

HOMELAND STORIES MINUTES



Elsie Gregory MacGill
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Elsie MacGill: Queen of the Hurricanes

In a lifetime of awards and "firsts", Elizabeth Muriel Gregory MacGill (1905–1980) was the first woman to receive an Electrical Engineering degree in Canada in 1927, first woman to receive a Master's degree in Aeronautical Engineering in 1929, first woman aircraft designer in the

world in 1938, first woman corporate member of the Engineering Institute of Canada in 1938 and the first female Technical Advisor to the United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization in 1946.

A specialist in stress analysis, Elsie helped design the first all-metal aircraft built in Canada. She designed and tested the *Maple Leaf II* Trainer for pilot training. It was Elsie's work on the Hawker Hurricane fighter planes, however, that earned her the nickname, "Queen of the Hurricanes". Elsie adapted the Hurricane to fly in cold weather by looking over thousands of aircraft blueprints, oversaw the manufacturing of the tools needed for the production of the new aircraft, organized the training for hundreds of inexperienced workers to accustom them to a new airplane assembly line, flew on all test flights and supervised the 4,500 people who built the Hurricane, half of whom were women.

One thousand four hundred and fifty-one Hawker Hurricanes were built by the Canadian Car and Foundry Company in Fort William between 1939 and 1943. Elsie stated, "War effort is a man staying and working an extra hour, or two or five hours a day. It is the woman cutting short her noon hour to get back to finish the job; it is someone taking home his problems to solve them after dinner; it is someone coming back in the evening to finish an assignment. War effort is something, which is as microscopic in the unit as the individual, but as mighty in the sum total as an army."

The RCAF operated Hurricanes in Canada for local defence. Pilot candidates of *The Plan* transitioned from training to operational flying with Hurricanes. The Hawker Hurricanes and the men who flew them were the deciding factor in *The Battle of Britain*. One of every 10 Hurricane fighters used during WWII was built on Elsie's watch in Fort William, today's Thunder Bay.