



Address
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the unveiling of a memorial to honour those lost
in and around Iceland during World War II
8 October 2003

Distinguished ambassadors

Rear Admiral

The Ancient and Honourable Artillery Company of Massachusetts

Friends from the United States

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are gathered here today to honour the brave people who fought for freedom, who lost their lives in defence of democracy, who made the ultimate sacrifice so the world would be a safer home.

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.

In Europe one country after another fell into the hands of the aggressors: France, Poland, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium; the list is long, the entire continent became the battleground; the victories of the dark forces brought fear and desperation to the free.

Across the Atlantic America decided once again to come to the rescue and young men and women were called into active service.

Iceland was still within the Danish Kingdom, the foundation of the republic had yet to become the crowning moment of our independence movement. Farmers and fishermen had for centuries struggled in this barren land and sought their livelihood from the ocean.

Although our country had no armed forces, many Icelanders lost their lives during the World War, perished with their fishing vessels or when taking to Britain the fish which helped to feed a fighting nation.

The arrival of the Americans was a historic event in our country but also a landmark in the course of the war. Even before Pearl Harbour the United States had thus joined the battle against the Nazi and Fascist regimes. Indeed the arrival of the American forces in Iceland marked the entry of the United States into the Second World War.

The prevailing view of history has presented another version but the evidence, with Iceland as a witness, is abundantly clear. The presence of the American forces in Iceland proved that the United States had formally decided to come to the defence of freedom. It was here that your country entered the Second World War.

It is therefore a moving tribute to the soldiers and the sailors, to the airmen and marines and other members of the American forces to unveil here today a monument in their honour, dedicated to the memory of all who served and gave their lives in and around Iceland in the Second World War.

We are deeply grateful to the members of the Ancient and Honourable 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.

It stands here together with the Icelandic Seamen's memorial where we gather every year on the first Sunday in June to honour those lost at sea and where the names of many Icelanders who drowned during the Second World War have been enshrined.

We will thus always be reminded here of our brotherhood in the defence of freedom, our alliance for the protection of democracy, our partnership in the creation of a better world.

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