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Police Uncover Loaded Handgun in Suspect's Home During Vehicle Theft Investigation on St. Croix

Search warrant execution leads to unexpected find and additional charges

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Mugshot of Joannes Francois. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. CROIX — Police looking for evidence relating to the case of a stolen vehicle executed a search warrant on the suspect's house, only to find an unauthorized firearm hidden away.

According to court documents, on March 27, the court issued a search and arrest warrant for Joannes Francois, in connection with the unauthorized use of a vehicle. The next morning, around 6 a.m., officers went to his Croixville apartment to execute the warrant.

While performing the search of his residence, police discovered a .45 caliber Smith & Wesson handgun in the bedroom, loaded with 9 live rounds in the magazine, and one in the chamber. An additional 52 rounds of ammunition were discovered in the bedroom.

Francois was arrested and taken to the Wilbur H. Francis Command police station, where he reportedly declined to provide an official statement, but claimed the gun as his. The convicted felon does not have a license to carry firearms in the territory.

He was charged with unauthorized possession of a firearm, as well as possession of ammunition. He was also charged with reckless driving, reckless endangerment, and the unauthorized use of a vehicle, meaning that Francois has two criminal matters wending their way through the courts at the same time.

In court on Friday, Magistrate Yolanda Brow-Ross set bail for the firearms offense at \$50,000, but allowed Francois to pay \$1000 in cash to secure his release, with the remainder as an unsecured bond. He also paid an additional \$1000 to satisfy the cash component of his \$25,000 bail in the stolen car matter.

The magistrate ordered that Mr. Francois be confined to house arrest while awaiting trial, although electronic monitoring is not required. His next court appearance is scheduled for April 17.