Rescued man meets rescuer

More than 40 years later, former U.S. paratrooper meets Jewish man his force liberated in Holland

By Jim O'Connell
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Bert Jakobs remembers Aug. 23, 1942, as if it were yesterday. On that day Jakobs and his family fled their home in Holland before the Nazi invasion, beginning an odyssey of escape and intrigue rivaling any spy novel.

Jakobs, along with his parents and two sisters, spent two years hiding from Nazis in and around the farmhouse of a sympathetic Dutch couple before being liberated by American paratroopers on Sept. 23, 1944.

For Jakobs, the memory of those times was clear but dormant, until they were brought vividly back to life by a coincidence 40 years later and half a world away.

Jakobs, now 53 and owner of Bert's Foreign Auto Service at 518 E. Second St. in Santa Ana, was on the Newport Beach Golf Course a year ago when he met Henry LeFebvre, a retired U.S. Army colonel.

"Bert was being introduced as a new member of our golf club when we started talking about our experiences during the war," LeFebvre said.

"I told him I had been a paratrooper and had made a couple of jumps, including one in Holland," LeFebvre said. "He got excited and asked me where in Holland. When I told him I landed in a little patch of woods called Berg en Dal, I thought he would have a stroke."

As the two men soon discovered, LeFebvre had been a member of the paratroop regiment that liberated Jakobs' family after landing near Nijmegen in Holland in 1944.

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As a result of that coincidental meeting, Jakobs agreed to speak at the annual reunion of members of the 508th Regiment of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division held this weekend in Los Angeles.

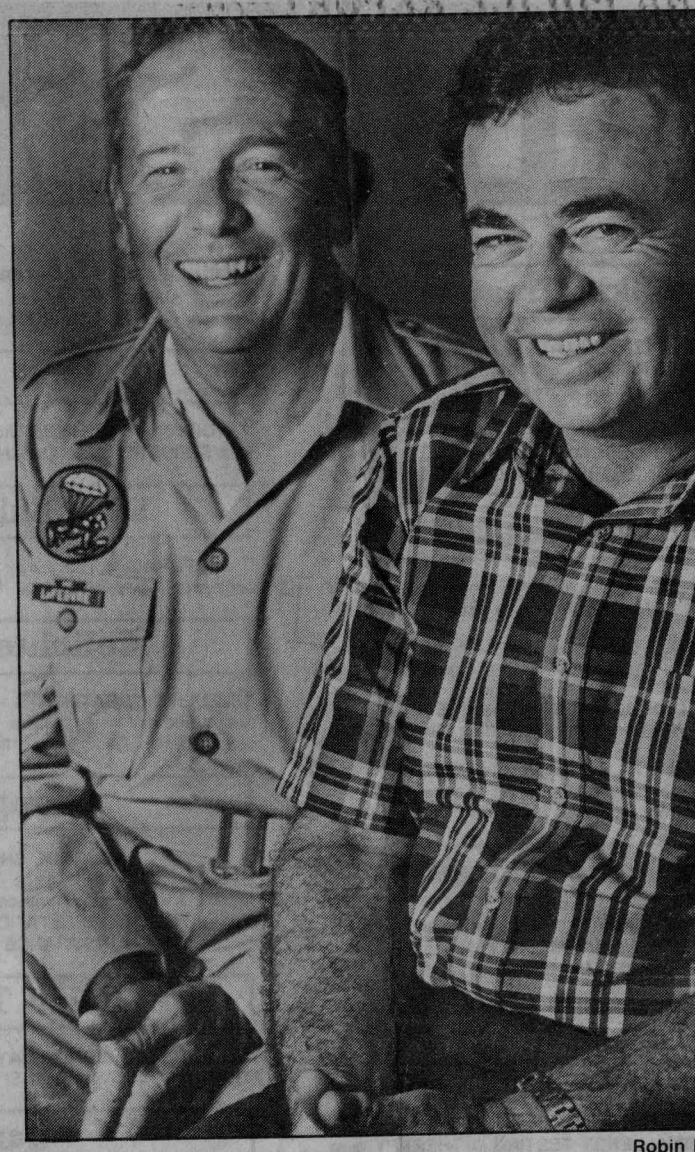
That address was to be taped by a CBS-TV film crew for use on a new fall show to be called "Magic Moments," Jakobs said.

"I remember everything about the two years we spent in hiding," Jakobs said. "We rarely went downstairs or outside the farmhouse for fear one of the neighbors who sympathized with the Nazis would turn us in."

After the war, Jakobs came to America and set up an auto repair business in Santa Ana. He now lives in Laguna Beach.

Recently Jakobs traveled back to Germany for a week-long dialogue about the war. There, he said, he was able to "make peace with a new generation of Germans."

This week, he said, he was also able to formally thank the U.S. servicemen who risked their lives to liberate him and other Jews from Nazi persecution.



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Henry LeFebvre, left, was part of the American paratroo liberated Bert Jakobs and his family in Holland during Wo