

**Col Justin Dintino:
Honor, Duty, Fidelity**

**Col Callahan --- Gov Florio --- Chief Justice Zazzali --- Attorney General DeVesa ---
Current and retired State Police leaders --- Law enforcement colleagues ---
friends and most importantly Col Justin Dintino and your family**

It is easy to recount Justin Dintino's many achievements in law enforcement and the national recognition he earned during his long career. He is, of course, most closely associated with exposing and investigating organized crime in NJ, culminating in his well-deserved appointment by President Reagan to a panel of experts charged with reporting on the structure and threat of organized crime across the nation.

But, there is a deeper level to the story of Col Dintino. It has to do with his character and that of the organization to which he devoted his professional life. For he defined what it means to be a "Trooper." If we leave this place today having honored a great leader of this organization only for his achievements, we will be missing the most important lessons his life can teach us.

So please indulge me while I give you some historical context to better understand what kind of a man Col Dintino is, and the role he played in the history of our state.

When Trooper Justin Dintino, badge #1152, fresh out of the farm fields of South Jersey, graduated from the State Police academy on December 2, 1952 he could not have understood the hidden political culture of this state and the ways in which it would challenge his integrity. During his early years as a road trooper he displayed tenacity and skill as an investigator in Troop A and gradually, almost reluctantly, gravitated toward detective work. It was in the early '60s,

when he began to investigate illegal gambling in South Jersey, that he collided with the awesome power of New Jersey's political corruption.

Long before Trooper Dintino came along, it was widely understood that New Jersey political power was concentrated in the hands of bosses in the urban counties. Hudson, Essex, Passaic, Middlesex, Atlantic and Camden Counties were the centers of power where candidates for office were selected and favors were exchanged.

At the same time, New Jersey was home to every organized crime group operating in the New York and Philadelphia metropolitan areas. From colonial days, when Benjamin Franklin described New Jersey as "a keg tapped at both ends" by New York and Philadelphia, our state seemed incapable of resisting exploitation by outsiders. During prohibition, we gave free reign to bootleggers and their criminal enterprises. When prohibition ended, those groups expanded into gambling, prostitution, drug dealing, loan sharking, cargo theft and many other crimes, creating a flourishing illegal economy parallel to legitimate commerce.

What we failed to recognize was the extent to which county machine politics had become captive to organized crime. There was virtually nothing at any level of government out of reach of criminals. In fact, in the darkest days of the 1950s and 60s, racketeers had so infested governmental institutions that they were able to name a State Police Superintendent to whom they paid a regular salary alongside his government check.

So when Investigator Dintino, operating out of the Turnersville Station, decided to lock people up for illegal gambling, he was confronted by a delegation from Division Headquarters, who told him in no uncertain terms to lay off gambling. Most of us would have failed that moral test. After all, there was plenty of

other crime to deal with and he could have accepted their enticing rationale that gambling was to be policed by headquarters units, not the Troops.

But Investigator Dintino was not built to accept such deception. He knew that no gambling raids were being conducted by Trenton and that absent his efforts the racketeers behind the gambling were thumbing their noses at law enforcement. And so, convinced that it was his duty to enforce the criminal laws and at great personal risk, Investigator Dintino persisted.

In those days, there were a handful of Troopers like Dintino who could not abide the affront to their duty as law enforcement officers and to their personal pride. They were typically passed over for promotion and transferred to remote outposts where they couldn't cause trouble. They felt isolated and frustrated, but could not conform to the corrupt culture that had grown like a cancer within the organization to which they had sworn their loyalty.

They had no way of knowing that during this period an important figure in State Police history, David B Kelly had maneuvered himself into the position of Deputy Superintendent and was secretly being fed information by the FBI in an effort to stem the festering corruption within the organization. By 1965, Kelly was able to muster enough political support to become Superintendent, but was concerned that any sudden change in policy toward organized crime would be the end of his administration. So, in 1966, Col Kelly secretly, in the basement of his home, brought together the core members of the future battle against organized crime and their corrupt political friends. Five Troopers were quietly transferred to a newly created Intelligence Bureau, assigned to collect information about the structure and membership of organized crime, their illegal enterprises and the sources of their protection. Justin Dintino, based on his record of resistance to corruption, determination to enforce the law against criminal enterprises and his resourcefulness, was a charter member of Kelly's team of revolutionaries.

Detective Sergeant Dintino flourished in the new environment that Col Kelly had created. He built relationships with the FBI in Philadelphia and Camden, earning their trust and overcoming the stigma of past corruption. He had developed organized crime informants during his gambling investigations to whom he now turned for intelligence on the full range of organized crime activities from murders to political payoffs. As the Intelligence Bureau was getting on its feet, something happened that would change law enforcement history forever.

