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Landlord Arrested After Shooting During Verbal Altercation Over Eviction

A tenancy disagreement in St. Thomas escalated into violence, resulting in third-degree assault charges for property owner Keith Marsham

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Mugshot of Keith Marsham. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. THOMAS — A property owner has been arrested after shooting a man during a tenancy dispute.

According to court documents, last Friday evening, police responded to a reported shooting in Altona. Responding officers spoke to property owner Keith Marsham, who said that he had been having an ongoing dispute with someone who lived on the property, and owed five months' rent.?

The man was not an official tenant, but reportedly occupied the premises after his father, the original lease holder, left the island. The father had reportedly asked that his son be allowed to stay in the home until August 19, a request to which Mr. Marsham had agreed.

That day came and went, Mr. Marsham said. After several attempts to contact his now-overseas tenant, he decided on August 23 to change the locks of the residence. That evening, the son got into contact. They agreed to meet, and Mr. Marsham communicated his expectation that the man clean the premises and remove any trash before vacating the property. The son of his tenant reportedly took umbrage to that directive, and a verbal confrontation ensued.

Mr. Marsham told police that the man and two people who were with him refused to leave the property, prompting him to call 911 out of concern for his safety. The three men began to surround him, he said, making him feel threatened. Mr. Marsham said that he went outside, but his tenant's son then began threatening to kill him because he was not being allowed to collect his belongings. He told police that he discharged about two shots from his firearm when the three men began to run towards him, and they retreated to await the police.?

Officers spoke to the man who had been living at the residence. He told them that he informed Mr. Marsham that it was too late to clean the house, which prompted the verbal altercation. Before the shooting, he and his father's landlord were reportedly engaged in a bout of one-upmanship. He said he was at the top of the driveway when he challenged Mr. Marsham, saying that the landlord was not going to do anything. In return, Mr. Marsham reportedly dared him to step back into the yard.

The man said he took his former landlord up on that dare and approached, shouting in Mr. Marsham's face. The property owner reportedly stepped back, pulled out his gun, and fired one shot to either side.

The tenant said he only realized that he had been shot when he felt a cold, burning sensation in his right arm, and retreated once again to the top of the driveway to wait for police. His story was corroborated in large part by one of the people who had come with him to the property.

Mr. Marsham was arrested and charged with third-degree assault and reckless endangerment, and remanded into custody to await his advice of rights hearing.

In court on Wednesday, Magistrate Simone VanHoltten-Turnbull found probable cause only for the assault charge – not reckless endangerment. She allowed Mr. Marsham bail in the form of an unsecured \$25,000 bond, and instructed that he report to the probation office twice a week by telephone. He is now banned from possessing firearms, ammunition, or dangerous weapons while the case is pending, and must also remain at least 20 feet away from the others involved in the incident.

His next court appearance is scheduled for September 20.