

*Coincidence and memories draw two vets closer.*

# Package brings back WWII

By Edward Colimore  
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Pat Sasso couldn't believe his eyes.

He opened the mysterious package that had been delivered to his Glendora home and came face to face with his life as a young soldier 62 years ago.

There was the Nazi flag that Sasso hauled down after he and other American troops took over Cologne, Germany, in 1945. He and his buddies signed their names to it.

There was the swastika armband he took as a souvenir of Adolf Hitler's collapsing Third Reich — and the letter from a major general congratulating his division of "Timberwolves" on its performance.

And there was the note from his sweetheart of those days. In August, more than six decades after he sent her the memorabilia from overseas for safekeeping, she wrote Sasso again:

*It is not my intent for you to revisit WWII, however, it was a pivotal time in your life.*

*With sincere respect and obligation, I am returning these items to their rightful owner.*

*God Bless You Timberwolf.*

"I was amazed," said Sasso, 85, a patient of Marilton's Samaritan Hospice, which is providing him with in-home care.

He was so delighted with the package that he shared the news with fellow World War II veteran Robert Leibrand, a Samaritan Hospice volunteer who visits him regularly.

And soon the two were surprised again. See **PACKAGE** on B8



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Pat Sasso (right) of Glendora and hospice pal Robert Leibrand, also a veteran, with the banner Sasso hauled down in 1945. He sent it to his then-fiancee; her daughter returned it in August.



Pat Sasso and his World War II fiancée, Terry Ziccardi, at a wedding reception in 1948. Above, Terry Ziccardi Calderetti today.

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GERALD S. WILLIAMS / Inquirer Staff Photographers  
Robert Leibrand (left) and Pat Sasso in photos from World War II. Leibrand was taken prisoner in Stolberg, Germany. Sasso was among the Allied troops who later liberated the town.

## Package

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Leibrand, who was shot and captured by German troops in November 1944, read the letter from the major general and learned that Sasso's unit had been to Stolberg, Germany — just as he had.

Leibrand, 82, of Haddonfield, had been taken prisoner there after being wounded. Sasso and other troops later liberated the town.

"When you know you were that close, it's incredible," said Leibrand, a retired accountant. "Two boys from Philadelphia experienced something similar in the same place in Germany. ... Talk about coincidences. It's a small world."

Sasso went on to help liberate the Nordhausen concentration camp, and Leibrand was set free by U.S. Army engineers.

"We bonded together in war, and we have a responsibility for each other," Leibrand said. "We are now reestablishing that bond."

Sasso was engaged to Terry Ziccardi during the war, wrote her many letters, and sent her the memorabilia to keep until his return.

"We met down the Shore and became close through the letters," Sasso's former fiancée said. "He was my first love, but it wasn't meant to be."

The two drifted apart and married others — and the letters and war items were stored in the basement of Terry Ziccardi Calderetti's South Philadelphia home.

Her daughter, Janet Bianchini, said she used to "hide in the collar and read the letters" when she was a young girl in the 1960s. "It was like reading a book," the 44-year-old Cherry Hill woman said. Sasso, she said, "was so eloquent and smart."

Last summer, Bianchini scanned a large envelope with war memorabilia and told her mother — now 81 and living in Williamstown — that she should return it to Sasso.

"I was shaken when I opened the package the first time," Bianchini said. She was alone, she said, and the Nazi flag, swastika armband, and letter from the major general "shook my world."

The faded, typewritten December 1944 letter, from Maj. Gen. "Lightning" Joe Collins, captured a moment in time.

"We regard the Timberwolf Division as one of the finest assault divisions we have ever had in this corps," Collins wrote.

In a postscript to the letter, Maj. Gen. Terry Allen wrote: "There will be other rivers to cross and more objectives to take before final victory is attained. Our standards of discipline, training and physical



Terry Ziccardi around the time she was dating Pat Sasso. He sent her his wartime memorabilia for safekeeping. She kept it for six decades.

... Nothing in hell must stop the Timberwolves."

After examining the memorabilia, Bianchini said, she told her mother: "If these belonged to my father, I would certainly want them back. I think the man is still alive."

With her mother's blessing, she found Sasso through the Roman Catholic church and took the package to his home in August.

"The joy in that man's face!" Bianchini said. "I cried the whole time. I knew this guy through the letters and fell in love with him. I took off my sunglasses, and our eyes locked. He could see my mother in me."

"He used to call her the boss lady, so I kissed him on the temple and said: 'This is from the boss lady.' That was one of the best days in my life."

In September, Pat Sasso and his wife Mary — married since 1960 — invited Calderetti and Bianchini to their home for a visit.

Calderetti said she had been happy to return the package. "It was a comfort to me to be able to do that," she said. "He was appreciative."

Leibrand was incredulous when he first looked at the memorabilia. Sasso, he said, "was getting something 62 years later that mentioned the place he liberated and the place where I was wounded."

The relics have revived old memories for Sasso and become the subject of conversations with Leibrand, who has volunteered the last four years for Samaritan Hospice as part of its Veterans' Outreach Program.

"It was lucky," Sasso said. "I didn't get a scratch. I was luckier than a cat with nine lives. I had 99 of them."

Now when the two veterans get together, Leibrand said, they "settle the nation's problems and the world's problems — but nobody listens."

Sasso smiled. "You believe that, and I'll tell you another one."

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