

History of military in Elgin turns into fascinating hobby

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Elgin County's military past is being brought to light thanks to the efforts of a local man who has long been involved and interested in the militia.

Brian Sim, 27, is now actively involved in writing a military history of the area, a project he has been engaged in for about a year.

The contributions, the antics and other aspects of history of such groups as the St. Thomas Rifle Company, the St. Thomas Troop of Cavalry, and the Port Stanley Marine Company are being studied by Mr. Sim, through records and through interviews with local people with military backgrounds.

"St. Thomas was quite an active military city at one time," he said. There are also many men with "very exciting" military careers, he notes.

Digging into the past, Mr. Sim said he discovered "a lot of

funny things that have happened, and a lot of sad things."

He said one amusing incident occurred in the spring of 1866, when someone reported that about 100 Fenian vessels were merging on Port Stanley. About 60 men from the militia in Port Stanley, Vienna, St. Thomas and other areas stormed down to the port, only to discover that the "invasion" was merely three or four merchant boats coming into the port.

"This was typical of what happened at that time. There were many, many stories," Mr. Sim said.

His history will include an in-depth study of the Number 7 Cadet Corps at CECL, which is Canada's oldest active cadet corps, founded in 1880. Mr. Sim himself is lieutenant quartermaster with the corps.

The history will also deal largely with the 91st Battalion. Mr. Sim is custodian of the records of the battalion.

Mr. Sim's decision to take on the task of writing a military history of the county came after several years of avid interest in the military.

"It all started out with me being a collector," he said. "I started picking up old military uniforms, rifles and badges."

A member of the cadet corps in high school, he became interested in the "history angle" and wrote a history of

the corps. The history, however, was rejected by the Department of National Defence for publication on the grounds that it was "too narrow a category."

He is also a member of the Officers' Mess of the Elgin Regiment, and is a former assistant custodian at the Elgin County museum.

His military collection, which he says covers a much broader spectrum than Elgin County, includes military uniforms from as far back as 1860, medals dating back to 1806, machine guns, caps, and a host of other "militaria."

Mr. Sim, a technician in the City Engineer's Department, said he hopes to complete his history in the next couple of years.