

German native recalls life on the 'other side'

Gerhard Treviranus, born in 1927, was six years old when Adolph Hitler came to power in his native Germany, and as a child and teen growing up with his older sister and younger brother, he watched the events unfold leading up to the Second World War.

Every German school child was required to become a member of the Hitler Youth organization, so he saw significant changes in his daily life—things like seeing his opening prayer at school eventually replaced with students being required to salute Hitler.

As time went on, Treviranus witnessed the major social upheavals in his homeland

including the increased persecution of the Jewish people.

As a Hitler Youth, he was required to work nights, manning the anti-aircraft guns until he was drafted January 6, 1945, at the age of 17.

His father, a veteran of both world wars, encouraged him to apply to officers' school, and in doing so, stay away from becoming an SS officer.

Treviranus only fought for the German army one day before he was captured by the Americans, and spent the balance of the war in a POW camp, until his release in February 1946.

Wanting to see the world, he traveled to Canada in May of 1953, and worked in every

province until he returned to Germany in 1955, then married his wife Elizabeth in 1958.

He returned to Canada in 1966, to manage the dairy operation at Alexhome Farm on the Eighth Line and with Elizabeth, they raised five children, three daughters and two sons.

The following are excerpts from his memoirs that he has recently written to pass on to his 10 grandchildren, to give them an understanding of what it was like to grow up and become a soldier in wartime Germany during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

...
I remember Hitler's speech over the radio. He had a voice that made you listen fearfully, it was like you were put under a ban.

...
I belonged to the Hitler Jugend, I was too old to be in the Jungvolk. Because I was in high school I was sent to a leader training camp in Braunau Silesia. They kept me for two days and then gave up on me. I was glad to be sent home to help my mother.

...
In our school I always was shunned when history lessons had to deal with the time after the first war. I was the nephew of a traitor. Two boys had the habit to drag me in to the toilet and put my head in an armlock and pound me. I could not get any help; you did not snitch. I got the idea to hide my leader riding stick in my pants. This time I walked back in to the toilet my friends followed and got

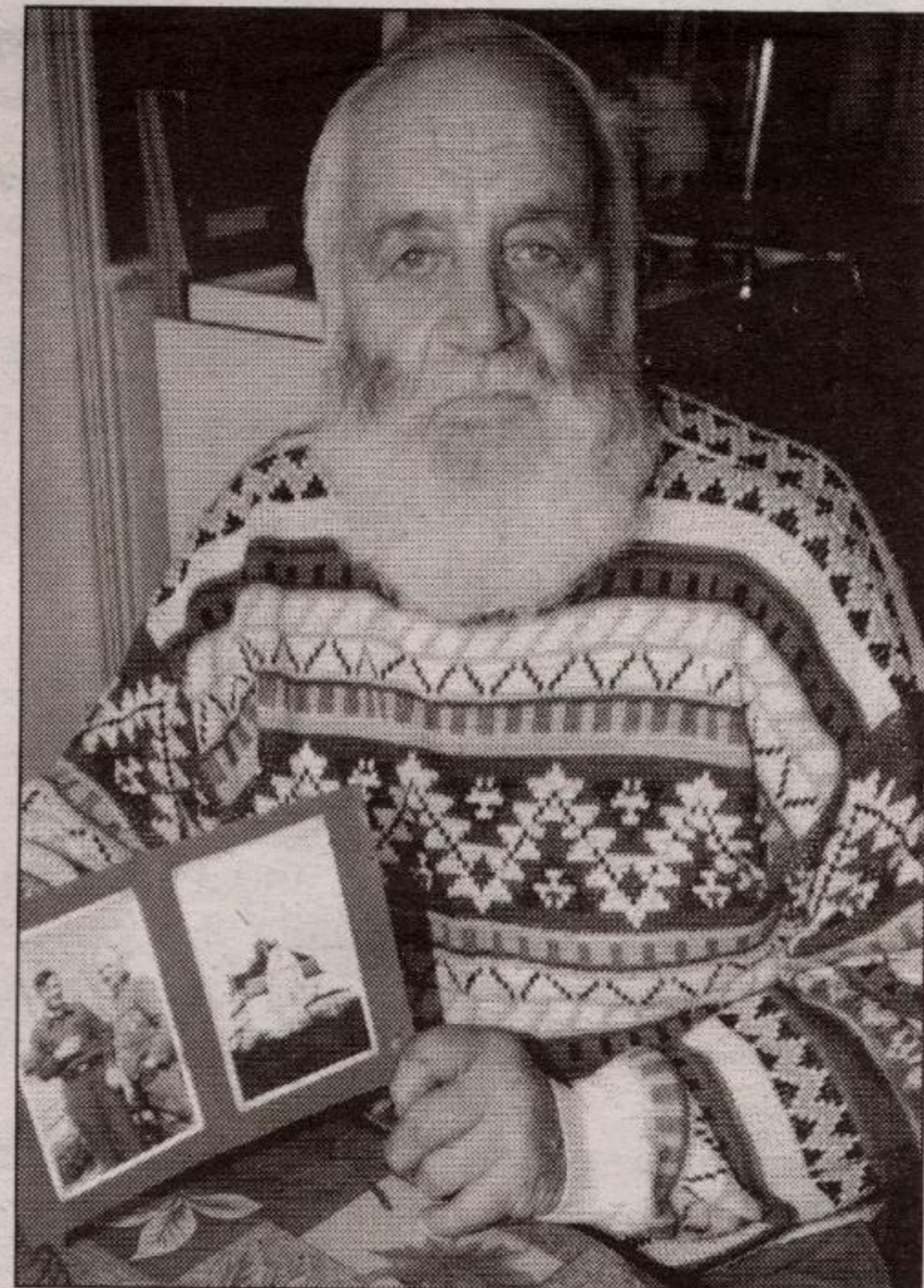
the whip across the face. I never was bothered again.

