Wolfgang immediately recognized his father. And thus began a very meaningful father-son relationship that lasted for the next sixteen years.

Soon after his reunion with his father, Wolfgang was interviewed for a local Ohio newspaper article (*Times Leader*) that was published a short time later. Mr. Berardi asked that neither his name nor his home community, Benwood, be mentioned, possibly due to the newness of the situation, and perhaps because his extended family was not yet aware that Larry had a son. -- The information is presented here with the permission of Wolfgang Oude Aost.



T-L Photo/SANDY WALLACE

THE COOPERATION of area residents and members of the Bellaire Police Department helped Dutch police detective Wolfgang Oude-Aost find the father he had never met. Oude-Aost and his wife,

Ina, became good friends with Bellaire Police Chief Bob Wallace during the two weeks they were in the United States in October.

Dutchman finds long-lost father in small mill town in Ohio Valley

By SANDY WALLACE

Bellaire Bureau Chief

TWO WEEKS. Fourteen days. A fortnight.

A short time in the grand scheme of the universe, but a lifetime for a tall, mustachioed police detective from Holland who found his past and his future in a tiny Ohio Valley mill town where he met his father for the first time in October.

Time enough to break through the fear of rejection and dispel the pain of misunderstanding. Time enough to forge bonds that will last forever.

Time enough to cement friendships with all who helped him — area

tradesmen, neighborhood residents, and especially the members of the Bellaire Police Department who offered a familiar camaraderie of police routine that extended beyond the usual rules and regulations.

In accordance with the father's wishes, neither his name nor the exact location of the local community will be revealed in this story. Although Chief Bob Wallace and the Bellaire Police Department helped, the town involved is not Bellaire.

The son, Wolfgang Oude-Aost, grew up in Apeldoorn, Holland, knowing only that his parents met in 1945 and when the American soldier returned

to the United States, he left behind a pregnant Dutch girl.

Oude-Aost talked about his successful search for his father in an interview at Bellaire police headquarters shortly before he was scheduled to return to Holland. "It was a bad time," he said softly, recalling his mother's account of her life before his birth. "A woman pregnant without a husband... I have no sisters or brothers. My mother didn't marry. She died in 1976 and after that, I felt almost a great need to know my father. So I started to search."

He began by writing to an

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Father

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old local address he found, but that letter was returned to him. "Then I wrote to the mayor (of the town) and he helped."

Oude-Aost added, "The desire was very strong. I was very ill for two years and I couldn't work. I said, 'I must go find him to find my roots, to know who I am.'"

He and his wife, Ina, arrived in Washington, D.C., on a Monday and traveled to Ohio the next day. Once here, they got in touch with Bellaire police and explained their mission. "We did basic police things," said Chief Wallace, who said he felt impelled to help because he grew up in a large, close-knit family. "We knocked on doors, made phone calls, met people who kept pointing us in the right direction. We felt like we were close. He never gave up."

The combined wisdom and experience of Dutch and American police training (aided by a tip from a local resident who knew members of Oude-Aost's American family) eventually discovered that the man Oude-Aost believed to be his father had moved but was still residing nearby. The Oude-Aosts finally visited the man's apartment only to find he wasn't home.

Then they settled down in their rented car to wait.

Time again to wait, to question, to feel nervousness and anticipation all at once. Time to know that the future is, indeed, upon us, approaching too rapidly, too slowly...waiting...always waiting for us to catch up...

"We stayed in the car," Oude-Aost recounted. "We saw a man come down the street with groceries in a bag and I said to Ina, 'that's him.' I never saw him before, but I knew he was my father."

That first encounter between father and son no doubt was as difficult and emotional as anyone could imagine; the details will

remain private. Oude-Aost said simply, "In five minutes, it was okay."

Like his mother, Oude-Aost's father never married. "He didn't know he had a son," he explained, indicating that the man believed he was unable to father children and did not know when he left Europe that his girlfriend was pregnant.

"Now he says often 'my son'" Oude-Aost noted proudly. "Every day it is better. He cooks for us; I have met an aunt and cousins and a few good friends. We went back to the family home and I saw where my grandparents are buried."

Ina Oude-Aost said her new-found father-in-law was thrilled to discover he has grandchildren and, just like grandparents everywhere, he insisted on purchasing gifts for the Oude-Aosts' 14-year-old daughter and 17-year-old son.

