

2025 FORMER TROOPER OF THE YEAR (POSTHUMOUS) AWARD

It is with great pride and pleasure that the Association of Former New Jersey State Troopers, Inc., announces Detective Sergeant First Class Joseph P. Keely, #2449 as the recipient of the Association's 2025 Former Trooper of the Year (Posthumously)!

Joseph P. Keely was a first generation American whose parents were both Irish immigrants. Growing up his parents instilled in him the love and lore of the gift they bestowed upon him, growing up in country where you are free. At the age of 16, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, he wanted to quit school and join the Marines to go stop the Communists from delivering nuclear missiles ninety miles off the U.S. coast. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1964. As a proud Marine, he served his country as a Staff Sergeant from 1964 through 1968 completing two tours of duty in Vietnam. He continued on in the Marine Corps Reserves until 1980.



As a New Jersey State Trooper for 26 years, he rose to the rank of Detective Sergeant First Class and was a fingerprint expert and skillful crime scene investigator. During the investigation into the 1981 fatal shooting of Trooper Phillip Lamonaco #2663, DSFC Keely discovered integral evidence that broke the case and resulted in the capture and arrest of the perpetrators, Thomas William Manning and Richard Charles Williams. Both Manning and Williams were members of the United Freedom Front who had been conducting war against America as communist sympathizers since 1972, when they gunned down Trooper Lamonaco. He would later write in his book "Wounds of the Heart," that his last battle of Vietnam ended in 1992 in the second courtroom battle in Somerville, NJ, where after several days of testimony, a guilty verdict was received on Richard Charles Williams.

After he retired from the State Police, he worked security for the North Jersey Watershed Unit until he retired from that position over five years ago.

An accomplished bagpiper, Joe was a founding member of the Cu'Chullain Pipe Band in 1977. During these years, he would play events for the New Jersey State Police. He had a pioneering idea and in 1986, he petitioned Colonel Clinton Pagano with a proposed plan to start the New Jersey State Police Pipe Band. His plan was approved, and it became the first state police pipe band in the country. The formation, growth and success of this band would become Joe's sole purpose for many years. Later in his piping career, Joe would help in the founding of the St. Ann's of Hampton Pipe Band and the Morris County Police Pipes and Drums. He was also a former member of Leatherneck Pipes and Drums. He was a legend in the pipe band community, and his influence was far reaching, inspiring many other pipe bands to share their tradition and musical talent with their community.

In 1995, upon his retirement and as a result of changes in leadership of the New Jersey State Police, the New Jersey State Police Pipe Band was forced to re-organize as a private nonprofit entity and under his leadership was established as the Pipes and Drums of the Blue and Gold. From that point forward the Pipe Band, although a private entity, remained loyal to supporting the New Jersey State Police and its members performing at numerous official and unofficial State Police and Former Troopers Association functions while remaining independent of potential fluctuating and politically motivated decisions.

In March 2021, Joseph Keely authored the book **"Wounds of the Heart"** from Page Publishing, Inc., which touts the book as being, *"at the same time a deeply personal and historical record of the Vietnam War, the major players in Vietnam and the United States, and the devastating experience of American soldiers returning from serving their country in a stridently unpopular war. This extensively researched work offers a comprehensive understanding of the Postwar era and the geopolitical machinations that led to multinational conflict in Southeast Asia."* Page Publishing goes on to say that it is *"an exhaustive work inspired by his own wartime*

experience and a fierce loyalty to his military brothers and sisters who were so grievously wronged by their nation."

Joe dedicated his book, "This is for my children and my children's children so that they may know that their father/grandfather served his country along with 2,909,918 other men and women in uniform in Vietnam. Most of these men and woman remained loyal to their oath as military personnel and served with honor and distinction. I want them to know that our efforts and sacrifices were undermined at every turn of the event by the American people, the American press, and self-centered politicians through lies, propaganda, and treason on a scale so large it was unstoppable. And finally forced the government to abandon its troops on the field of battle to fend for ourselves. That they may also see the real truth surrounding the Vietnam War and the war that has raged within me these past fifty-plus years.

These words were engendered by a comment I heard on television. It angered me enough to conduct a personal investigation to see if the nine lines written above were just a figment of my imagination or what I felt to be true in my heart. This investigation has culminated with mixed feelings. It saddens me that what I felt in my heart is true; however, I am elated that my investigation serves as a vindication of all the Vietnam veterans, both men and women, who remained loyal to their oath as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. I am elated that there is finally a book that countermands the lies and propaganda that have carried on from the '60s to this very day and that it shows the Vietnam veterans as the loyal and honorable men and women they have proven themselves to be."

Throughout his life of service, as a United States Marine Corps Vietnam Veteran, and his State Police career as a Trooper, Detective, and Piper, DSFC Keely earned a reputation emulated and respected by active and retired Jersey Troopers throughout our Outfit of Jersey Troopers and the Law Enforcement and Piping Communities. His honesty and integrity were beyond reproach, and his competence and character are the epitome of the core values of the New Jersey State Police, "Honor – Duty – Fidelity." DSFC Joseph Keely #2449 had been a loyal supporter of the Former Troopers Association since 2003, and we are honored to recommend him posthumously as the 2025 Former Trooper of the Year Award. He consistently represented our Association of Former Jersey Troopers and our beloved New Jersey State Police with honor, dignity, and professionalism.

Without doubt, DSFC Keely's life of service certainly earned him this award through his brave and selfless commitment to aid his fellow comrades. He was a truly compassionate and professional leader, and a friend to all! Please join me in bestowing this prestigious award to the family of DSFC Joseph P. Keely, #2449 as the 2025 Former Trooper of the Year (Posthumously).

Presentation of the award will take place on November 19, 2025, at the Grand Marquis, 1550 Route 9, Old Bridge, New Jersey 08857, 6:00 – 10:00 p.m. Additional information and pre-registration will be posted in the near future.