



AIRBORNE AGAIN: Dutch resistance leader Anton Schrader (centre) gets aloft today with Cyril Mora (right) and pilot Ra Penn.

Photo: Karen Day

Tortuous road to forgiveness

Laughter and tears for Dutch war hero

By CHRIS LONSDALE

THE SLIM hand dabs the image away. "Don't make too big a fuss of it all. It was a long time ago."

This was the hand the Gestapo torturers had crushed 48 years ago, and from which they had torn the fingernails.

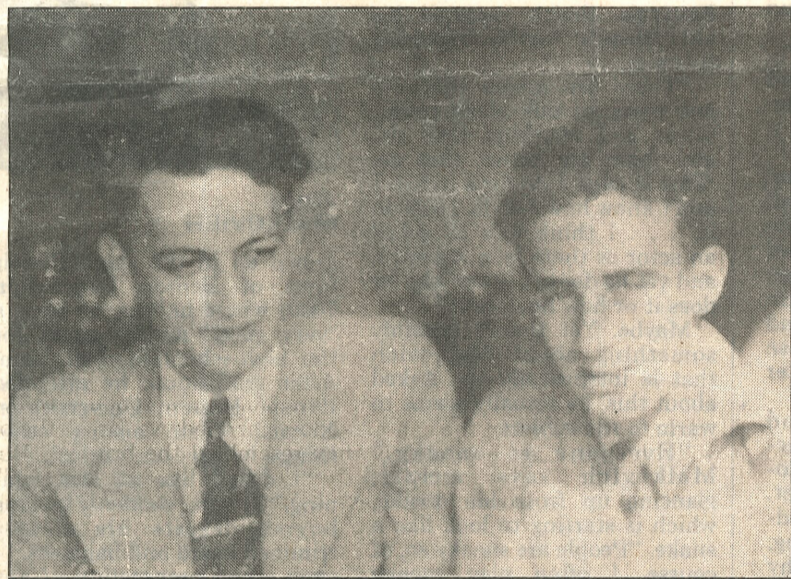
The Germans wanted Anton Schrader to name names in Holland's wartime resistance network, to tear from him the secrets of an underground army of spies and saboteurs, newsletter printers and brave civilians who risked their own and their families' lives to smuggle intelligence and, sometimes, human cargo, to Britain.

For three years Anton Schrader's hand had steered a widespread Dutch resistance group which set up a pipeline for aircrews from the thousands of Allied fighter and bomber planes that were brought down by the Luftwaffe over the Nazi-occupied Netherlands.

And the man known as the Orange Pimpernel had done it all in style, sometimes being chauffeured in Queen Wilhelmina's personal limo.

He was a 23-year-old Delft University engineering graduate in 1940 when he was appointed to a senior job in the Dutch agriculture ministry, answerable to the secretary of agriculture and to the German commandant for The Hague district.

His task was to monitor and distribute products and produce,



AS YOU WERE: Anton Schrader and Cyril Mora when they met in Utrecht in 1943.

maintaining a balancing act between the remnants of the Dutch Government and their new German masters.

Highly mobile and about as far above suspicion as any Dutchman was in German eyes, he was able to weave a web of contacts and resources which could be called on when Dutch nationals needed to be spirited out of the country or when Allied airmen buried their parachutes and tapped, fingers crossed, on farmhouse doors in an unknown and enemy land.

Airmen like Cyril Mora, the New Plymouth pensioner whose Christmas came early this week when he was able to repay some of the hospitality Anton Schrader, and thousands of people whose names are both revered and forgotten, gave so willingly nearly as half-century ago.

On the night of April 26, 1943, Sergeant Mora was a radio navigator on a Stirling bomber from the

RAF's No 15 Squadron when the plane was raked by machine-gun fire from a German fighter and tipped, out of control, from the skies between Amsterdam and Utrecht.

Six of the seven crew parachuted from the plummeting plane. One man was shot dead in midair when he was skewered on a searchlight beam and five were later captured.

Mora alone escaped. He crashed through a market garden greenhouse, skirted a large house nearby because that was what RAF crews had been told to do and took a chance on a more modest home he spotted down a side road.

He hit the jackpot. The Dutch family, after their initial caution, took the New Zealander inside — and hid him with a Dutchman also on the run from the Germans.

