

Local collector helps Canadians remember

■ *Hands-on war memorabilia display will be at Strathcona museum until Nov. 30.*

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Rick Crawley's father wanted to forget World War II, but more than a decade after the corporal's death, his son is on a mission to remember.

It's a race against time for the Strathcona resident, who is trying to collect stories from a dwindling number of

World War II veterans. Crawley also has a wide variety of Canadian army memorabilia, but original items are becoming more scarce.

From bayonets to canvas bathtubs, his collection focuses on items that Canadian soldiers took with them overseas. Crawley also has traditional army memorabilia including badges and

newspaper clippings.

This month, his collection is on public display for the first time at the Strathcona Heritage Museum.

"I love teaching and I really want to use my collection to educate," Crawley said.

While he has been interested in Canadian military history since childhood, he has only recently had the time and

resources for detailed research.

Like many veterans, his father didn't like to talk about the war. It wasn't until his father's death about 12 years ago that Crawley began his research.

He started his collection with an inherited badge and title, and learned his father was part of a regiment that helped block the Falaise Gap in France,

causing the German army to be surrounded and playing a pivotal role in the Allies' victory in Europe.

Crawley wants to remind younger generations of the leading role Canadians played in liberating Belgium and the Netherlands – a feat he feels doesn't get the attention it deserves.

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"There's a town in Belgium that plays the Last Post every night for Canadian veterans," he said. "They have far more passion about our veterans than we do."

Crawley said he got a wake-up call about the importance of public education when he told another baby boomer about his collection and the information about the war was all new to her.

"We all know the phrase for Remembrance Day 'lest we forget'. It dawned on me that this lady couldn't practice 'lest we forget' because she had never learned," Crawley said.

Now his goal is to share veterans' stories and retell Canadian military history so future generations have something to remember.

Crawley plans to record as many World War II stories as possible and



Rick Crawley adjusts one of the military uniforms in his exhibit.

PHOTO BY JOELLE TOMEK

will be at the museum on Remembrance Day to talk with local veterans.

In the future, he hopes to make his collection mobile and take it to schools all over the province.

The display of items used by soldiers in World War II is all hands-on.

Museum guests are allowed to try on helmets and ammunition belts worn by soldiers, operate a switchboard and examine collectors' items from Beaumont to India.

"I think it's important to see it, to touch it, to hear it and to experience it," he said.

Crawley's collection will be on display until Nov. 30. In honour of local veterans, the museum will be open on Remembrance Day from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.