

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Christiansted, A Solemn Remembrance Of Those Who Died For Freedom

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ST. CROIX -- There were signs early Monday that rain could overwhelm St. Croix skies, but by the time a group that included Governor Kenneth Mapp and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, Veterans Affairs Director Patrick Farrell, soldiers, a marching band, American Legion members and others, began their march from the Basin Triangle in Christiansted, the skies had cleared up, and it seemed as if the weather would remain pristine all day.

The group made their way to the Christiansted Cemetery, where a hymnal was sang, a prayer lifted and a wreath laid in honor of the fallen. They then continued their march that led to Fort Christianvaern, where a brief ceremony was held.

But as soon as they recommenced their march after the brief stop at the cemetery, a downpour of rain unleashed heavy showers that did not subside until the second wreath-laying ceremony at the fort, creating a perfect display of pride and honor for Virgin Islanders who died fighting wars the world over, as the group marched in the rain through downtown Christiansted without hesitation.

It was a solemn sight to behold to say the least. The shower drenched participants and reporters alike, the latter eager to capture the moment. And onlookers who had lined either side of the street cheered as they marched, some waving while others snapped photos of what was sure to become an unforgettable moment.

But marching in rain was a small price to pay for participants, especially active duty soldiers who have experienced the brutality of war and, more painfully, the loss of men and women they had grown accustomed to and formed relationships with. That strong sense of pride, bathed in a mix of sorrow, were among the themes of yesterday's keynote speaker's talk.

"Memorial Day, like many holidays, has its own triggers," said Command Chief Warrant Officer Augustin Webster, yesterday's keynote speaker for the St. Croix ceremony. "What it does for most of us is trigger an emotion."

Chief Webster highlighted Memorial Day for many Americans to be a holiday that includes summer sale of cars, furniture and clothing. "It is viewed as day off for fun activities such as horse racing, barbecues, or going to the beach. Memorial Day over the years has grown to become a high-spirited, commercialized holiday, in some instances missing the purpose for which the holiday was designed," he said.

But the warrant officer said Memorial Day reaction for service members and their families, is usually completely contrary to that of the rest of the country. The holiday can evoke "sadness for the loss of a loved one, therefore Memorial Day is a difficult time when we pay tribute to our fallen comrades, knowing that they will forever be missed in our lives," he said, remembering in tears and honoring of memories of Virgin Islands soldiers who died on the line of duty.

Senate President Neville James, representing the 31st Legislature, reminded through his speech the importance of supporting those who work to protect freedom; while constantly honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

"We are honored to let them know that we remember them, and that they are very important to us," he said. And he noted the great sacrifice Virgin Islanders have paid with their lives, stating that, per capita, the territory has lost more soldiers in battle than anywhere else in the U.S.

Mr. Mapp's comments mirrored that of Mr. James in regards to the considerable sacrifice made by men and women of the Virgin Islands. And the governor said he was pleased to see the strong number of groups that came out in support of the fallen, stating that, "we are assured that their great sacrifice will not be forgotten."

During the ceremony, [Project Promise](#), a nonprofit [whose mission](#) is to improve "the lives of at-risk youth on St. Croix by providing empowerment initiatives, cultural programs, and family services," gave 12 letters written by the organization's youth members, called

caterpillars, to Brigadier General Deborah Howell, to be delivered to Virgin Islands soldiers currently deployed. Touched by the token, which was presented by Project Promise Founder Resa O'Reilly, General Howell kindly asked that 12 more be written, as currently 24 service members from the territory are deployed in various parts of the world.

"I know they would greatly appreciate it," she said.

Events were also held in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas and Cruz Bay, St. John.

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