

# Boston Broadside

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FIGHTING CORRUPTION AND LIES

NEW ENGLAND POLITICS AND BEYOND - without the liberal spin

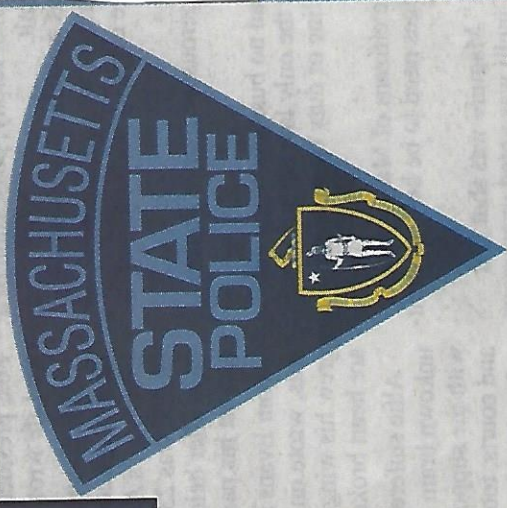
### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE STATE POLICE?

by **Dennis Galvin**

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Special to The Boston Broadside

The Massachusetts State Police has long enjoyed a reputation as one of the nation's most professional law enforcement organizations. This reputation was the result of a century of hard work, dedication and sacrifice. However, recent scandals threaten to undermine that reputation. What happened to the State Police is a story of structural and cultural changes that combined with political corruption to erode



the effectiveness and integrity of one of the commonwealth's most respected and vital institutions. It is also a story of two police organizations. The first, the Division of State

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Police, also known as “the uniformed” branch, and the second, the Department of State Police, its successor. Flaws in the organizational design of the latter, and the culture that developed around them, are largely responsible for the problems that we are witnessing today.

Understanding the contrast between the former and current agency is important. The Division of State Police was formed shortly after World War I. It featured minimal top management, cohesive membership, and strong direction provided by very capable first-line supervisors. The Division was a novelty for its time. Appointment to the force required the completion of a rigorous academic and physical training program. A mandatory retirement age of 50 years old was established. Excellence in performance, integrity in conduct, and competence in skill became key organizational values.

The Division was the first to institute a citizens’ complaint process based upon concepts espoused by August Vollmer, the pioneer police reformer of the twentieth century. Strict accountability and transparency were required. Adherence to this process earned respect and admiration for the Division. It took a leadership position in the movement for police professionalization.

In 1992, the successor agency, the Department of State Police, was created. Designed as a mega-police agency, it consolidated the Capital Police, the Registry Police, the MDC Police and the former Division of State Police. While attempts were made to retain as many of the progressive aspects of the old Division as possible, most of these faded away.

Several structural problems with the new Department of State Police were apparent at consolidation. Most prominent was the fact that the Colonel became a direct appointee of the governor, serving at his or her sole discretion. No term contract or removal for cause provision was provided. This politicized the Department. The agency found itself dangling from a puppet string, yanked most often in favor of political expedience, rather than organizational development.

Candidates for the position were all drawn in-house, outside professionals were barred from competing. This significantly limited the talent pool. Some Colonels had very little experience in managing an agency of the size and scale of the new Department. The regulatory authority of the new agency was also significantly expanded, creating an incentive for politicians to use their influence to bend and shape the department to their needs.

The Department’s chain of command eroded. The interjection of politics caused political considerations to often supersede professional competence in the selection of appointments to the Department’s command staff. The divided political loyalties that resulted inhibited direct accountability of these vital senior managers to the Colonel. In some cases, competing allegiances developed. The Colonel rarely exercised the authority to hire and fire these critical appointees based on performance. Central control of the Department faded away.

A one party Legislature also helped to undermine the Department’s internal control structure. Employing “budget blackmail,” the legislative leadership began to subvert the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches, forcing concession from State Police management on personnel decisions and resource allocation under threat of budget cuts.



Additionally, significant sections of the Department became balkanized. State Police units assigned to the Mass. Turnpike and Massport became detached in both spirit and practice from the Department, leading to a significant breakdown in oversight. Detachment also occurred in the units assigned to the District Attorney's offices. The District Attorneys and the Authorities often dictated to the Department. Because of the weak position of the Colonel, the department could not push back. A hands-off approach was adopted and control was lost.

Within the Department, supervision and discipline slackened. First-line supervisors and the subordinate troopers they supervised remained grouped in the same union. A conflict of interest was allowed to perpetuate, which obstructed first-line supervision, so vital for keeping a police agency aligned with its mission. State Police sergeants found themselves holding split loyalties between their duty to provide oversight of their subordinates, and their dependence on them as fellow union members.

Troopers were once disciplined through a trial board system, similar to that of a military court martial. This system served the Division very effectively in rooting out members who were unfit for duty. A provision requiring civil service review was grafted onto the process after the 1992 consolidation. This created a cumbersome process that rendered discipline ineffective.

Mandatory retirement was a critical policy for keeping the former organization vibrant, and for preventing entrenched corruption. It was akin to term limits for elected officials. From the outset there was a failure to enforce this policy in the new agency. This played a significant role in creating the conditions that led to the deep-seated corruption being uncovered today.

The State Police are absolutely essential to this state's homeland security effort. They are a main line of defense against terrorism, narcotics and human trafficking, and for maintaining civil order. They consume \$300 million annually in state revenue. While there are many courageous and dedicated troopers who protect and serve the people of Massachusetts, they are serving under increasingly demoralizing conditions. They deserve a properly led and well-regulated Department. Cronyism, corruption and politicization benefit a few at the expense of the many. The long term effect of demoralization is the degradation of effectiveness. This cannot be allowed to occur

The governor should call a blue ribbon commission of recognized law enforcement professionals to conduct a "stem to stern" review of the Department's organization, administration and operation. The goal should be to identify and then correct the flaws created by the 1992 consolidation. The people of Massachusetts and the loyal and dedicated men and women of the State Police deserve this. ♦

*The author is a retired Major of the Mass. State Police with 29 years of service.*