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Federal Jury Indicts Dangleben in Detective Phipps' Murder

Crime / **Published On October 16, 2023 04:27 PM /**

Staff Consortium **October 16, 2023**

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Mugshot of Richardson Dangleben, Jr. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ST. THOMAS — U.S. Attorney for the V.I. Delia L. Smith announced today that a federal grand jury has returned a 13-count indictment charging Richardson Dangleben, Jr. with federal and territorial offenses relating to the [July 4, 2023 shooting death of V.I.P.D. Detective Delberth Phipps](#).

“I want to be clear that any act of violence toward our law enforcement officers is unacceptable and will not be tolerated,” U.S. Attorney Smith said. “Such acts will be met with swift and forceful consequences and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

Virgin Islands Attorney General Ariel Smith said: “Officer Phipps bravely responded to a criminal act in progress when his life was taken during the cowardly act of murder. The death of an officer in the line of duty is a loss that affects the entire community, and we expect justice to be served in a manner that reflects the ultimate sacrifice he made. The V.I. Department of Justice (VIDOJ) looks forward to continued collaboration with USDOJ in the pursuit of justice for the Virgin Islands community.”

St. Thomas-St. John Police Chief Steven Phillip said: “We stand united as a community in the pursuit of justice for our fallen Police Detective. This indictment is a significant milestone and serves as a testament to the relentless dedication and steadfast commitment of our law enforcement family, who have tirelessly worked to bring this individual to account. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the community for your unwavering support throughout this painful journey, and we assure you that we will spare no effort to ensure that justice is served for Detective Phipps and his grieving family. Together, we will continue to stand strong against violence, as we work towards creating a safer and more peaceful community for all.”

“Law enforcement officers put their lives on the line daily to serve and protect others,” said Joseph Gonzalez, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI San Juan Field Office, which covers the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. “The FBI will not stand idly by while delinquents display no respect for authority and instill fear in their communities. We will investigate these cases fiercely to bring those responsible to justice. Detective Phipps was a hero, and the FBI will stand by those he left behind in our commitment to curtail violence and bring peace to the communities we serve.”

According to court documents, on Tuesday, July 4, 2023, VIPD Detective Delberth Phipps and VIPD Officer Shahim Skeete responded to a 911 call that came in at approximately 7:54 a.m. The caller reported observing a shirtless man in the Hospital Ground area of St. Thomas wearing a bulletproof vest and appearing to have a gun in his back pocket. Shortly after Det. Phipps and Officer Skeete arrived on the scene, Dangleben began firing at them. Both Officer Skeete and Det. Phipps returned fire. During the shootout, Det. Phipps suffered a fatal gunshot wound to his torso. Dangleben eventually laid on the ground to surrender. He was subdued and transported to the Schneider Regional Medical Center to be treated for the gunshot injuries that he sustained. Det. Phipps was pronounced dead at the Schneider Regional Medical Center at 9:05 a.m.

An assault rifle covered in blood was found near Dangleben where he laid on the ground. Officers also recovered the following from Dangleben’s car: (1) two assault rifle magazines; (2) seven boxes of assault-rifle ammunition; (3) a loaded .45 caliber handgun with a serial number that had been obliterated; and (4) over 300 grams of marijuana.

The federal indictment charges Dangleben with: one count of first degree murder; two counts of first degree assault; two counts of third degree assault; one count of attempted first degree murder; one count of use of a firearm during a crime of violence resulting in death; two counts of discharge of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence; one count of possession of firearms in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime; one count of possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number; one count of receipt of a firearm while under indictment for a crime punishable by more than one year imprisonment, and one count of wearing body armor during the commission of a violent crime.

Dangleben has been detained in federal custody since his initial arrest following the July 4 shooting.

At the time of the July 4 shooting, Dangleben was on pretrial release for a prior shooting death. He had been previously arrested in connection with a February 24, 2023, homicide and charged in the St. Thomas Superior Court. Dangleben's release conditions included an order not to possess any firearms or ammunition or any dangerous weapon.

U.S. Attorney Smith reminds the public that an indictment is not evidence of guilt. Charges are only allegations, and Dangleben is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation was conducted by the Virgin Islands Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The government's case is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael J. Conley.

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