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Duct Tape, Gunpoint and a Man Found Hogtied Naked: Court Filings Raise Alarming Questions About Little Saint James

Probable-cause sheets describe gunpoint claims, duct tape restraints and a man found hogtied and naked on Little Saint James, part of Epstein's former USVI estate; he was arrested in 2019 on sex-trafficking charges involving minors.

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An aerial view of Little Saint James, the former Epstein-owned island off St. Thomas, where court filings describe gunpoint claims, duct tape restraints and a man found hogtied and naked.

Separate police reports involving Little St. James, the island formerly owned by Jeffrey Epstein, have led to criminal charges against three people following incidents that authorities say involved individuals detained at gunpoint, a man found naked and hogtied on a vessel, and another man later discovered restrained with duct tape after an alleged trespassing encounter.

The first incident unfolded on March 1, when VIPD officers were dispatched to the island after reports that individuals had been detained there at gunpoint. When officers arrived, they met federal law enforcement personnel from several agencies who were already responding to the scene.

A member of the U.S. Coast Guard told officers that federal authorities had responded to a report of someone brandishing a firearm. They arrived to find a boat with two people at the helm and a man at the rear of the vessel who was naked and hogtied. The man told officials that he and his brother had been filming a documentary when they were accosted. He also said that his brother had been taken to the island by another boat.

The siblings, identified as Eloi and Marcel, had flown into St. Thomas some time earlier, according to Eloi. They rented two jet skis and traveled to Little St. James while using a drone to record the island. Because of weather conditions, they reportedly had to land the drone on a Little St. James beach so it could be retrieved.

Marcel swam ashore, retrieved the drone, and returned to his jet ski. The brothers then left the area, but a boat reportedly began pursuing them. Eloi, who was later found naked and hogtied, told officials that the boat attempted to intercept the brothers as they rode their jet skis. The siblings separated, and the boat caught up with Marcel.

Eloi told investigators that as the boat approached Marcel, he saw a woman pointing a firearm at his brother. He said he began recording and shouting for help. The woman could be heard ordering Marcel to jump off his jet ski and swim to the boat, which he did. Eloi said that once he saw the woman pointing the weapon at Marcel as his brother knelt in the boat, he fled on his jet ski to seek help. He found other boaters, who contacted 911.

However, the police report filed by officers on April 26 does not indicate how Eloi came to be found tied up in the boat with the alleged assailants.

Marcel later told investigators that the woman who pointed the gun at him was Little St. James property manager Ann Rodriguez. According to Marcel, Ms. Rodriguez searched his bags, removed the memory cards from his drone, and threw them overboard.

When federal law enforcement officials arrived, they recovered a pellet gun designed to resemble a Glock 19 handgun. Officers said the firearm did not have the customary orange tip that would distinguish it from a real gun. A total of three BB guns were recovered and removed from Little St. James.

When questioned by law enforcement personnel, Ms. Rodriguez reportedly corroborated the brothers' account. According to police, she admitted pursuing the jet skis by boat, pointing a gun at Marcel and ordering him to board her boat, and taking him back to the island. She also reportedly admitted taking the memory cards from his drone and throwing them overboard.

Ms. Rodriguez told officers that the island is frequently approached by people seeking to film social media content.

She was charged with false imprisonment and kidnapping, third-degree assault, and destruction of property. Ms. Rodriguez appeared before Magistrate Simone VanHolten-Turnbull on Monday. The outcome of her advice of rights hearing had not yet been made publicly available by the court, but other court records indicate that at least one of the charges was upheld by the judge.

Two other men also appeared before the court Monday following a separate incident on Little St. James over the weekend.

According to police, officers received reports of a trespasser and traveled to the island to investigate. Once there, they were met by Ms. Rodriguez, Paul Arnold III, and a third person, who escorted them to a “designated holding area,” according to the police report.

At that location, officers found a man restrained with duct tape. His body and face were bound, and he was wearing only a pair of black pants. As police began documenting the scene, Mr. Arnold reportedly walked past them and struck the restrained man. Officers immediately detained and handcuffed him.

Mr. Arnold reportedly told police he was upset because his pregnant girlfriend, the third person who met officers on the island, said she had been pushed to the ground by the trespassers.

The restrained man was identified as Benjamin Owen. The pregnant woman told officers that she met Mr. Owen and other people on the island and informed them that they were trespassing on private property. The group reportedly fled. As she attempted to take photographs of the trespassers, one of them reportedly pushed her, causing her to fall on her side.

Police said the other alleged trespassers were able to return to their vessel and flee, with Ms. Rodriguez in pursuit. Maintenance workers, however, were able to detain Mr. Owen, who was taken to the holding area to await police.

According to Mr. Owen, he and his group went to Little St. James to take photographs for his nonprofit organization. He reportedly admitted to the sequence of events described by the pregnant woman, telling police that he was captured because he became winded while attempting to flee the island.

Mr. Owen was arrested and charged with trespassing. Mr. Arnold was arrested and charged with simple assault.

Judge VanHolten-Turnbull found probable cause to uphold the charges against both men. Mr. Arnold was granted bail in the amount of \$500, with \$50 required in cash. Mr. Owen was ordered to pay the full \$500 bail requirement.

Both men must report to the probation office twice weekly, with Mr. Owen permitted to do so by telephone and Mr. Arnold required to report in person. They were also placed under other standard release conditions.

Arraignments for Ms. Rodriguez, Mr. Arnold and Mr. Owen are scheduled for May 15.