

# Ancient and Honorables Honor World War II Dead

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BY JO2(SW/AW) MAT SOHL

NAVAL AIR STATION KEFLAVIK, Iceland — Hundreds of onlookers assembled on the lawn at Fossvogur Cemetery near downtown Reykjavik Oct. 8 to witness the unveiling of a new monument created to honor the 238 American service members who lost their lives in and around Iceland during World War II.

The memorial ceremony was organized by the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts and featured speeches from the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson; the U.S. Ambassador to Iceland James I. Gadsden and Rear Adm. J.J. Waickwicz, Commander Iceland Defense Force and Fleet Air Keflavik.



Photo by JO2(SW/AW) Mat Sohl  
Two "Ancients" place a wreath honoring those who gave their lives in World War II in front of the newly unveiled monument at Fossvogur Cemetery.

During the World War II, nearly 900 allied servicemen and civilians, including 138 Icelanders, were killed in action or by other causes in Iceland or her surrounding waters.

The ceremony, attended by ambassadors from several nations who lost men and women in WWII, helped showcase the international bonds forged nearly 60 years ago during that conflict.

"We will always be reminded here of our brotherhood in the defense of freedom, our alliance for the protection of democracy, our partnership in the creation of a better world," said Grímsson.

As Iceland's president addressed the crowd of sailors, airmen, "Ancients" and other distinguished guests, he stressed the great impact WWII had on the world and the importance of the sacrifice so many young men made during that time.

"We are gathered here today to honor the brave people who fought for freedom, who lost their lives in defense of democracy, who made the ultimate sacrifice so the world would be a safer home," said Grímsson at the event.

“The horror of the Second World War was beyond anything ever witnessed; the cruelty, the oppression, the atrocities, the death camps, the extermination of millions of ordinary citizens were evil beyond all known proportions.”

Inscribed on the monument, which was brought from America to Iceland by the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, were the words, “To all Americans who served in Iceland during World War Two. They gave their today for our tomorrow.”

It is in this tradition of remembrance that the members of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company carry out their annual Fall Field Day Tour of Duty, where members of the group travel to various locations worldwide where American service members have lost their lives in the line of duty. “We are deeply grateful to the members of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts for your initiative and contribution, for your leadership in creating this memorial and bringing it so close to the heart of our capital city,” Grímsson said.

Originally chartered in 1638 by Gov. John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to train new military officers, the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company now serves chiefly as a historical society.

Waickwicz, a Massachusetts native himself, also commended the Ancient and Honorables for their dedication to preserve the memory of America’s fallen heroes.

“It is our privilege to remember those who have fallen defending freedom. We remember them through ceremonies and dedications such as these,” said Waickwicz. “They have become the part in ourselves that wells up with pride and awe every time we see ‘Old Glory’ unfurled and hear the national anthem.

“We all know the price of freedom is high, may we always remember those that paid it and every day thank those that preserve it.”

As the monument was unveiled and Taps was played, those in uniform rendered salutes while others bowed their heads in remembrance of yesterday’s fallen heroes and the legacy they left for those still serving.

“We bow our heads and honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice, who gave their lives in and around Iceland so others might enjoy freedom and a better world,” said Grímsson. “May their memory be with us forever.”