

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Men Arrested After Police Find Shotgun and Ammunition in Vehicle They Occupied

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Mugshot of Curtis Bernard. The V.I.P.D. has not provided the mugshot of Leon Thomas.
By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ST. CROIX — Two men have been arrested and charged on gun-related offenses.

Leon Thomas, age 37 and 46-year-old Curtis Bernard were arrested on October 2 on charges of unauthorized possession of ammunition. Bernard was arrested on two additional charges: unauthorized possession of a firearm and unauthorized possession of a firearm in a vehicle.

The arrest follows a report by a police officer who stated that she was on mobile patrol Sunday when she noticed a black BMW on the Melvin Evans Highway in the vicinity of Home Depot. The officer said she recognized the vehicle as one that was involved in a burglary incident that she was investigating.

According to the probable cause fact sheet, the officer conducted a vehicle registration check via the 911 Emergency Call Center, which revealed that the license plate did not belong to the vehicle it was attached to. She then conducted a traffic stop on the vehicle and made contact with the driver, who was later identified as Leon Thomas. An unknown male occupant was also in the vehicle sitting in the front passenger seat. He was later identified as Curtis Bernard.

Thomas was asked to present his driver's license, registration and proof on insurance, and he stated that the vehicle was not registered or insured. The officer then advised Thomas that the license plate attached to the vehicle was not registered to the BMW, and Thomas admitted to affixing a license plate that did not belong to the BMW — an action he said was taken to avoid being traffic-stopped by police. Thomas also stated that he did not have any paperwork for the vehicle.

The officer advised Thomas that the vehicle would be impounded because he was unable to provide any documentation for it. She also advised him that she would be conducting an inventory search of the vehicle before impounding to which Thomas consented, according to the probable cause fact sheet.

The affidavit further states that while conducting the inventory search, the officer observed what appeared to be a muzzle/barrel of a shotgun protruding from under a white T-shirt that was on the left side of the front passenger seat. The officer lifted the T-shirt and observed a black 'sawed-off' shotgun leaning on the passenger side front seat with the barrel touching the floorboard. She asked Thomas who the gun belonged to and he replied that it was not his. Thomas then pointed in the direction of Bernard and stated, "That's the owner of the gun."

Bernard then immediately stated, "I will be honest with you officer, the gun belongs to me." Bernard was then asked if he possessed a license or permit to carry a firearm in the United States or its territories and he said no.

While conducting a further inspection of the vehicle, the officer observed a backpack in the trunk of the vehicle. Thomas immediately tried to grab the bag while stating that it belonged to him and it contained his tools for work. The officer then asked Thomas for permission to check the backpack and he consented.

She searched the backpack and found a clear plastic box containing 49 .22 caliber rounds of ammunition and several bags of jewelry. Thomas was asked whether he possessed a license or permit to carry ammunition in the U.S. or its territories and he replied, "No, that backpack does not belong to me." He then stated that Bernard placed the ammunition in his backpack despite having asked Bernard not to do so.

The 911 Emergency Call Center was notified and a forensic unit was requested to travel to the scene. Forensics recovered a rusted, 12 gauge sawn-off shotgun and three live rounds inside the ammo tube. A verbal check with the Firearms Bureau revealed that

Bernard did not have a license or permit to possess a firearm or ammunition in the U.S.V.I. The check also revealed that Thomas did not have a license or permit to possess ammunition in the U.S.V.I

In court on Monday, the judge ruled that Thomas would be allowed to post 10 percent of the \$5,500 bail requirement with the remainder as an unsecured bond. Meanwhile, Bernard was allowed to post \$2,500 cash with the remainder of the \$50,000 bail requirement as an unsecured bond, to secure his release.

The two men are to surrender their passports and are barred from leaving St. Croix without the court's written authorization.

Thomas has been ordered to report to the office of probation every Tuesday, while Bernard will be on 24-hour house arrest with the use of an electronic monitor.

They are to have no contact, directly or indirectly with any victims or witnesses, or each other in this matter.