...
Another time one officer of the SS (Saal Schutz) was holding an emotional speech (on) how to serve your fatherland better by joining them. Everyone who did not want to join had to stand up—I was the only one standing. A furious lieutenant tried to make me sit down. I pulled a piece of paper out of my pocket that showed I was a volunteer for the army. My father had talked me into it; he knew I was crazy about horses and I had a chance to be with horses if I volunteered. The officer could not touch me.

...
I just made it home for Christmas 1944. The Russians were already on German soil. We saw many planes. My mother thought they were German but I had to correct her—they were American bombers.

...
On the evening of Feb. 19 we camped outside Dresden. Late at night I heard the familiar sound of bombers. The whole city was red from the fire and smoke. I felt sorry for the pilots who had to do this job, they must have had nightmares all their lives. But they could not refuse...

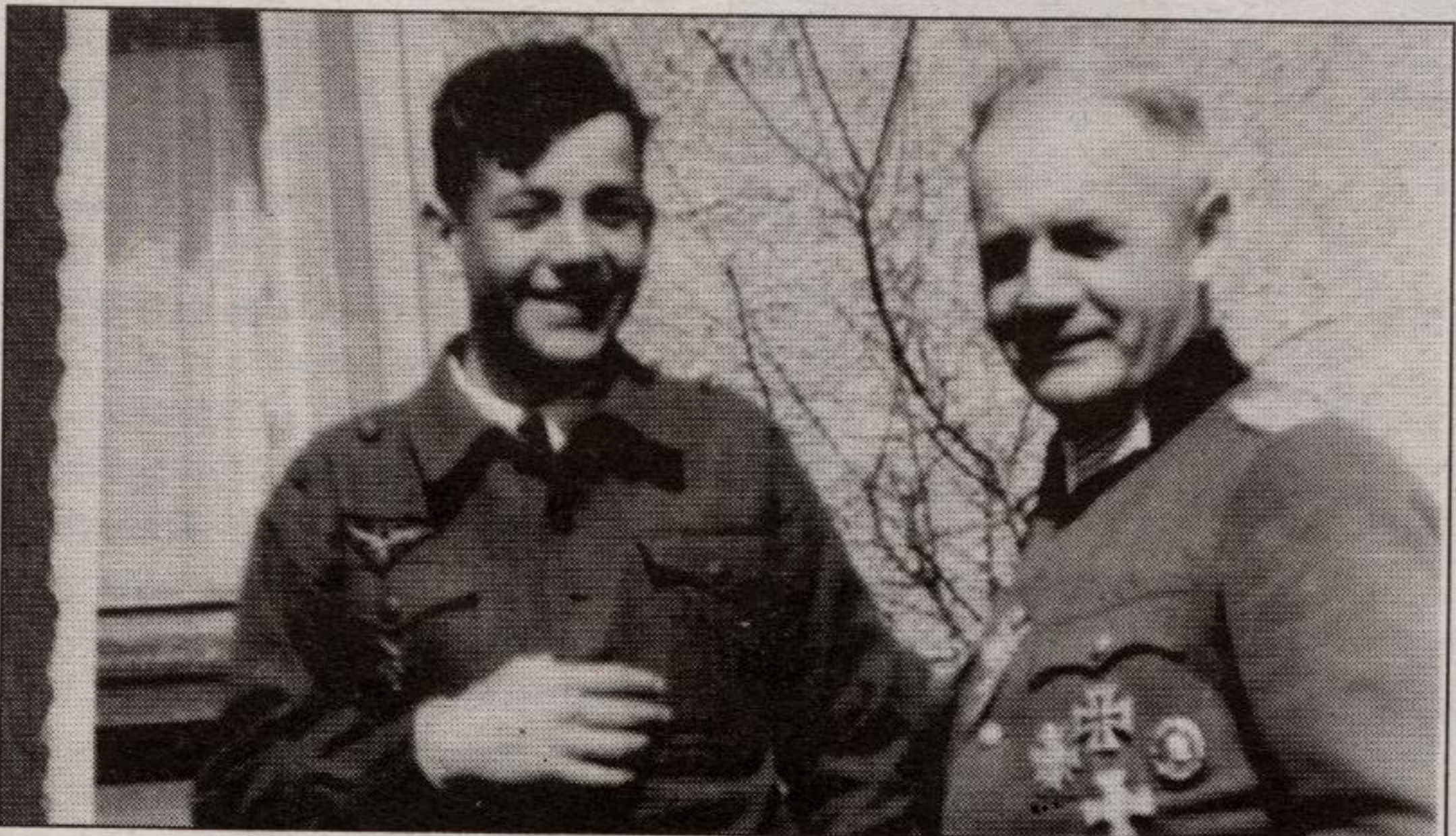
...
Mid-April 1945: One day before we marched towards Ragun, we were told everyone



Gerhard Treviranus in his Georgetown home. Photo by Ted Brown

who tried to become a prisoner of war without being wounded had to be shot by his fellow soldiers and their parents would be punished. This was a big shock to me. I was still hoping to get through the war alive. I did not want to be a coward, but did not want to lose my life.

...
All the other tanks were pulled far back. After a long time of shooting I heard the noise of chains right over my head; a tank drove over my man hole. I was covered with dirt but then felt a hand pulling on my helmet. I became a prisoner without being wounded.



A teenaged Gerhard Treviranus and his father.

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