

Norman Levitt Speech – May 7, 2005, Warsaw, Poland

My name is Norman Levitt. I was born and raised in Hamilton Ontario and I volunteered to join the Royal Canadian Air Force in June of 1942. I volunteered because I felt it was my duty and obligation as a Canadian and of the Jewish faith. I did know that the Jews in Europe were being persecuted but I had no idea of what was really happening to our people over there.

At that time, practically all of Eastern Europe was controlled by the Germans and only Britain and her allies were resisting the Germans. France was under German control and the French Vichy government were co-operating with the Germans.

When I enlisted in a military office on Jane street south in Hamilton, the enlisting officer left the room for a few minutes and I took advantage of his absence to check his notes about me. The notes said “good material for a Jewish lad.” I was very insulted with his inference that being of the Jewish faith was therefore not good material for war service compared to other faiths. I am sure he was not aware that over 17,000 Canadian Jews served in WWII This was approximately 10% of the Jewish population in Canada, which in 1939 was about 167,000. That was the largest percentage of any ethnic group in Canada.

In training accidents in Canada I was left with a breathing problem and a hearing loss. Consequently, I was deprived of serving in the aircrew. I lost several good friends of the Jewish faith in Hamilton who all made the supreme sacrifice.

Some of them I went to high school with. They were all in their 20’ or late teens and they were the finest men you could ever know.

With your indulgence, I would like to name them and pay tribute to their memory:

**Flight Seargent Alex Balinson** was fatally injured and was buried in the cemetery in Malta in April 25<sup>th</sup> in 1942.

**Flight Officer Joseph Feldman** reported missing. I knew his family I went to visit them who lived on Grant Street in Hamilton. I was in uniform and it was in the evening. His mother answered the door and thought I was her lost son. It was a very emotional time for her and me. Joseph Feldman was officially presumed dead on 12 May 1944.

**Sgt. Ralph Frank.** He and I were teammates on the Westdale Collegiate football team. He was killed on active service and buried in the Nottingham Jewish cemetery in England.

**Warrant Officer Alfred Garshowitz** was reported missing and presumed dead following air operations over enemy territory on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1943. He is buried in West Thalia, Germany.

**Flight Officer Sydney Lees** killed in action over Germany in his twenty-eighth operational flights over on enemy territory. He was born in Russia and escaped to Canada at an early age. He was buried in Bergen Op-Zoom in Holland.

Now I would like to tell you about a Hamilton hero who survived. **Squadron Leader David Goldberg** from Hamilton was an outstanding and notable hero during WW2. He completed many successful operations involving low level attacks against ground targets.

On April 12 1944, he was reported missing after air operations. His plane was shot down and he parachuted down to France. With the co-operation of the French underground, David managed to get to Britain and return to Canada. He did not have to return to the war, but he did.

He led a formation of spitfire planes and supported the Jewish Brigade in Italy attacking the German mortar positions. He had 234 flight sweeps over France, Germany, Italy & the Low Countries. Incredible! I also should tell you that David was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1945.

Now that I have finished mentioning my comrades, I would like you to give some thought to the heroism of the thousands of other Canadian soldiers -Jews and non-Jews - who fought to free Europe from Nazi tyranny. Over 23,000

Canadians laid down their lives serving in the Canadian army: 17,000 in the air force, 2000 in the navy and 1600 in the merchant navy. Another 54,000 Canadians were wounded. Over 700 Newfoundlanders also died during the war.

I would like to ask you all now to observe a moment of silence in their honor.

Thank you.

One of the most exciting and memorable days of my life was VE day May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945, when the Nazis finally surrendered and the war was officially declared as being over.

Exactly 60 years ago tomorrow, I was in London, England and it was an unforgettable experience. Everyone was out celebrating. Piccadilly Circus, Lester square; Trafalgar square were jammed with people. Hugging everybody, kissing, screaming with joy and relief and many tears of happiness. I managed to get down to Buckingham Palace and to my great surprise on the balcony were King George the 6<sup>th</sup>, his wife who was later to be known as the Queen Mother who passed away not too long ago in her 100<sup>th</sup> year. Their two daughters, one of whom is the present queen who was 15 years of age at the time and her younger sister were also there.

With them was Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Churchill inspired the free world with his speeches telling everyone **“we shall never surrender”**. They said of him that he marshaled the English language and sent it to war. Together with England’s Royal Air Force, the Royal Canadian Airforce, and the allies won the airbattles over Britain against the Germans. Churchill’s memorable comment on this heroic victory was that: **“never in the history of mankind has so much been owed, by so many to so few.”**

A few months later, I was posted in Germany at an airfield controlled by the RCAF called Uterson about ten kilometers from the City of Hamburg.

I was given the job of supplying the Canadian vehicles with gasoline.

I had heard that there was an institution a few miles away organized by the joint distribution committee of the United States. They were looking after the rehabilitation of the young Jewish orphans rescued from the concentration camps.

A friend of mine accompanied me there, it was heartbreaking to see these children who were emaciated, thin, very little pep and energy and the effect of their life in the camps was evident.

I went back to the camp with the orphans several times and brought candies, chocolates and chewing gum for the kids.

The people at the orphanage could not thank me enough. I also wrote to my brother Leslie back in Hamilton and he organized a clothing drive for the children which were sent to the orphanage. I felt happy that I was able to do this.

In conclusion, I want to thank-you for coming on the March of the Living on this anniversary of VE day, to remember my comrades who made the supreme sacrifice and for remembering all those brave Canadian soldiers who gave their lives and the others who fought to protect that we all enjoy today.

We should be grateful that we can live with the knowledge that we and our families can enjoy a life of peace and freedom without the fear of being involved in any hostilities.

Thank-you.