

HOMELAND MINUTES



Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum Mount Hope, Ontario
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Little Norways: proud pockets of freedom

By June 1940, the Nazi juggernaut had quashed Norwegian resistance. The Norwegian whaling fleet fled to Halifax where many of its ships were converted into anti-submarine corvettes that fought in the Battle of the Atlantic. What was left of the Norwegian air force fled to Britain. During this time of stress, the Norwegian government-in-exile in London was already negotiating to lease the Toronto Island Airport for training to re-build the Royal Norwegian Air Force under the auspices of the Commonwealth Air Training Plan. A training camp at the south-west corner of Bathurst Street and Queen's Quay officially opened November 10, 1940. Norwegian recruits who had escaped from behind enemy lines and volunteers from Canada and around the world flooded to Little Norway. Undelivered combat planes which Norway had ordered from the US before the war were delivered to Little Norway. That \$20 million worth of equipment was augmented by purchases of air craft with funds from the "Wings for Norway" campaign that received \$400,000 of donations from Nordic associations, Norwegian and Swedish expatriates, Canadians and Americans. The first Norwegian unit went overseas to Iceland in April 1941, and the first all-Norwegian fighter squadron with complete air crew

and ground crew went to England two months later. In 1942 a larger Little Norway was opened near Gravenhurst. By the end of the war, 3,000 men had trained at the Toronto and Gravenhurst "Little Norways". Norwegian fighter squadrons supported the Canadian landing at Dieppe and Normandy and they supported North Atlantic convoys with a record of destroying 252 enemy aircraft and five submarines. Of the 600 pilots, 270 survived the war.

Norway's current king, Harald V, visited Little Norway in Gravenhurst at five years of age to unveil three new Fairchild fighter planes: Spirit of Little Norway I, II and III. To this day, the Norwegian and Canadian flags fly side by side at Little Norway Park in Toronto.