

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Deceased McDonald's Robbery And Hostage Suspect Committed Suicide, Autopsy Shows

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ST. THOMAS -- The 17-year-old suspect who died during the March 25 Lockhart Gardens McDonald's attempted robbery and hostage incident -- identified as Juan De Dios, who was a 10th grade student at the Charlotte Amalie High School -- committed suicide, the Virgin Islands Police Department announced Monday.

According to Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, the force has had testimony from witnesses who said Mr. De Dios killed himself, but law enforcement officers were awaiting an autopsy result to be completely certain that that was what took place.

"While interviewing the suspects, they indicated that once the police began to close in, the individual turned the gun on himself. That's the information we got. However, we wanted to verify, so the autopsy was performed and there's evidence that's conclusive to suggest that he did in fact commit suicide," Mr. Richards said.

The suspect shot himself in the neck, the commissioner said, adding that officers did fire shots after being fired upon, but the suspect, sensing that he was being backed in a corner, took his own life.

The incident occurred just before 11:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 25 at a McDonald's restaurant in Lockhart Gardens, leaving one suspect dead after engaging in a shootout with police, and two other suspects with injuries.

Back then, the V.I.P.D. believed that the suspect was killed by police. "Unfortunately, when you become bold enough to become involved in criminal actions like that, you have to be prepared to suffer the consequences," Mr. Richards had said. "My guys responded and they did what they were trained to do as professionals."

Mr. Richards told The Consortium today that the V.I.P.D. and other agencies -- both local and federal -- involved in the investigation were in possession of the autopsy results for sometime. However, it was not released earlier because the V.I.P.D. wanted confirmation that releasing the updated information would not jeopardize any ongoing investigation.

"We wanted to make sure that it was the agreement to release, and that it didn't jeopardize any part of the investigation. After we were sure that it would not jeopardize any part of the investigation from both sides, local and federal, we decided to make it known," Mr. Richards said.

The information's release was also to clear any confusion as to how the suspect died, noting that some media outlets were having difficulty classifying the incident. "In one of the conversations I had with the chief [Jason Marsh], I said you got to get this information out to the media and close it out once and for all," Mr. Richards said.

The Hispanic suspects stormed the McDonald's restaurant to rob the establishment, consequently holding hostage several customers who were dining, according to the V.I.P.D.

Police were alerted of the robbery while it was ongoing, and immediately responded by hustling to the scene. Upon their arrival, police observed the suspects and surrounded the area, Mr. Richards said. An exchange of gunfire between at least one of the suspects and police officers ensued. Mr. Richards said none of the customers dining at the McDonald's restaurant were injured during the ordeal.

The two suspects who were injured sustained their wounds from shotgun pellets emanating from their own weapons — and not by guns belonging to police officers, according to the commissioner.

The incident was the latest in a series of robbery that have affected St. Thomas, with Hispanic males appearing to be the culprits, according to Mr. Richards. Earlier in March, [the Pony Parlor was robbed at gunpoint](#), with three assailants escaping with an untold amount of cash.

“Those three individuals that entered were described as Hispanic males,” Mr. Richards said. “The suspects for the McDonald’s robbery were carrying similar weapons that were described by the folks at the Pony Parlor, and they were also described as Hispanics, so there are some similarities.”

The surviving 18-year-old has been identified as Hanselmo Joseph Feliz Recio. He was arrested on Monday after being released from the Schneider Regional Medical Center, according to police. The V.I.P.D. had determined in March that it would not release the name of the third suspect because he was a surviving minor.

Mr. Recio was levied with multiple charges — including third-degree assault, grand larceny, possession of an unlicensed firearm during the commission of a crime, and brandishing a firearm. He was held after failing to post \$200,000 bound.

Feature Image: Mc Donald's Restaurant located at Lockhart Gardens. (Credit: Morgan Richardson, Jr., VIC)