

SECOND WORLD WAR

Veteran recalls youth in Nazi Germany, being wounded in battle

• Georg Vording has mixed feelings about Remembrance Day, denounces brainwashing by Nazi regime, and remembers being called a 'cheese head'

Josh Ginsberg
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MONTRÉAL (CUP) - Georg Vording displays the medals he won in the Second World War on a wooden plaque, labelled neatly in white marker. The 79-year-old describes them with the pride any veteran would, explaining one was earned for bravery, one for being wounded by the enemy.

The only difference between Vording and other veterans living in Canada is the country: his medals are adorned with swastikas, and the enemy that wounded him is a hero in our history books.

Now living in Montréal as a landlord in the McGill University ghetto, Vording recalls the horrors of the war and the Nazi genocide from a rare point of view.

When asked how he feels every Remembrance Day in Canada as the country remembers the soldiers that died at the hands of his nation, Vording was, at first, evasive. Eventually, he conceded Nov. 11 is always a difficult day for him.

"I don't like to say it, but each year with the war people - I have nothing against them, I love them -- but I don't feel good, because I'm the enemy."

Vording was born in Holland to a Dutch mother and German father in 1925. At 10 years old, he was sent to a religious school in Westphalia, Germany, for training to become a missionary in Argentina.

Vording's childhood was crudely interrupted when war broke out in 1939.

"I remember 1939 when the Nazis passed by in the main streets and all the brothers were standing there. . . . They were also forced into the army."

It was not long before Vord-



Georg Vording is a veteran from Germany's forces in World War II. He fought in the Russian front.

ing, too, was drafted into the Hitler Youth at the age of 16, a mandatory organization designed to indoctrinate children with Nazi propaganda.

But more than the propaganda, Vording said he remembers the fun he had wrestling with the other boys. He soon left the Hitler Youth, and was forced into Arbeitsdienst -- a service corps of the army acting as a training ground for regular service.

**- Georg Vording,
German Second
World War Veteran**

"It's training with all the tools, how to clean everything, how to clean shoes inside out, how to dress . . . and you learn Hitler's Mein Kampf."

While Vording said learning Hitler's doctrines seemed routine at the time, in retrospect he claims to have rejected them.

"I started to read it, but every page is the same thing . . . hate against the Jewish people. Right away I took the book, and put it in the corner," he said. "You can see the anger."

In 1943, Vording again had no choice but to advance to the next stage in his military career.

From the Arbeitsdienst, he was transferred into the regular infantry, and shipped to Calais, France, where he was trained as a machine gunner.

Calais was heavily bombed by Germany in 1940, acting as a point of defence for British and French troops to be evacuated to England at the battle of Dunkirk.

Vording arrived two years later to help fortify the city in

case of an Allied attack. "I spent six months in Calais, where a lot of Canadians were killed. I saw Dunkirk, I saw it all; it was all broken," he said. Canadian forces liberated Calais in 1944.

He said during his training period, other soldiers often teased him for his young-looking features.

"I looked like a baby and they were teasing me, calling me a 'Dutch cheese head.' I just hit them, right away."

Vording eventually gained acceptance among his peers by drawing caricatures of other soldiers, a hobby he continues to pursue.

Vording did not witness an actual battle until he was moved to the Russian front at Vilnius, now in Lithuania.

The town was decimated by earlier fighting, when 100,000 inhabitants were killed and its Jewish population almost entirely wiped out by the Nazis.

Vording said the fighting was still intense upon his arrival.

"There was fighting, a terrible loss of soldiers on both sides. The Russians had much more. I'll never forget; I still have the pictures in front of me. I was still a kid.

"I didn't know anything else except, 'Watch out you don't get killed,' because 99 per cent

of machine gun soldiers are killed," he said.

He recounted one occasion in which an officer standing beside him was killed.

"We were behind a big tree. I was on the right side; he was on the left side. . . . All of a sudden, there was a gunner behind us, and I thought, 'Oh, boy.' I told him, 'Change (sides).' I changed, but I didn't get an answer from him. I lifted him up; he was full of blood. I took his medal and his booklet. . . . We lost one after the other."

Eventually, Vording, who had been promoted to corporal by this point, was injured by shrapnel, and spent the rest of the war in hospital.

He followed his father and brother to Canada in 1957 and set up a contracting business.

OLD WOUNDS HEAL SLOWLY

Vording complained the German government never compensated him for his war wounds. He attributed this to what he called an unfair evaluation process in Montréal by Jewish doctors, who determined he was "wounded less than 25 per cent," or below the amount needed for compensation.

"They sent me to five Jewish doctors - they were nice doctors, because Jewish doctors are very good - they look at you just like anybody else."

But they marked down below 25 per cent, so you don't get anything. I disagreed with that. It should be a German doctor. . . . they are more understanding for soldiers. . . . It has to be a soldier doctor," he said.

Despite his aversion to Jewish doctors assessing his war wounds, Vording spoke highly of Jewish people, even speaking mournfully of many acquaintances who died in the Holocaust.

He also spoke of a Jewish friend in Montréal, with whom he discussed the Holocaust.

"I remembered his parents were murdered in Munster. We became good friends. . . . We were always together, skiing. One day I asked him - we had a big party, lots of drinks - I said, 'How the hell do you feel, as a Jewish guy, in between all these Germans?'"

"He gave me an answer that really hits me: 'One of you could have killed my parents.'"

Vording is thankful he never fought against Canadian soldiers.

"God thanks I was fighting (in Russia) and not in Normandy. But it never gets out of my mind every day I think about it, everyday, everyday, everyday."

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