

Sveinn Eiríksson



Born: July 30, 1935

Died: June 2, 1986

Sveinn Eiriksson, an Icelander, was born July 30, 1935 and began his career as a firefighter in 1952 with the 1400th Air Base Group at Keflavik Airport. In 1956 Eiriksson was promoted to Fire Inspector and in 1961 transferred to the Navy when the Air Force turned the facility over to the U.S. and operation of the airport was assumed by the Military Air Transport Service.

In 1963 Eiriksson he was chosen by the US Navy to become the Fire Chief for Naval Air Station Keflavik, the first non US citizen appointed to command a US military fire department, a position at which he served for 23 years. He organized the Naval Air Station Fire Department into an outstanding establishment recognized world wide for innovation and excellence.

An innovator, Eiriksson developed airfield services at Keflavik Iceland maintaining the airfield free of Ice and Snow 24 hours a day throughout his career, staffing snow removal equipment with fire department personnel, maintained freight and baggage control for transit aircraft and established a fire department maintenance facility that maintained and repaired all fire apparatus, snow removal equipment and specialized airfield vehicles.

On January 23, 1973, a fissure opened on the eastern side of Heimaey, Iceland at approximately 1:00 a.m. It was 1,100 yards from the center of the town of Vestmannaeyjar. The fissure was one and one-quarter miles long and spread from one side of the island to another. In the beginning, fountains of lava spouted all along the fissure but soon the activity reduced to a small area one-half mile from Helgafell Mountain. Although one-third of the town of Vestmannaeyjer was destroyed by the eruption of Eldfell, crews of volunteers and emergency services personnel under the command of Chief Eiriksson reduced potential damage by pumping seawater onto the lava flows diverting the lava from the city and saved a major fishing village from extinction. He received the Iceland Government order of the Falcon Cross for the successful application of water cooling of Volcanic Lava flow in 1973, following that the U.S. Government awarded Sveinn with the Distinguished Civilian Service Medal, the only foreign national to receive this medal.

Eiriksson was honored in numerous ways by his employer the U.S. Navy for excellence in management, meritorious service and innovative ideas in improvement of aviation safety and fire prevention. During Eiriksson's tenure as fire chief at Naval Air Station Keflavik, the fire department was a perennial award winner in the National Fire Protections Association's annual Learn Not to Burn Fire Prevention programs. Eiriksson was highly decorated for his work by the US Navy and the government of Iceland.

Eiriksson was also a professional aviator and owned his own aircraft that he flew and carried passengers throughout Iceland.

He died in London, England on the operating table during heart surgery on June 2, 1986.