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Ocean Springs Man Pleads Guilty to Possession of Controlled Substances

Gulfport, Miss – United States Attorney Dunn Lampton announced that William J. Golding of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, pled guilty today to misdemeanor possession of controlled substances (cocaine and marijuana). Golding, who is a high school football coach, pled guilty in the Dan M. Russell Jr. United States Courthouse in Gulfport, before U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert H. Walker. Judge Walker accepted Golding's plea and entered a judgment of guilty, with an adjudged fine of \$700.00 plus \$25 special assessment and \$25 processing fee for a total of \$750.00.

The offense occurred on July 4, 2008, at about 1:00 p.m. on the north beach of West Ship Island. Two U.S. Park Service Law Enforcement Rangers smelled the strong odor of burning marijuana and saw Golding with three other men approximately 20 feet away. The four men were sitting shoulder-to-shoulder on a sand dune 35 feet from the water's edge

Upon stopping to investigate, the rangers noticed one of the men make a movement to the sand with his right hand. The rangers walked up to the men, and asked if they had been smoking marijuana. The rangers then asked the four men to move from their position on the sand dune so the rangers could check the sand for marijuana.

The four men complied, and William Golding explained to the rangers that the men had been smoking marijuana and that the marijuana was his. When asked where the marijuana was, Golding indicated that the man who had been on the west end of the dune was last in possession of the marijuana – whereupon the man Golding indicated came forward and pointed to the spot in the sand where the marijuana was hidden and said "it's right there."

After digging through the sand's surface, U.S. Park Rangers discovered a partially smoked marijuana cigarette which Golding admitted was his. Asked if he had any more drugs on his person, Golding stated that he did not have anymore drugs with him, adding that the rangers got "the last of it." A ranger then asked Golding if he would empty his pockets and

Golding agreed. Golding pulled his pockets out showing he had nothing in them; but, as Golding did so, the rangers noticed Golding appeared hesitant to pull his right pocket completely out – so, Golding was instructed to pull the inside lining of the pocket completely out such that the entire inside of the pocket would be visible. While Golding did this, the rangers noticed a small sandwich style plastic baggie containing a white powdery substance coming out of the pocket, which Golding threw to the ground at the ranger’s feet. Both rangers also saw a small straw had fallen to the ground with the baggie.

As a ranger picked up the baggie and straw, Golding stated “that’s not mine.” One of the rangers reminded Golding that both park rangers had observed Golding remove and toss the baggie. When asked what the white powder was, Golding replied “sugar.” When asked why he had the short straw in his pocket, Golding smiled, paused for a few moments, hung his head down and admitted the baggie belonged to him, that it contained cocaine, and that he used the small straw to “snort” the cocaine.

Golding then asked the park rangers if they would not make a “big deal” of this, and explained he was a high school football coach and was only “trying to have a good time.” When one of the rangers explained that possession of illegal drugs is prohibited at the Gulf Islands National Seashore, Golding agreed and said “come on, it’s the 4th of July.” The rangers then explained that Golding was being issued a citation and would be released from the scene.

Since Mr. Golding stated that he was a high school football coach, rangers confirmed that the other three men, while noticeably younger than the 51-year-old Golding were not minors; but, were young adults.

When asked how he arrived on West Ship Island, Golding said he rode “on a friend’s boat.” When asked to point out that friend, Golding pointed to a man in a group of about 50 people who were approximately 150 feet away. One of the rangers informed the captain of the vessel on which Golding had traveled, that Golding had transported illegal narcotics on his vessel and the captain denied being aware of Golding’s possession of narcotics.

Rangers delivered the drug evidence to the Mississippi State Crime Laboratory in Gulfport where testing showed that the evidence included one-tenth of a gram of cocaine, three-tenths of a gram of marijuana in a partially burned hand rolled cigarette, and that the small straw contained cocaine residue.

Prior to sentencing, the Government also gave notice to the court of Golding’s prior criminal record for a 1999 first offense, misdemeanor conviction for driving under-the-influence in Florida, at which time Golding’s occupation-of-record was listed as “teacher.”

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