

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Contrary To Police Chief's Statement, Man Whose Five Dogs Viciously Attacked An 84-Year-Old Man Has Not Been Arrested

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ST. CROIX -- The V.I.P.D. said Friday that the man whose five pit bull dogs viciously attacked an 84-year-old man while on his own property, and who had to be airlifted for intensive medical care because of the severity of the his wounds sustained during the attack, had not been arrested as of Friday night.

St. Croix Chief of Police William Harvey [told the Consortium on Wednesday](#), which was the night of the attack, that the suspect -- who police has yet to identify -- was arrested. However, in the V.I.P.D.'s Friday report on the incident, it said, "The owner of the dogs was not arrested at the scene. However, he could face criminal charges after a thorough investigation is conducted by the V.I.P.D.'s animal cruelty investigator."

The Consortium spoke with the investigator, Danny Rodriguez, lead detective for animal cruelty, to seek answers. Mr. Rodriguez said while Mr. Harvey told officers to arrest the suspect the same night of the incident, Chief Harvey was told that that would not be a good idea.

"Chief Harvey reached at the scene ordering that the person be arrested. I was at the scene when he reached... but the only thing in the V.I. Code to charge this person right now is ferocious, vicious, mischievous animals," Mr. Rodriguez said. There is nothing right now that I could find to arrest him on the spot. And it's a misdemeanor not committed in the presence of an officer."

Mr. Rodriguez added, "I am working the case to see if I could find other charges. Because if it was something like he opened the gate and the dogs took off and bite the victim, then he would have probably been charged with third-degree assault, using the dogs as a weapon. But that was not the case."

The 84-year-old man was mangled by five pit bulls in his own yard and is clinging to life. The dogs had left their owners yard through an area that they had done so on a number of occasions, which Mr. Rodriguez said he learned of the night of the incident while conducting his investigation. The dogs had attacked almost every single family in the neighborhood; there's even video showing them in the yard of a family whose members had to lock a gate on their porch to secure themselves from being attacked -- in their own yard, own their own porch, by the pit bulls. Numerous reports were made to police officers. During one incident, the officers told the neighbors all they could do was admonish the man to secure his dogs in his yard. They did. Yet still the dogs would continually leave the yard through the escape route and last Saturday they attacked a man on the main road, who was with his son and two daughters attempting to get into a vehicle. The man had a knife and he slashed one of the dogs with it.

Mr. Rodriguez said he knew of 10 reports related to the pit bulls, and said that he was still conducting an investigation and awaiting more information from the call dispatch arm of 911.

"I told Chief Harvey we can't arrest this man with what just happened. We have to build the case and then come with a good case," Mr. Rodriguez said.

Citation book for stray animals

Mr. Rodriguez said he tried for a long time to get the V.I.P.D. to create a citation book strictly for stray animals. "We already have the draft," he said. It would work similarly to traffic citations: an offender would be given a ticket for having their animals running loose. This person would then have to go to court to either pay the citation or challenge it.

"The system failed because we as law enforcement officers, we cannot give citations for dogs running at large. We cannot enforce the law with the existing citation book that is

used for traffic. I've been in three meetings already to try to get a citation book created to enforce the law for animal cruelty," he said.

Mr. Rodriguez said if the citation book was available, the incident on Wednesday night might have been avoided.

"That guy would have several citations if the police were called... and let's say he goes to court three times for the same thing, I'm pretty sure by then the judge would say, 'you know what, we're going to take away your dogs (because) this is the third time you've been here,' and that would have been avoided.

"But the law is not being enforced because we cannot enforce that law without a citation book," Mr. Rodriguez said.

Five of the 7 pit bulls were euthanized. Another was held by authorities and as the last, a female, was left with the owner because it recently gave birth to puppies, according to Mr. Rodriguez.

Wednesday night incident

According to several individuals who witnessed the attack, some of whom were also attacked by the dogs previously, the man was in his yard when the dogs rushed him and started barbarously biting his flesh. As the attack was occurring, frightful and angry neighbors called for help. They called 911 seeking immediate response — doing so with a high level of frustration as they had reported the dogs numerous times before to police with little results.

According to the neighbors, the wild pit bull dogs, 7 in total, belong to a neighbor at the beginning of the street. This neighbor, a man, had been urged many times to properly secure the dogs in his yard because of the animals' aggressive behavior toward the community, the neighbors said. The dogs have attacked virtually every family in the small neighborhood, according to multiple eyewitness.

They recently attacked an elderly, deaf man, and had to be shouted away by a frightened neighbor. On Saturday, they attacked a man, his son and two daughters who were walking the main road of the neighborhood and attempting to get into a vehicle. The father had a knife and managed to slash one of the dogs. Days before, the dogs stormed the yard of another neighbor, forcing family members to run inside their home and quickly close a metal gate of their porch. Video recorded of the incident shows the dogs barking at the family who were confined to their home until the dogs left.

The elderly man was badly injured by the five dogs. Pictures the Consortium has seen show what appears to be the man's right foot disfigured with wounds and blood all over it; his chin showed a gaping wound and a deep gash under his lower lip. When an ambulance arrived on the scene, the man was placed on a stretcher and was rushed to the Juan F. Luis Hospital for treatment, where family members said he was losing blood. In critical condition, he was airlifted out of the territory to a medical facility for further treatment, family members said.

The Clifton Hill neighborhood where the incident occurred is on the 3rd street to the left when coming from the Melvin Evans Highway by the Container Port intersection.

Neighbors said they had called police multiple times to the location to report the dogs. Police officers, they said, came to the area but said they could do nothing but admonish the dog owner to keep his pit bulls in the yard. The neighbors felt like the community was let down by the police department, as several incidents were reported and no serious action was taken.

St. Croix Police Chief William Harvey, who was on the scene, said the man whose yard the dogs were supposed to be secured in, whose identity was not revealed at the time, had been arrested. The dogs were also taken away and were to be put down. A police report on the incident is expected to be released with more details about the arrest and the suspect.

At least one of the pit bulls, which neighbors described as the aggressive ring leader, was coming toward this reporter when he arrived on the scene from the main entrance. Its mouth was made red by the elderly man's blood, and it was still enraged, barking as it came closer. "Go in your car!" the neighbors, who know all too well of the dogs' violent nature, yelled. "It will attack you. Get in your car!"

Feature Image: Pillow used to comfort 84-year-old man following attack on Wednesday.