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Amid Rising U.S. Military Activity in the Caribbean, USVI Honors Veterans and Local Service

As the U.S. expands operations across the Caribbean, the USVI's Veterans Day events highlighted the territory's military legacy, the National Guard's mainland directive keeping troops off parade routes, and the triumphant return of the SCEC Marching Band.

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Veterans, students, and community members joined together for St. Croix's Veterans Day Parade and ceremony, which honored the VI's legacy of military service. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

ST. CROIX — Veterans, public officials, students, and community groups gathered on Tuesday, Nov. 11, to honor the men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces during St.

Croix's annual Veterans Day Parade and ceremony — a day marked by reflection on sacrifice, service, and the Virgin Islands' deep military roots. The parade, which began at the intersection of King Street and Market Street and concluded at the Canegata Ballpark facility, was mirrored by similar observances on St. Thomas.

This year's parade notably did not include Virgin Islands National Guard (VING) units, as the Guard had received a directive from headquarters on the mainland. Marching bands included the St. Croix Educational Complex (SCEC) Marching Band, the St. Croix Central High School (CHS) Caribs Battalion, and the VIP Adventist Drum Corp., among other groups.

Adjutant General MG Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker opened the ceremony by briefly addressing his lack of uniform, explaining that he was following orders from the secretary of war. "Like a good soldier, I follow orders ... this is the uniform of the day," he said. "It doesn't matter what uniform we're in, I'm still a soldier. I'm ready to fly, fight, and win."

He then shifted to the purpose of the observance, noting that nearly 18 million veterans—about 6 percent of the U.S. adult population—"have and will continue to serve and continue to embody and honor and devote themselves to our nation's principles."

Knox-Limbacker underscored the Virgin Islands' record of service abroad and at home. Since federal recognition in 1973, the VING has deployed over the past three decades to Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Kosovo, Haiti, South America and Cuba, while also standing on the front lines during hurricanes, natural disasters, and other emergencies in the territory. He linked that history to the present, pointing to "the largest U.S. military presence and operations in the Caribbean since the 1980s" and describing VING's integration with federal forces and local knowledge as "paramount" to regional security and the protection of American interests. He closed with thanks to veterans, service members, and families: "They know more than most freedom is truly not free, a truth paid for the sacrifices of our veterans."



Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Adjutant General MG Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker salute Veterans Day parade participants on Tues. Nov. 11, 2025 on St. Croix. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, V.I. Consortium)

Acting Senate President Senator Kenneth Gittens acknowledged the moment's strain on those in uniform and those who have already served. "We gathered today at a challenging and uncertain time in our nation's history, many of those currently serving face financial hardship. Others are being asked to carry out missions here in the Caribbean and across the United States that may test their convictions or challenge their values." He emphasized that the territory recognizes their sacrifices: "I want each of you to know that you are seen, you are valued and you are supported." Gittens extended the 36th Legislature's thanks to participants and to veterans unable to attend. "We salute you, we honor you, and we thank you all for your service. Happy Veterans Day."

Keynote speaker Beresford F. Edwards, Lt. Colonel (Ret) placed the observance in historical context, tracing the Nov. 11, 1918 armistice through the 1938 designation of Armistice Day and the 1954 renaming to Veterans Day, and distinguishing the day from Memorial Day. He stressed

the nature of an all-volunteer force and pointed to current challenges: “But today is Day 42 of the government shutdown, and our service members are hoping that they will receive a paycheck on November 15. It's unconscionable that Congress and the command in chief are being paid while our service members are facing Payless payday.” Edwards highlighted veterans’ ongoing contributions across the territory in education, public service, emergency management, health, culture, and business, citing individual examples and concluding with thanks and a blessing on the Virgin Islands and the United States.



Band Director Kevré Hendricks leads the St. Croix Educational Complex Marching Band during the Veterans Day Parade, marking the group’s first public performance since the Covid-19 pandemic after a three-year effort to rebuild the program. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, V.I. Consortium)

This year’s St. Croix Veterans Day ceremony honored Wilfred Charles Tuitt Sr., a Korean and Vietnam War veteran whose distinguished military career spanned over three decades. Born on October 25, 1932, to Magline Edwards and Joseph Tuitt, he served in the U.S. Army beginning in

1952 and completed multiple deployments in Korea, Germany, Vietnam, and Greenland. A Master Technician Mechanic and member of the Virgin Islands National Guard, Mr. Tuitt also worked as an educator and technician at Charles Harwood Hospital and Henry E. Rohlsen Airport. Decorated with numerous awards—including the National Defense Service Medal, four Army Commendation Medals, the Meritorious Service Medal, and the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal—Mr. Tuitt’s career exemplified discipline, leadership, and lifelong service to the Virgin Islands and the United States.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. greeted attendees and reflected on the intertwining of service, citizenship, and representation for Virgin Islanders. He recalled an early moment in office at the National Guard: “Governor, this is your army.” He spoke about a veteran born in 1932—the year Virgin Islanders gained U.S. citizenship—later drafted in 1953 and serving through eras of limited political representation and Jim Crow, then returning home after 30 years: “But he served.” Bryan described how military presence used to be part of everyday life in the territory—vessels in the harbor, battalions marching in parades—and urged Virgin Islanders to emulate the military’s mission focus in civic life. He thanked those who “showed up to honor our veterans,” closing with appreciation for the freedoms secured by those who served.

The ceremony also celebrated the long-awaited return of the St. Croix Educational Complex (SCEC) Marching Band, performing publicly for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic. Band Director Kevré Hendricks said the program had gone dormant when students were barred from using instruments due to the virus’s respiratory risks. Rebuilding the ensemble, he explained, has taken three years of steady effort. Reflecting on the band’s comeback, Hendricks praised his students’ resilience: “This is amazing. These kids are gladiators.”

The ceremony’s through-line remained consistent: honor the past and present service of veterans, recognize the demands of the moment, and affirm the territory’s enduring connection to those who wear the nation’s uniform.