

Man Jumps From Moving Pathfinder, Runs Into Richmond With Loaded AM-15 as Officer Charles Homicide Probe Intensifies

Ra’Kheel Velazquez is charged only with firearm and ammunition offenses after police say he switched from the Hyundai sought in Officer Charles’ murder probe into another SUV, jumped out while it was moving and fled into Richmond with a loaded AM-15.

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Mugshot of Ra’Kheel A. Velazquez. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ST. CROIX — A 28-year-old man was arrested on multiple firearm and ammunition charges during the investigation into the killing of VIPD Officer Eustace Charles after police said he was seen driving a plateless black Hyundai matching the description of the vehicle used to flee the

homicide scene.

Ra’Kheel A. Velazquez later entered a gray Nissan Pathfinder and jumped from the moving vehicle when a DPNR police officer attempted a traffic stop, according to a probable-cause fact sheet. Police said he ran into the Richmond community carrying a firearm and discarded a loaded Anderson AM-15 rifle along his escape route.

VIPD said a subsequent multiagency search of a residence where Velazquez had last been seen produced another firearm and related paraphernalia. He reportedly admitted owning both weapons. As of the available court and police records, he has been charged with firearm and ammunition offenses, not Officer Charles’ killing.

Witnesses Describe Shooter Fleeing in Plateless Hyundai

The investigation began at approximately 5:49 a.m. Sunday, when the ShotSpotter system detected multiple rounds fired within the Williams Delight Housing Community.

Moments later, a resident reported seeing a black vehicle leave the area at a high rate of speed.

Responding officers found Officer Charles in the front seat of a black Ford Explorer parked near No. 159 Williams Delight. He had sustained multiple gunshot wounds and later died from his injuries.

While canvassing the neighborhood, investigators spoke with a witness who reportedly saw a person dressed entirely in black firing at the Ford Explorer.

After the shooting, the individual allegedly ran to a black, four-door Hyundai without a license plate. The vehicle then traveled south through Williams Delight and left the housing community.

At approximately 7:40 a.m., a detective assigned to VIPD’s Intelligence Unit saw a plateless black, four-door Hyundai parked at Plot No. 10CB in the Work and Rest community.

The Hyundai eventually left the property, followed by a gray Nissan Pathfinder bearing V.I. license plate CHV-002.

The detective followed the Hyundai to the Richmond beach area in Christiansted and reportedly saw Velazquez exit the driver’s side of the car and enter the Pathfinder’s front passenger seat.

The detective then requested assistance.

A DPNR police officer subsequently spotted the Pathfinder near the Estate Richmond beach area and attempted to stop it by activating his siren. The driver ignored the signal and sped away, according to the fact sheet.

The officer reported seeing Velazquez exit the moving Pathfinder from the front passenger side and fall to the ground. He then got up and ran into the Richmond community while carrying a firearm.

Officers cordoned off the area.

Loaded AM-15 Recovered Along Escape Route

VIPD Officers later located and detained Velazquez inside the Richmond community.

During a search of the area, officers recovered a firearm along the route he allegedly used to flee.

Velazquez was transported to the Wilbur H. Francis Command Police Station, advised of his Miranda rights and agreed to provide a statement.

According to the probable-cause fact sheet, he admitted exiting the gray vehicle with a firearm and discarding it.

Investigators showed Velazquez photographs of the recovered weapon. He reportedly confirmed that it belonged to him and initialed, dated and signed the photographs.

The weapon was identified as a black-and-red Anderson AM-15 assault rifle capable of using multiple calibers. It contained one live .223-caliber round in the chamber and 34 additional live rounds in its magazine.

A VIPD police cadre of the Training Bureau test-fired the rifle and confirmed that it was functional.

Second Firearm Found During Multiagency Search

VIPD said the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations and Special Operations personnel assisted with a search at a residence where Velazquez had last been observed.

During that operation, officers recovered an additional firearm and related paraphernalia.

According to VIPD, Velazquez admitted owning both firearms. The police release did not provide a description of the second weapon or the paraphernalia recovered.

Investigators contacted VIPD's Firearms Bureau on St. Croix to determine whether Velazquez was legally authorized to possess firearms or ammunition.

The records check found that he did not have a license to carry or possess either and was not a licensed firearm or ammunition dealer in the Virgin Islands.

A separate criminal-background check showed that Velazquez has a felony conviction, according to the probable-cause fact sheet.

VIPD said he was charged with two counts of carrying a firearm openly or concealed during the commission of a crime of violence and two counts of possession or sale of ammunition.

The fact sheet states that investigators believed the evidence supported charges of carrying a firearm openly or concealed and possession or sale of ammunition.

Bail was set at \$50,000. Velazquez was unable to post the amount and was remanded to the John A. Bell Correctional Facility pending his advice-of-rights hearing.

The investigation into Officer Charles' killing remains active.

Anyone with information is asked to contact 911 or VIPD at 340-778-2211. Anonymous tips may be submitted to Crime Stoppers USVI at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