The next day, dressed in civilian clothes, he cycled 200 metres behind a guide to Utrecht and was

delivered to the Dutch underground and Anton Schrader.

The RAF navigator and 10 other escapers were eventually crowded into a launch which crept through the reedy shallows in the Biesbos, at the head of a deep inlet south of Rotterdam, past armed trawlers guarding the estuary, over a minefield and out into the North Sea for the 16-hour journey to English waters.

Those 11 men were among 3500 British and American aircrew returned by the French, Belgian and Dutch resistance — chickenfeed compared with the tens of millions of people engaged in the war around the world, but high-quality chickenfeed in an Allied army struggling to maintain its military skills.

Schrader says his underground army grew from the thinnest ranks of a few brave people who distributed banned newsletters, keeping up the morale of a crushed and terrified population. Most chose to submit, stay alive, do what they could for their children.

Neutral Netherlands had collapsed over five days in May 1940 when the German 18th Army swept in from the south, paratroopers blossomed in their thousands and the Stukas screamed in over Rotterdam.

"We never had a chance," he recalls. "Our soldiers were on bicycles. The Germans were in tanks. I saw Rotterdam bombed and the houses burning and people crying as they tried to get out of the city."

"The people were very scared. If you asked them at first if they would help a British airman they would say no. So you ask them if they would deliver some newsletters and they agree. And then their sons and daughters get involved, and they offer to act as couriers and, maybe eventually, escorts for the aircrews being smuggled back to Britain."

"And, over a period of time, they

hear about people killed and tortured. What could we do? Work with these people?"

But he admits there was as much adventure as there was patriotism.

He laughs now at sharing his car with a German officer while Cyril Mora slept in the front. And crawling under the floorboards of a restaurant in Mappel with a hand-made tape-recorder that he and other agents invented during a stint in England before parachuting back to Holland. At the tables above them the cream of Nazi counter-intelligence discussed Hitler's plans to strike back through the Belgian Ardennes at the advancing Allied armies.

Schrader's restaurant eavesdropping is estimated by military historians to have shortened the war by three months. US forces commander Dwight Eisenhower pulled George Patton's 9th Army back from his headlong rush to the German border to meet the German counter-offensive.

But there were tears, not laughter, when treason delivered Schrader to the Gestapo in 1944 and when a battered and near-broken man agreed to talk.

After demanding terms, such as the freeing of comrades rounded up with him, Schrader allowed a story to be coaxed from him about a planned Allied invasion in northern Holland. He knew the story well — all 30 pages of it had been rehearsed to perfection with the Americans in London before he returned to his homeland.

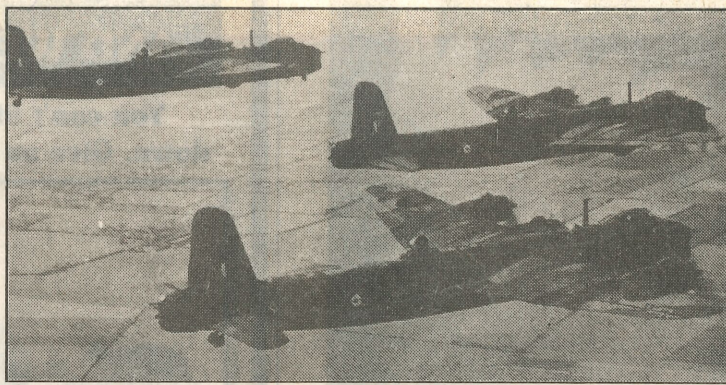
The Germans were so impressed that the Schrader story was couriered direct to Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, who immediately sent four parachute regiments from Nijmegen in central Holland to meet the non-existent northern threat.

Nijmegen fell to Britain's Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's forces a week later.

Schrader was sure the debacle would seal his fate in Zwolle Prison's death row. Furious SS troops emptied the cells, but to Schrader's bafflement his name was not on the list.

He discovered later that his near-namesake captor, Commandant Schreider, who had earlier discovered the Dutchman could play the piano to the German's violin, had ensured the name Anton Schrader was taken off the list for execution.

He already knew the lessons of survival. This was his first lesson in forgiveness.



STERLING SERVICE: The Stirling bomber.