

Vancouver. He enjoyed life in B.C., having joined a musical theatre group that put on outdoor shows in Vancouver and Seattle.

While working at Mainland Foundry in 1943, his firm received a call from the military. The war in Europe was in full swing and British manufacturing companies were busy building hundreds of new aircraft which were urgently needed to fend off the Germans. But there was a problem.

Not enough aircraft control cable was available to put the finished planes in the air. At the time, there was a nine-month wait for aircraft control cable - the taught rope-like string made of metal wires.

Charles Aldridge was just a civilian engineer working by himself in Vancouver when he invented a new machine to manufacture the cable. His invention got those planes into the air a lot sooner and helped save hundreds of lives.

The army recognized Charles' talents and soon had him drafted. Charles was placed into the Signal Corp where his design engineering skills would be put to good use. He arrived in England and went to work deciphering and encrypting codes under the wing of Sir William Stevenson - otherwise known as 'Intrepid'.

Canadian women were being used by the Allies as spies in Europe. When one of the Canadian operatives located the whereabouts of an Enigma, the Brits launched a clandestine campaign to capture it.

With an actual working model of the German's code machine at their disposal, the Colossus team went to work. They built a better code machine, called the Ultra, and went about their work intercepting enemy

work meant being in the plants with the machines and heavy equipment and talking to the men who used them so he could design improvements back at his drawing board. But the loud roar of the heavy engines had destroyed his hearing and he could no longer communicate in the necessary fashion.

In 1946, Charles joined his brother John in the construction business in

Fisherville.

Charles continued to work in the construction business but found it difficult because of his hearing loss. He later dabbled with a few other jobs; becoming a manager at Simpson Sears, before settling in as a stock broker.

He worked as an investment councilor during the 1960's but he was constantly fearful of making errors, again because of this bad

he had wanted to see how he could make out for himself without it. It was those letters he wrote from England back home to his mother during the war that provided the necessary documentation to garner him a pension.

In 1971, the government called upon him once again, making him a public relations officer. Charles enjoyed that job until his retirement in 1985.

But it wasn't until 1995, while listening to a TV program about Operation Colossus, did Charles tell anyone about his wartime experiences. Not his wife, not his family, not his business partner brother and not his mother. His brother and mother are gone now and it's Charles' biggest regret in life - that they never knew of his secret involvement to help win the war.

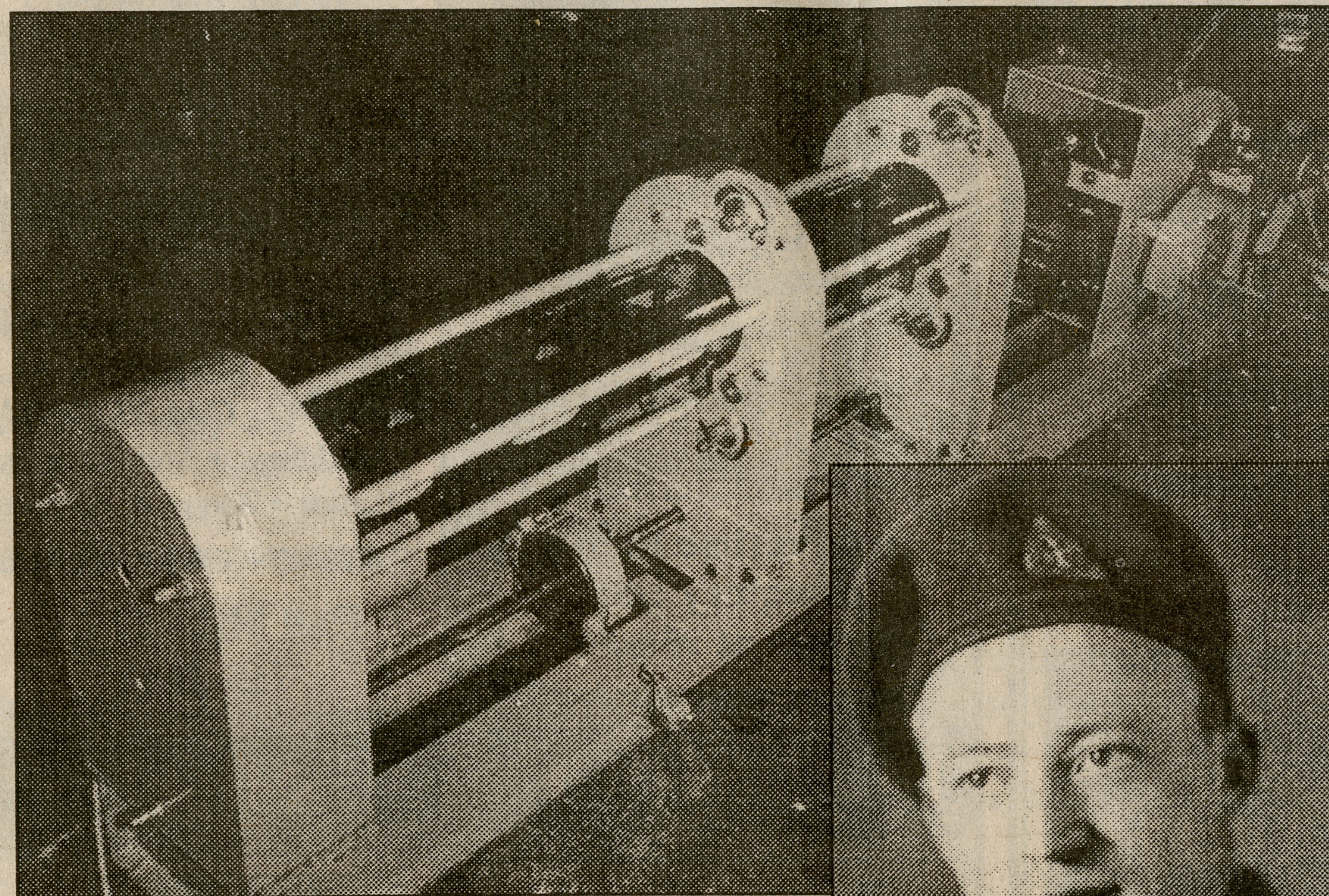
When Charles first learned

Affairs to confirm it before he spoke of any of it. But with a letter from Ottawa confirming the de-classification of his secret wartime project 50 years ago, Charles is now free to speak as he wishes.