And what about time, that indestructible constant that kept father and son apart and brought them together again? Will there ever be enough for these strangers who are now family?

Oude-Aost waved away mention of his imminent departure, clearly upset at the inevitable. When he agreed to be interviewed, he still had two days left before he was scheduled to return to Apeldoorn, 48 too-brief hours to fill with memories and explanations and love.

Your story is like a fairy tale with a happy ending, someone said.

Oude-Aost looked around at the small, cement-block office, at the wife who loved and supported him through years of questioning and searching; at the American police officer he now counted among his friends; at the reporter who was wondering how to describe such breadth of emotion in just a few paltry, inadequate words.

He smiled, a smile of ineffable, soul-satisfying contentment. "It's not a happy ending," he said. "It's a happy beginning."

There wasn't a dry eye in the room.



Larry Berardi and his son, Wolfgang Oude Aost, on the Suspension Bridge in Wheeling, October 1989.

After their initial meeting in October 1989, Wolfgang and Ina visited Larry twenty-one more times. On four of their visits, they were accompanied by their son, Bas, and daughter, Miep, Larry's grandchildren. When Larry died suddenly on December 23, 2005, he was a man with a wonderful family. He died as a proud father and grandfather. He was a man who loved and was loved.

Wolfgang's own words (translated from Dutch) tell of their relationship:

"He was happy that I had found him and even pride. He's never been married and had a girlfriend sporadically. In his life he was disappointed by the Government for which he had fought in WWII. Great adjustment difficulties upon his return. We know that of the Vietnam and Iraq veterans. But he was not bitter. He had lived on a social security allowance and furnished rooms. He had no personal stuff, only an old tv which lasted 15 minutes before there came a picture. We have bought him a new. He could delicious cooking and asked what my favorite food was. When we visited Larry we rest in motels near Wheeling. Larry was a faithful letter writer. Every 3 weeks we got a letter from him. They were dear letters with everyday affairs. He also sent regular paper-clippings. He also always sent birthday cards. Also to the children. Together with my children we have visited him 4 times. That was very special for me. For the first time in my life I felt myself father. Like I was pushed in the generation. I asked Larry inexhaustible to come over to the Netherlands for a vacation. I wanted to get him and bring him back. He wanted to do this. He always came up with excuses and after several years of questions I am stopped. I had to respect his opinion. Shortly after finding my father got my life again shining. I was happier as ever again. This was my experience in bird flight to find Larry Berardi."

"Larry died on December 23 2005. He was found at the bottom of the stairs of his apartment. The doctor thought he had a stoppage of the heart. He was never sick. An elevated blood pressure. I was called and emailed by Bob Wallace. On 25 december my wife Ina, son Bas and daughter-in-law Astrid flew to USA."



Father & Son - Larry & Wolfgang.



Larry with his son, Wolfgang, and grandchildren, Miep & Bas, 2004.

Wolfgang valued every moment he had with his father. During their many visits, he learned everything he could about Larry's life and family. He captured many moments on video and in photos, which he treasures, along with the simple, meaningful items that Larry had given him. Larry's diploma from Union High School, his graduation picture, his Baptismal Certificate, and his Voter's Registration card, are a few of the items that are carefully preserved by Larry's family in the Netherlands.

Lawrence R. Berardi was buried with military honors at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania.

Wolfgang said:

"I have spoken at his coffin. I've been told when I met Larry and what he has meant for me and my family. That I have a lot of respect for all those incredible servicemen who have our country freed from the German domination. And who have given their lives for our freedom. That many spiritually wounded and thus must live their entire lives. Larry was one of these people. - That he the years that I knew him for me has been a very good father. And that I'm proud of him. - It was a solemn occasion and I was honored to receive the flag on his coffin. In 16 years I get to know my father and myself."



The funeral was attended by Wolfgang, Ina, Bas & wife, Astrid, and Larry's sister, Erma.