In 1967, frustrated with the growing power of organized crime nationally and the unwillingness of the then US Attorney General to unleash the full resources of the Department of Justice to fight against it, the FBI leaked records of extralegal electronic surveillance installations they had been operating for several years to Life Magazine. Those bugs revealed, in graphic detail, the inner workings of the mob nationally. Based on that information, Life Magazine ran two articles exposing the links between racketeers and politicians throughout the country, with particular emphasis on New Jersey. Details of discussions between high level mobsters about the sources of their impunity, including their State Police connections dropped like a bomb in New Jersey. Kelly and his team took full advantage of the shockwave. Working with a courageous legislator, Senator Ed Forsythe, a set of powerful new laws were pushed through a stunned legislature. For the first time anywhere in the country, they created a grand jury with statewide jurisdiction, and along with it, legalized court authorized electronic surveillance and the power to grant witness immunity. These were the tools essential to penetrating the layers of insulation protecting the most powerful racketeers and corrupt politicians.

But Kelly and his team were not satisfied just to have the new laws on the books. They pressed the Attorney General into giving the State Police the resources to implement those laws. And so, in 1969, a new unit was created within the Intelligence Bureau, made up of experienced prosecutors, to work alongside Troopers like Lieutenant Dintino to transform raw intelligence information into successful prosecutions – the first such program in the country.

Over the next 10 years hundreds of mobsters and corrupt politicians were brought to justice. All of the mob bosses identified by Life Magazine were brought down. County political leaders, legislators, mayors, police chiefs, prosecutors and even judges were convicted. And, the New Jersey State Police became a national model of integrity and effectiveness in the fight against organized crime.

Major Dintino could have rested on those achievements as he rose through the ranks to fill the newly created position of Lieutenant Col. But here is where the story of his character deepens. For many years, the State Police had been the target of accusations of abusing minorities by civil rights organizations. By the time, Governor Florio was elected in 1989, the State Police had been barraged with law suits and in some cases Troopers had been convicted of civil rights violations and even imprisoned. At the outset of his administration Governor Florio turned to Col Dintino as his new Superintendent demanding that the problem be assessed and fixed.

We all know that law enforcement tends to rely on statistics to measure itself. The numbers of arrests, drug seizures, weapons recoveries and the like, give us a sense of comfort that society is being protected. Col Dintino saw through the deception of numbers. His policy was very simple – protecting the rights of all citizens is the highest priority of the State Police. For emphasis, he instructed his troops that he would prefer that not another ounce of drugs were seized to witnessing another Trooper going to prison for a civil rights violation.

When the troops came to understand that Col Dintino was serious, they followed his lead so scrupulously that for the first time in its history the New Jersey State Police receive the unqualified praise of the American Civil Liberties Union. During his tenure racial profiling ended.

To understand the real significance of this, I need to tell you one final story. It is not about a sweeping policy change or a law enforcement achievement splashed across the media. At best it is a footnote in the history of Col Dintino's tenure. But, I witnessed it and I want you to understand its profound implications.

In the early 90s, a community policing experiment was conducted in one of Newark's most dysfunctional, crime infested neighborhoods. With no fanfare, a unit of Troopers and Newark Police Officers were assigned to patrol on foot from an apartment that had been converted into a mini-precinct. Not since the 1967 Newark riot had local residents encountered Troopers in their community and distrust was palpable. But within a mere couple of months, dramatic transformations began to occur. The police began to recognize law abiding community members as individuals, forming trusting relationships among them. The police began to respond to neighborhood priorities, providing safety for residents to emerge from their homes to shop and interact with their neighbors. Children were free to play without fear of being caught in a cross fire between rival gangs. Residents began to give police information about the locations of drug dealers and organize to clean up their neighborhood. Basic social values incompatible with drug abuse, thievery, and violence began to take hold in the neighborhood – all because of the intimate connection that grew in a few short weeks between the police and the community they served.

What are the lessons that Justin Dintino can teach us? They are defined by the State Police motto: Honor, Duty, Fidelity. But to whom do we owe those obligations? Col Dintino's story tells us that it is the public. Regardless of differences among us, individually we are entitled to the loyalty and protection of law enforcement. Col Dintino did not simply preach those values. He fought against overwhelming obstacles with extraordinary courage to live by them and to lead the New Jersey State Police by his example. Let us never forget.

Ed Stier, October 30, 2019