

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Fallen But Never Forgotten: Memorial Day In The Virgin Islands

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The territory has had its fair share of soldiers who've made the ultimate sacrifice during battle for the protection of the US and these islands, so it's not strange to see civilians, students and senators making known their gratitude through acts of solidarity, kindness and flattering words on Memorial Day in honor of fallen military personnel.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the territory lost 6 soldiers according to [iCasualties](#), a nonprofit group that keeps state-by-state count of servicemen and women who died during the Iraq war. They include:

Staff Sergeant Gregory Rivera-Santiago, 26, who died on September 10, 2007 during a non-hostile incident when the vehicle he was traveling in rolled over in western Baghdad; Staff Sergeant Floyd E. Lake, 43, died on January 20, 2007 during combat in a helicopter crash that occurred in Diyala, Baghdad; Lieutenant Colonel David C. Canegata, 50, died during combat on the same helicopter crash in Diyala, Baghdad where Lake lost his life; Specialist Jose E. Rosario, 20, fell on October 19, 2005 during combat by mortar attack in Salah ad Din, Iraq; Private First Class Jason N. Lynch, 21, died on June 18, 2004 during battle by small arms fire in Diyala, Baghdad; and Staff Sergeant Kendall Thomas, 36, died during a non-hostile vehicular accident in western Baghdad.

But the territory's sacrifice goes beyond the Iraq war, and its military personnel have been deployed around the world in the name of freedom for decades.

It's one of the reasons why residents and officials alike have called on the U.S. Government to give U.S. Virgin Islands full representation in Congress, and the right to vote in presidential elections.

"As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Selma, and the subsequent passage of the Voting Rights Act, there are still American citizens today who do not have equal voting rights. These are citizens of America's island territories — the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Northern Marianas," Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett [said in March](#). The congresswoman has been vocal on the issue of equal rights for the territory in relation to voting and other matters.

Senator Kenneth "Kenny" Gittens, in expressing his gratitude, said the liberties residents enjoy today are in part because of the sacrifice of the selfless men and women of the armed forces.

"We have thousands of Virgin Islanders who are heroes today because they made the choice to put on that uniform and defend the freedoms and liberties that we all enjoy today. But we have a smaller number of our soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice, when they lost their lives protecting the ideals that this great country stands for," said Gittens in a press release issued on Friday.

Sen. Marvin Blyden expressed appreciation to those who served and did not make it back to the islands alive, stating, "your will to serve this great country and these Virgin Islands shows you are not only American heroes but my hero."

Throughout the weekend, civilians could be seen gathering at cemeteries in honor of the fallen soldiers. In St. Thomas, members of the American Legion Post 90 were joined by cadets of Ivanna Eudora Kean High School JROTC program, along with their instructor, First Sergeant Raymond E. Frett, decorating veterans' gravesites in preparation of [today's commemorations](#).

"They were ordinary people who answered the call in an extraordinary way and in extreme times. They rose to the call because they wanted to protect a nation which has given them and all of us so much to be thankful for," Gittens added, making a point of highlighting not only those who died on the battlefield, but also those who have yet to be accounted for. "These fallen soldiers who include those soldiers missing in action, possessed courage, pride, determination, dedication to duty and integrity, which are all

qualities needed to serve a cause that is greater than themselves."

Memorial Day commemorations are scheduled throughout the territory today, in Frederiksted on St. Croix, Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas and Cruz Bay on St. John.

*Feature Image: A cadet of the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School JROTC program helps decorate a veteran's grave in preparation of Memorial Day commemorations.*

*Image Credit: American Legion Post 90 Facebook page.*