

Memorial Day Ceremony in St Thomas Honors the Fallen and the Freedoms They Defended

At Government House, speakers reflected on the ultimate sacrifice made by U.S. service members, with moving accounts from veteran Kathryn Rhymer and a call from Governor Bryan to remember that freedom, though cherished, is never free.

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Memorial Day 2025 Ceremony in St. Thomas. Standing far left is Kathryn Jensen-Delugo Rhymer, a retired Naval radioman whose father and sons served in the United States Army.

On Monday, the Memorial Day ceremony at Government House on St. Thomas was a solemn occasion focusing attention on the sacrifice of all those who paid the ultimate price in service of

their country.

“Although service members make up only 1% of the U.S. population, we are interconnected by our common duty to service and reverence to our fallen comrades,” said Kathryn Jensen-Delugo Rhymer, a retired Naval radioman whose father and sons served in the United States Army.

Rhymer spoke of her time in the military, recounting painful memories about the two friends whose deaths stood out most amongst her “list of losses.” Emil White, born in Charlotte Amalie, was a radioman like Ms. Rhymer. He was on a Navy bus in Puerto Rico traveling to a communications tower on the east end of the island on December 3, 1979. The bus was ambushed by Los Macheteros, militants in support of independence, and White died in the barrage of fire. One other occupant of the bus was killed and 10 others wounded in the attack. Rhymer, on shift at the Navy communication center, got the news via a top secret message that came over the teletype machine. “I don't remember what happened next. I was pregnant with my first son at the time so it's quite possible I blacked out,” she recalled. Were she not with child, Rhymer would likely have been on that bus. “But for the grace of God,” she kept repeating to herself during White's funeral.

In April 1988, Rhymer was stationed in Naples, Italy, when a terrorist group known as the Japanese Red Army detonated a car bomb outside the United Service Organizations (USO) center downtown. “That night, the USO was hosting a movie and game night for sailors on shore leave from a ship that had pulled into port earlier that day...My friend Angela was the only service member killed in that attack,” Rhymer said. Angela Santos, another fellow radioman, had invited her friend to meet her at the USO. “I was too tired when I got home from work so I never made it there,” said Rhymer. Again, she found herself saying “there, but for the grace of God.”

Having survived her service while the families of too many of her comrades-in-arms were left with nothing but memories and their loved ones' medals for comfort, Rhymer appealed to the audience to always remember the veterans lost along with the families left behind. “We must continue to teach our children about sacrifice,” she urged. “We must teach our children that the free society in which we live isn't really free.”

Each Memorial Day, Rhymer said, is a reminder that the price of freedom “is paid in the blood of those who gave their lives and service to this country so that we can remain free from tyranny, free from persecution, free from autocrats and oligarchs...free from those who defy the supreme law of the land, the Constitution.”

The focus on freedoms was continued by Governor Albert Bryan Jr., who argued that the life Americans enjoy is often taken for granted. “Freedom to get on Facebook and denounce the president, freedom to get on the radio and talk about who's in power, freedom to just walk through the streets...we take it for granted,” he remarked. The populace has grown so accustomed to the freedom, power and wealth of the nation built up over the last century or so, argued Governor Bryan, that “I think we're starting to forget, as a people, that we are greater than the single units. The whole, all of us put together, the sum of us is greater,” he declared.

He pivoted the message back to his recent argument that Virgin Islanders in the diaspora must be prepared to come back to help develop the territory. Those in the past who gave their lives in service did so “so we could be here today,” Governor Bryan said. “It's not easy, but somebody has to do it,” he argued.

“Today, we honor the people that had a bigger commitment...a republic and a way of life that has been tried and tested for over 225 years,” Governor Bryan concluded, the implication heavy in the air. “The men and women that died for it will continue to be honored and revered for the sacrifice

that they have made.

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