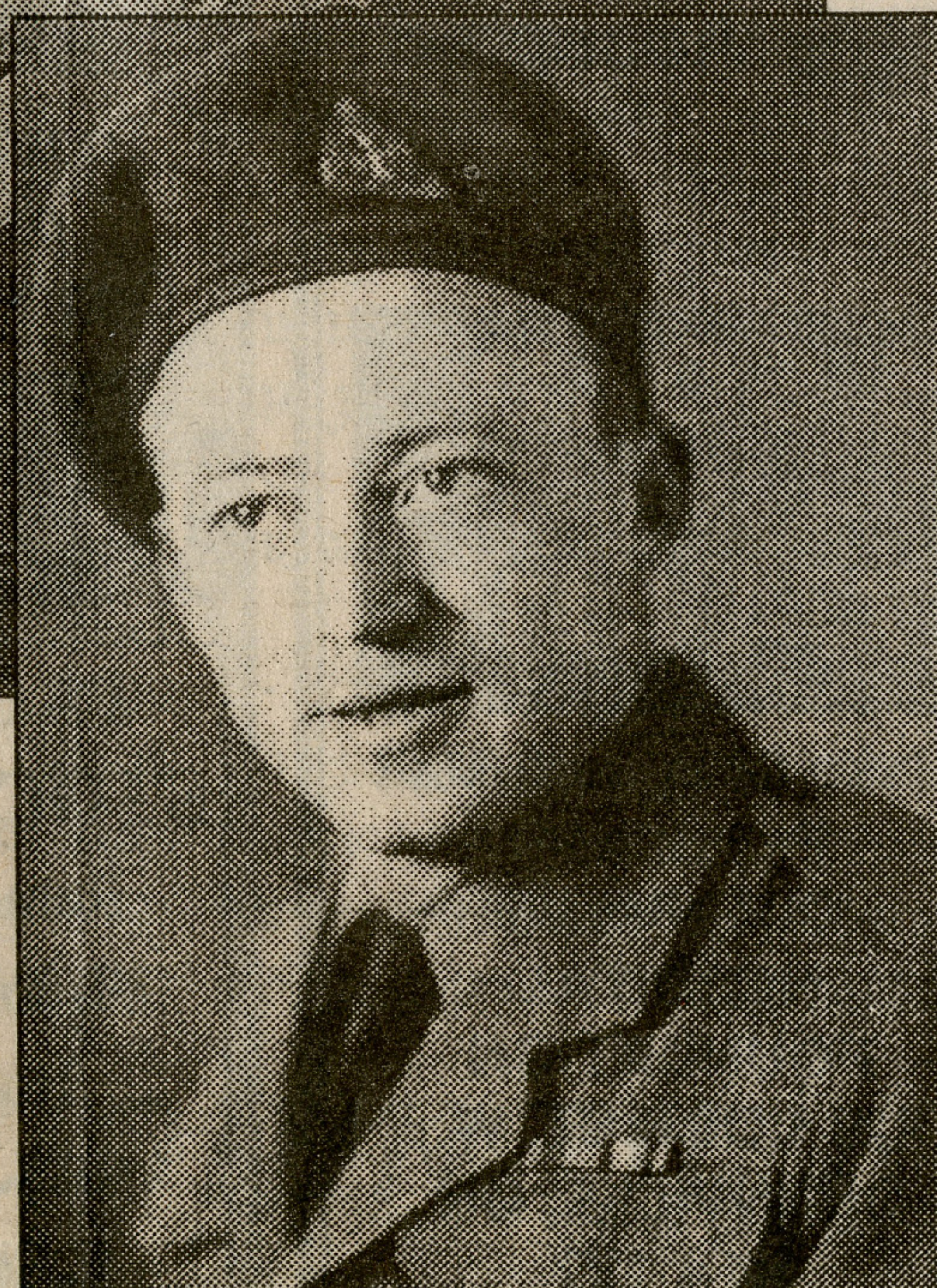
He and Barbara live in St. Catharines and he has given about a half dozen talks - mostly to service clubs and school groups, about his wartime experiences.

He says he might write a book but he doesn't have the time. He hopes to be able to attend the Caledonia High School Reunion this May.

It's a little sad ironic that Charles Aldridge's greatest achievements had to go unnoticed for so long. The self-reliant man from Caledonia who left home to make a name for himself certainly did - it just took 50 years before he could tell anybody.



Charles Aldridge helped design the Ultra - a machine for encrypting and deciphering secret codes during World War II. Charles also invented a machine for manufacturing wire airplane control cable that helped put new planes in the air sooner and saved hundreds of lives.



Letters from Readers:

The Grand River Sachem welcomes letters on all subjects of community interest. All letters must be signed by the writer - pen names are not acceptable - and must include a day time phone number for verification purposes. Please keep your letters to a maximum of 350 words in length. Letters are subject to editing for length and libel.

Send you letters or drop them off to : The Grand River Sachem, 3 Sutherland St. W. Caledonia ON L3W 1C1 or email: sachem@sachem.on.ca