

NLF's history

Norwegian women's defence league (hereafter NLF) was founded by Jacobine Rye in 1928. The idea came from Finland where Lotta Svärd was started in 1918. Equivalent organisations were founded in Sweden in 1924 (Landsstormkvinnorna) and in Denmark (Danmarks Lottekorps) in 1940.

Jacobine Rye was daughter of an officer. She was teacher and became a principal. It was first after she retired, that she put into action her idea of training women for voluntary work in the Military Defence. During the first few years the work consisted of spreading the idea and collecting money. They arranged courses for military cooks, protection against chemical weapons and first aid for civilians. They arranged courses for military winter equipment. Throughout the 1930's NLF appealed to the Government for increased funding as the situation in Europe became more threatening, but they were not heard. Shortly before the war started on the 9th of April 1940, women contacted NLF to help out where they were needed. By then there were 53 local leagues, all together 16000 members. During the first years of war they helped civilians in war struck areas, provided first aid, set up food stations, took care of transportation and supported prisoners of war. In particular the members of the Swedish league's support for the Norwegian troop's internee in Sweden should be mentioned. NLF worked until the beginning of 1943 when they were ordered by the occupants to dissolve the organisation. Many of the members went under ground and continued to work illegally.

Immediately after the end of the war, women were encouraged to volunteer for service. The organisation started up again and the idea was to educate Norwegian women to be able to fill important positions in the event of another war. A national meeting was held at Larkollen in October 1945 and there were 23 local leagues left. New guidelines were established in order to specify which tasks NLF could undertake for the Military Defence. Crown princess Martha became the patron. When she died in 1954 her daughter Princess Astrid Mrs Ferner became patron, a position she still holds.

The Military's Home Defence (Heimevernet, hereafter HV) started to take shape in 1946 and some local leagues had already been in contact with local HV leagues. The big question in 1947 was whether there should be compulsive military service for women. The national meeting was against compulsory service for women, but in favour of work duty for women in a war situation. An agreement regarding cooperation between NLF and HV was signed 31 October 1947. Agreements with the navy and air forces were signed in 1951.

From 1 July 1951 NLF has received financial support from the Government. The money is to be used for NLF's administration and promotion and education of members.

After NLF had signed agreements with the various forces/HV, our members received special training and signed personal service agreements. In accordance with the Stortingsproposisjon (government proposition) of 1957 it was decided that members with signed service agreements should be equal to other voluntary personnel in the Military Defence and be called reserve personnel. In 1987 the General Inspector in HV founded a committee to find a new definition of our member's services in the military. The result of the committee's work was that the Government voted in favour of a new definition of our members. We were now able to sign personal agreements which allow us to be enrolled in battle in the event of war. The agreement is currently being reviewed for the present situation.

In view of the restructuring of the Military Defence we have to look at new tasks for our members.

It was in 1977 predicted that there would be future restructurings to the Military Defence and that NLF's participation could change and the cooperation with the Department for Civilian Preparation (DSB) was increased and the phrase Total Defence was introduced. An agreement was signed in 1995 between DSB and voluntary organisations, including NLF. The main reason for the agreement is that the organisations leaders and personnel should receive relevant education according to a specific plan based on evaluation of risk and analysis of consequences.

The organisation

To become a member of NLF you have to be over 16 years of age and undertake necessary compulsory courses: introduction course, 6 hour first aid and organisation development course. After completing these courses members can decide which part of the organisation or the Military Defence they want to concentrate their efforts on. Other courses NLF offer its members include for example: Presentation technique course, Instructor course, Total Defence course, Leadership course and other military related courses. NLF's members have also access to courses in other organisations.

NLF's highest authority is the National Meeting which is held every other year where we elect our Board. Our Board consist of the chairman, deputy chairman, board members for information and recruiting, defence, education etc. The chairman holds a full time position and has a full time assistant.

NLF is like HV divided into 18 districts. Each district has local leagues, all together 48 consisting of 1600 members. The local leagues have their own boards. NLF is also involved with other organisations that support the Military Defence and hold courses and conferences for these on the topics of Norwegian Defence Policy.

The threats towards our nation are not the same as previously. We have to constantly assess our situation in view of a changing world. One of the main task of the Military Defence today is cooperation between the Military and civil organisations.

NLF has great expectations for the future. We have a large female network and we are growing. We are a non political and civilian organisation and we need women of all ages with different backgrounds and educations. We train so that we can be equipped and prepared to take our part of responsibility in any crisis the country or local areas may be faced with.

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