

Chief Emil Fredreksen Receives Medal of Honor

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SEATTLE (NNS) -- Medal of Honor recipient Chief Watertender Emil Fredreksen was finally given proper military honors during a ceremony at the Evergreen Washelli Cemetery in Seattle, March 25.

Fredreksen, a Navy veteran who passed away more than 60 years ago, was a recipient of the rare peacetime Medal of Honor. With a service record that encompasses time on more than 20 ships, he is most notably defined by his time on USS Bennington (PG-4), Gunboat 4.

On July 21, 1905, the ship was preparing to sail from San Diego to Panama when at 10:33 a.m., one of its boilers exploded due to an over pressured valve. Records of the incident state that "the ship shook violently for several seconds, large volumes of steam and ashes filling most of the living compartments and deck space." With a total death toll of 66 and 46 severely injured, it was considered the worst peacetime disaster the Navy had seen. He, along with 10 others, was awarded the Medal of Honor for "extraordinary heroism displayed in the line of duty."

"Throughout our country's history, courageous men and women of the Evergreen State have answered the call to protect and defend justice, liberty and the freedom we hold so precious," said David Bloch, on behalf of Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. "Rising above the call of duty, at the risk of grave injury and loss of life the celebrated few of these fearless service members distinguish themselves as heroes in the eyes of their comrades."

Fredreksen's career eventually brought him to Washington state where, after 33 years of service, he would retire in 1930 from the Naval Reserve. He passed away in 1950 with no ceremony or headstone.

With no known next of kin, the hero was buried and all but forgotten until only recently, said Skip Dreps, of the Veterans Memorial Cemetery Board of Trustees.

Through the research of members from the Medal of Honor Historical Society of the United States, Fredreksen, received proper burial honors and a headstone will be placed upon his grave.

"Eleven survivors were awarded our nation's highest honor that day, and as the single event in military history where so many Medals of Honor were issued in peacetime," said Dreps. "Yet there was only a single undetailed line about their heroism."

Fredreksen is now the seventh Medal of Honor recipient to be buried at the Evergreen Washelli Cemetery.

The rendering of military funeral honors is a way to show the nation's deep gratitude to those who, in times of war and peace, have faithfully defended the country. This ceremonial paying of respect is the final demonstration a grateful nation can provide to the veteran's family. Honoring those who served is the military's commitment to recognize the sacrifice and contributions of our nation's veterans.

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