

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Man Accused of Assaulting Guests at St. Thomas Villa Found With Firearm, Ammo and Marijuana

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Mugshot of Acio Richards. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. THOMAS — A St. Thomas man allegedly assaulted guests at a St. Thomas Villa Sunday morning after hanging out with same guests earlier. When asked to leave the premises, he returned from his vehicle with a gun, according to officer testimony. Police recovered said gun, ammunition and over an ounce of marijuana.

The suspect, Acio Richards, 30, appeared before the Magistrate Judge Henry Carr III via teleconference while in the custody of the Bureau of Corrections on Monday for his advisement hearing.

Richards was charged with third-degree assault, using a firearm in a violent crime, possession of an unlicensed firearm, unlawful possession of ammunition, and possession of a controlled substance.

According to the probable cause fact sheet, at about 3:12 am on Sunday, August 8, Officer Michael Hilaire, Sr. was dispatched to Villa Creole in connection to a report that a male pointed a firearm at the guests staying in the villa. Officer Hilaire's testimony revealed that Richards was hanging out with the guests earlier in the Red Hook area and was invited back to the villa. Richards did go to the villa and hung out with the guests at the pool, the officer said. The officer also stated that when Richards kept trying to enter one of the female guest's room, he was asked to leave by a male guest.

"It escalated from there where he left the residence and returned with a firearm," Officer Hilaire said.

It is unclear as to what transpired when matters escalated. Much of the details of what took place at the villa was not included in the fact sheet, and Officer Hilaire filled in some blanks in his testimony.

Still unclear about some details of the case, Judge Carr said, "I am concerned about that firearm. I am concerned about him returning back to that residence and threatening them with the firearm. I don't know what the argument was, but I am concerned about that."

According to the fact sheet, Richards was making threats and threw the firearm away once the guests stated that they were calling the police. When police arrived on the scene, they observed Richards searching in the nearby bushes with a flashlight for his keys to his vehicle.

The fact sheet said that a search of the vehicle commenced after officers asked to search for a firearm. Richards allowed the search and said, "You could search it. I don't have any gun in the car." A loaded magazine was found in the passenger seat rear pouch that appeared to belong to a Glock handgun. A search of the bushy area by the VIPD forensics team uncovered the suspect's keys, a black loaded Glock handgun and a black bag containing three mason jars with a "green leafy substance," the fact sheet said. The substance was field-tested by forensics and identified as marijuana, Officer Hilaire said in court. An additional three jars of marijuana and loose rounds were found in the trunk of the vehicle.

Questioning of Officer Hilaire by the defense's attorney Alexia Furlow revealed that Richards had injuries that he was taken to the hospital for. It is unclear as to how serious those injuries were and how they were inflicted.

Bail was set at \$50,000 upon arrest, and the prosecuting attorney Brenda Scales requested it to remain as is. Attn. Furlow requested that he should be allowed to sign an unsecured bond instead, since he is a life-long resident of St. Thomas and has strong ties to the island. Having some recent contact with the criminal justice system, Attn. Scales argued that allowing an unsecured bond would be naïve for someone with his history, claiming that Richards is now becoming violent.

Judge Carr ruled on the following release conditions:

- \$50,000 bail (with a provision to post 10% or \$5,000 cash and/ property)
- Must reside with a third-party custodian
- 24/7 house arrest without the use of electronic monitoring
- Prohibited from returning to Villa Creole
- No direct or indirect contact with guests (victims) and witnesses
- Surrender driver's license
- Prohibited from applying for a passport

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