National Cemetery of the Alleghenies, Bridgeville, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

In the Netherlands, Wolfgang became involved in programs established to help "war children" and "Liberation children" find their fathers. He is named in this 1993 article in the Los Angeles Times:

http://articles.latimes.com/1993-01-17/news/mn-2076_1_world-war-ii

He also served as Secretary of The Association of Liberation Children:

<http://www.canada.com/national/features/veday/story.html?id=202dc594-2820-43d4-af60-b72be42e1ad2>

A book about Larry's battalion, the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion, is found online:

http://issuu.com/inveteratus/docs/victory_td_northern_franceardennesrhinelandcentral

Larry's photo is on Page 113:



During World War II, the communities of Boggs Run, Benwood, and McMechen, in Marshall County, West Virginia, organized a club to support the veterans, provide news of those serving, and sponsor fund-raising events. They published a newsletter, and also did extensive filming of the military service men and women in the community, as well as many of their families. It was called the 1659 Club because the location of the building used for the club was located at 1659 Marshall Street in Benwood. - Larry is found on the films numerous times, including when he went to Clarksburg on June 11, 1943 to enlist, and when he left for duty at Fort Hayes on June 26. A film made in the fall of 1942 shows him walking in a crowd, at which time he would have been a senior at Union High. His brother, Earnest, was enlisted in the Army at that time, and he is shown on the film with parents, Vincent and Maria, as well as their sisters.

After finding his father, Wolfgang and his family researched the origins of his Berardi family in Italy. His daughter, Miep, and her husband, Crispijn, traveled to the Italian municipality of Carovilli, known to be the home of the Berardi ancestors. According to their research, the parents of the immigrants were Federico Berardi and Marianna Falasca.

Federico and Marianna may have had numerous children, but at least a few of them - Filomena, Antonio, and Vincenzo - immigrated to the United States and settled in Benwood, West Virginia. Vincenzo (Vincent) was the father of Lawrence R. Berardi.



Larry Berardi with father, Vincenzo, and mother, Maria.

At the age of 16, Vincenzo Berardi traveled from Naples, Italy to New York's Ellis Island in 1899. He took a job as a miner and lived with a cousin, location unknown. He returned to Italy in 1905 and came back with his sister, Filomena, on the steamship "Fürst Bismarck," which reached Ellis Island on November 15, 1905. A marriage license was applied for in Ohio County, West Virginia by Filomena Berardi and Antonio Paotucci on May 14, 1906. The license was not returned, indicating that the marriage didn't take place. Her death, the result of an "accidental gunshot wound," occurred on May 20, 1906.

In 1912, Vincenzo again went back to Carovilli. He returned to Benwood with Maria Rossi, his new bride.

The children of Vincenzo M. (Vincent) (Apr 1883-May 1969) and Maria Rossi (Oct 1891- Dec 1968)

Ernest Fredrick Berardi (June 19, 1913-Jan 1, 1979) - Married x 3.

Anna Berardi (Sep 20, 1914-Sep 23, 2000) -Married Vincent James Policy, 1923.

Fanny Berardi (1919)

Erminia Celia Berardi (Apr 18, 1920-Aug 2, 1921)

Irma (Erma) (1923-) - Married Robert Pedeleose, Feb 1946.

Lawrence R. (Lorenzo Rudolfo) Berardi (Nov 11, 1924-Dec 23, 2005)

Joseph Berardi (May 13, 1927-Sep 1, 1929)

Antonio (Anthony) Berardi (June 4, 1881- Dec 19, 1977), an older brother of Vincenzo, married Giovanna (Genevieve) Paolucci (Feb 12, 1884 - July 2, 1976). Their children:

Adlene (Adeline) Sferra - (Jan 12, 1905-May 18, 1996) - Married Anthony Sferra, 1923.

Lucia (Elizabeth) Berardi - (May 6, 1908) - Married Anthony Canestaro, 1927.

Frederick (Frederico/Federico) P. - (Jan 6, 1910-Dec 22, 1993) - Married Anna C. Lewis, 1944.

Stephen (Stefano) J. Berardi - (Sep 24, 1911-June 27, 1996) -Married Anna Marie Vidonic, 1938.

Elvera (Elverta) R. DeCola - (Dec 23, 1913-Dec 11, 1995) - Married Anthony DeCola, 1947.

Raymond (Romolo) Berardi - (Mar 24, 1916)

Henry (Enrico) Berardi (May 20, 1921)

Edward J. (Edwardi) Berardi (Aug 6, 1923) - Married Mary Lee Dellget, 1946.

Flanick (Flavianna) Berardi - Married Betty Moorehouse, 1940.



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