

**WORLD WAR TWO VETERAN REUNITES WITH ITALIAN
CHILDREN HE ALMOST SHOT IN 1944**

**PRIVATE FIRST-CLASS MARTIN ADLER ENCOUNTERED THE THREE SIBLINGS, WHO WERE HIDING IN A
WICKER BASKET WHILE HE WAS SEARCHING FOR NAZI SOLDIERS**

412



US soldier Martin Adler with Bruno, Mafalda and Giuliana Naldi in 1944. The three children he almost killed



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A World War II veteran and three Italian children he narrowly avoided shooting in the final months of the conflict reunited this week in an “emotional” meeting at the Bologna airport, reports Charlene Pele for the Associated Press (AP).

The foursome first met in October 1944, when Private Martin Adler was walking door to door in the small central Italian village of Cassano di Monterenzio. Then 20 years old, the American soldier was on the hunt for hidden Nazis.

Suddenly, a movement inside a large wicker basket in one of the houses he was searching caught Adler’s eye. Assuming he’d happened upon an enemy soldier, Adler trained his machine gun on the basket and prepared to shoot.

Luckily, he hesitated—and in that split second, a woman rushed inside the room to correct his mistake.

“The mother, Mamma, came out and stood right in front of my gun to stop me [from] shooting,” Adler recalls to the AP. “She put her stomach right against my gun, yelling, ‘Bambinis! Bambinis! Bambinis!’” — or “children” in Italian.

“That was a real hero, the mother, not me,” he says.

Three young children—two girls and a boy—poked their heads out of the basket. Laughing in relief, Adler asked the trio to take a photograph with him. Their mother agreed, reports the *Local Italy*, on the condition that she could dress them in their best clothes first. (See this picture directly above on this page)

Now 97, Adler had assumed he wouldn't see the children again after his unit, the 339th Infantry Regiment, left their village. But last December, as the Covid-19 pandemic raged, his daughter, Rachelle Adler Donley, posted the black-and-white photo of Adler and the siblings in several World War II veteran Facebook groups.

Adler Donley began her search in hopes of cheering up her father, who was in isolation with his wife, Elaine, in a Florida retirement community, reports Elisabetta Povoledo for the *New York Times*. Her post caught the attention of Italian journalist [Matteo Incerti](#), who alerted local newspapers and television stations.



Veteran Martin Adler poses with Bruno (left), Mafalda (right) and Giuliana (center) Naldi. Thanks to social media and a dogged journalist, the 97-year-old reconnected with the three siblings after 77 years.

Incerti's efforts proved successful. One of the children's family members recognized the trio as Bruno, Mafalda and Giuliana Naldi. *When Adler first met them, the Naldis were between 3 and 6 years old. Now, the siblings are octogenarians with grandchildren and even great-grandchildren, notes Chris Livesay for CBS News.*

The Naldi siblings and Adler initially reunited over video call last December, as Angela Giuffrida reported for the *Guardian* at the time. *By Monday, Covid-19 travel restrictions had finally eased enough for Adler to make the 20-hour journey from Florida to Bologna, where he greeted the Naldi siblings in person for the first time in 77 years.*

"My heart is bursting," Adler told reporters assembled to witness the meeting, per the *Times*. Bruno, Mafalda, Giuliana and many of their descendants attended the gathering.

"Knowing that Martin could have shot and that none of my family would exist is something very big," Roberta Fontana, Giuliana's 30-year-old granddaughter, tells the AP. "It is very emotional. Adler wore a T-shirt printed with the decades-old image and handed each sibling a chocolate bar—a call back to their first encounter, when he offered the children chocolate wrapped in a blue-and-white wrapper.

The veteran plans to travel to the siblings' hometown of Monterenzio before visiting Naples and Rome, where he hopes to meet Pope Francis, per the AP.

Incerti tells the *Guardian* that Adler suffered from PTSD after the war. Speaking with the AP, Adler Donley adds that her father still has nightmares from his time abroad. The soldier's chance meeting with the Naldi children stands out as a rare happy memory from what was otherwise a difficult tour.

Everyone is calling it a Christmas miracle," Incerti told the *Guardian* last December, when the group first reconnected.

He added, "Adler said this is the nicest thing that has ever happened to him."

After the war he suffered from PTSD. He received a bronze medal for saving wounded people, but he also watched a lot of people die.”

THEN AND NOW – 77 YEARS LATER



Bruno, Mafalda, Giuliana Naldi

The siblings live in Castel San Pietro, where they moved in 1953.

To view a very short video about this experience - copy and paste the link below into your browser.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcBLX2KIH_0 (2 min 43 seconds)



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