

The Virgin Islands Consortium

He Was 'the Best of Us': Emotional Candlelight Vigil Highlights Life, Career and Character of Slain VIPD Detective Delberth Phipps

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A portrait of slain VIPD Detective Delberth Phipps, Jr. at a podium where speakers recalled the detective's dedication to law enforcement, his love for motorcycles, and passion for life during a candlelight vigil on Friday, July 14, 2023. By. MEDIA ONE/VIPD

"Detective Phipps was the best of us, and you need to know that," was the message from the fallen officer's colleagues in the Virgin Islands Police Department on Friday, as they led a candlelight vigil in his honor.

At the beginning of the ceremony honoring the life and career of Delberth Phipps Jr., police officer Roger Arroyo told attendees, prior to the opening prayer, that the slain detective was one of only a few fellow officers who asked why he had forsaken becoming a pastor in favor of joining the VIPD. Mr. Arroyo said that interaction, and his explanation, sparked a special relationship between the two men, with Detective Phipps offering encouragement and praise at every opportunity. "That's the kind of man Delbert Phipps was," Mr. Arroyo said, his voice cracking with emotion.

Citing the biblical book of John chapter 10, verse 10, Officer Arroyo noted that on July 4, a day the country and the territory celebrates freedom in America, the enemy did come to steal, kill and destroy. Detective Phipps was part of the team that responded to a call regarding a suspect spotted with a high-powered firearm. That suspect, on bail awaiting trial for murder, began shooting at police, and Detective Phipps was [fatally injured](#) in the firefight.

"What he didn't destroy is our power," Mr. Arroyo said defiantly. "What he didn't take away is us wanting to be shepherds," he continued, having established the link between shepherds who will lay down their lives for their flock, and those who do so to protect and serve in law enforcement roles.

Following a brief vocal performance and a moment of silence, it was time for those gathered to step up to the podium to share memories, experiences and encounters with the deceased detective. Delberth Phipps's humor, collegial congeniality, and his love for motorcycles shone through with every anecdote shared.

"We're going to hurt for a while," said one speaker, acknowledging the immense collective pain shared by the entire VIPD, as well as the detective's family, friends and the wider community. "This is the time to be a little nicer to each other. This is the time to hold someone a little tighter. And this is the time to reflect and emulate Delberth Phipps Jr."

Kimberly Riley, a prosecutor in the criminal division of the Attorney General's Office, spoke to the professionalism of Detective Phipps, and his focus on ensuring that the cases he worked on were as comprehensively put together as possible. "On top of that [he] always came in with a smile and a positive attitude. The loss of this 2nd generation VIPD officer, said Ms. Riley, was a true loss to the territory and to her office.

The vigil was a true testament to Detective Phipps's extensive community ties, as members of the Love City Riders joined police officers, prosecutors, and other public officials to offer condolences and share memories. "If you know Buju, he likes to be on his Hayabusa," said one of the members, reflecting on a trip the club took to Bike Week in Daytona Beach, Florida. The longer and smoother Florida roads presented the opportunity for Detective Phipps to ride much faster, "and that is something that he liked very much."

St. Thomas Police Chief Steven Phillips told the audience of his struggle on July 4, when he questioned God and asked why this could be allowed to happen. He spoke of his guilt in feeling that he was not there to protect his men. And he pleaded with the community to stop turning guns on their family, friends and neighbors. "We all are family, no matter where we come from," Chief Phillips said. "If we come from Tortola, Antigua, Anguilla, St.

Kitts, Dominica, Saint Lucia, we all are family. We are one, we are one people," he declared.

Police Commissioner Ray Martinez, with a wavering voice, echoed the sentiments of Chief Phillips. "I feel like I failed him to a certain degree, because I couldn't protect him," said the commissioner. "I know deep down that it wasn't my fault, but I just feel that it was. I did not protect my Jedi, my soldier."

Mr. Martinez spoke of the last time he saw Detective Phipps alive; they had bumped into each other at a local barbershop. His detective wanted to speak to him about a case, but said he would not interrupt his senior's holiday. "Wednesday, I can pass by the office," Mr. Martinez recounted Mr. Phipps telling him. That Wednesday never came for Delberth Phipps, "and it never will," lamented the commissioner.

Acknowledging the evil that hangs over the territory in the form of relentless gun violence, Commissioner Martinez vowed that the VIPD would continue with the mission of enforcing law and order, "because we can't afford to stop. We can't afford to give up."

The commissioner ended with high praise for his fallen Jedi, as he called the detective. "Del Phipps was more than diligent. This dude was at a whole different level," he said, calling the murdered policeman "the ultimate detective." The men and women of the VIPD, even in the midst of their pain and grief, must ensure that the death of their colleague is not in vain, their leader urged. Fueled by those emotions, they must do the right thing and push forward, but not just in the short or medium term. "We have to endeavor to do it forever," Commissioner Martinez noted.