

YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED



WSJ wants to hear from you. Take part in this short survey to help shape The Journal. [Survey](#)

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/customs-officers-charged-with-assaulting-fellow-officers-at-newark-airport-1505340374>

CRIME

Customs Officers Charged With Assaulting Fellow Officers at Newark Airport

The three indicted officers are accused of assaulting two fellow male officers on two separate occasions in November and January

By [Kate King](#) [Follow](#)

Sept. 13, 2017 6:06 pm ET



Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, N.J. PHOTO: KENA BETANCUR/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Three U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers have been arrested and charged with assaulting fellow officers at Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey.

The three indicted officers: Tito Catota, 38 years old, Parmenio I. Perez, 40, and Michael A. Papagni, 32, appeared before Judge Michael A. Hammer in U.S. District Court in Newark on Wednesday and were released on \$100,000 bonds. They are accused of assaulting two fellow male officers on two separate occasions in November and January.

The criminal complaint alleges the accused officers threw the victims on an office table that they called the “rape table,” held them down, climbed on top of them and grinded on their bodies in a way that simulated a sex act.

“This behavior would be abhorrent in any environment, especially one serving a critical law enforcement function,” said Acting U.S. Attorney William E. Fitzpatrick in a written statement. “The hard working men and women who protect our borders deserve better.”

Mr. Papagni’s attorney said evidence will show that his client is innocent. “Separate and apart from that, I’m astonished that harmless horseplay amongst law-enforcement officers amounts to a federal crime according to this indictment,” said the attorney, Joe Tacopina.

Alan Zegas, who is representing Mr. Catota, said his client has maintained his innocence and will “vigorously” contest the charges at trial. An attorney for Mr. Perez didn’t immediately return a call for comment.

The complaint described the involvement of several other unnamed customs officers in the alleged assaults. A spokesman for the U.S. Attorney’s Office declined to comment on whether more arrests were expected, saying only that the investigation is ongoing.

NBC 4 New York first reported the allegations of sexually abusive hazing in May, and interviewed three customs officers—two men and a woman—who said they had been assaulted.

A spokesman for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection said in a statement that the department first became aware of the allegations in January and placed 11 Newark employees, including three supervisors, on administrative duty. The department also disbanded the specialized unit involved in the alleged misconduct, called the Passenger Enforcement Rover Team, which was charged with preventing the entry of contraband and suspected terrorists.

“We do not tolerate misconduct in our ranks and are committed to a safe workplace environment free of harassment or intimidation,” the spokesman said in a statement, adding that the department welcomed the indictments.

Write to Kate King at Kate.King@wsj.com