

Marked by Controversy, Accomplishment

24-Year Career Near End for Giarrusso



—States-Item Photos by James W. Gulliot.

By BERT HYDE

After 10 years as superintendent of the New Orleans Police Department, and 24 years as a policeman, Joseph I. Giarrusso is about to call it a career — a career marked by controversy, change and accomplishment.

The 46-year-old New Orleans native is expected to step down later this month after presiding over the most eventful decade in the police department's history. The force of 1,740 men and women is now the largest and best-equipped ever, but still problems of insufficient personnel and money persist.

The new superintendent, as yet unnamed will have his hands full, with a rising crime rate, but he will have the benefit of Giarrusso's administrative reforms, which tended to concentrate more power in the superintendent's office. And he will inherit an organization greatly improved by Giarrusso's tough disciplinary training and hiring policies.

THOSE WHO HAVE known the superintendent and served with him during his long career with the department say he has not always agreed with political and judicial decisions restricting police action, but he has made the most of the crime-fighting tools available to him.

Giarrusso's career in law enforcement dates back to July 19, 1946, when he was hired by the police department on a provisional basis. He was a member of the first group of recruits to be accepted during the administration of Mayor "Chep" Morrison.

After about five years in routine police work at the district level, Giarrusso spent two years as an instructor at the Police Academy. As a sergeant, he was named to the newly organized narcotics division, rising to the rank of lieutenant in 1956.

IN JUNE, 1957, the department's new superintendent, Provosty A. Dayries, appointed Giarrusso deputy superintendent. Giarrusso recalls wryly that it was a newspaper reporter who let him in on his new appointment.

He was attending a police convention in Alexandria, he said, when he received a call from The Times-Picayune police reporter asking him for comment on getting the job.

"I was surprised," Giarrusso said. "I told him I had received no official word of this. The reporter further informed me that the major with whom I was attending the Alexandria meeting had been fired, in what was the beginning of the now infamous New Orleans Police Department shakeup."

ON AUG. 15, 1960, Morrison elevated Giarrusso to the position he is now finally ready to relinquish. At the beginning, the new superintendent initiated a shakeup of his own, but with a view to restoring public confidence in the department's reputation.

"The process was slow," he recalls. "It took time to prove to the public that it should have confidence in the department without sweeping our shortcomings under the rug.

"I take full responsibility publicly for what happened then . . . there had to be firings in the top echelon and there were. Mayor (Victor H.) Schiro realized there had to be a change. It is a credit to Mayor Schiro and to Thomas J. Heier, then chief administrative officer, that they lent every possible, conceivable help, both financially and morally.

"WE TRIED TO inculcate into the people who remained and those who were to come into the department in the years that followed a motivation, the need to strive for self-respect. We were not long in getting going.

"Today, we are not the best . . . but neither are we the worst department in the nation."

Schiro retained Giarrusso's services when he was named to fill out Morrison's last term of office and kept him on during two elective terms as mayor. Mayor Moon Landrieu asked the superintendent to stay on at least temporarily until a suitable replacement could be found, and Giarrusso agreed.

He makes it clear that the new man, or any superintendent, must prepare for an inevitable stream of criticism.

"YOU CAN'T BE superintendent on a popularity basis," he said. "All I have sought is the respect of the men. I've tried to be fair even when it was hard to be fair. I have been strong on discipline. The men knew this."

Giarrusso has been criticized by some of his men for

ment," he says, "has been honest if not always correct. It has never been arbitrary or prejudiced. I have never attempted to make quick judgments. The Civil Service records will show that over the 10 years I have had very few reversals, and you will find that more men were dismissed from the department under my administration than any administration in the history of the department."

He has also been under fire in some quarters for giving his department heads little opportunity for recommending changes.

"I have never tolerated half-way measures," Giarrusso says. "You can't direct if you are going to share direction. It's no way to run a quasi-military organization such as the police department."

"WHEN DECISIONS have had to be made I have made them. I am not highly opinionated nor have I equivocated. The records will show that I have held weekly staff meetings . . . to stimulate interest, to dissolve differences, to listen to recommendations."

Giarrusso admits that recent labor-type unionization by police at various levels is at odds with his approach to discipline and will present a sticky problem for his successor.

"I don't know the solution or the answer to this problem," he said, "but I'm aware that government, the city administration in this case, must be prepared to move in the direction that is in the best interest of the men, to keep the complaints to a minimum."

"GOVERNMENT MUST take the initiative through appointment of the proper committees, to hold forums through which the men may express themselves and be heard and treated fairly.

"I think the working man is indebted to unionism but I am opposed to the police officers organizing. I feel they would find a conflict of duty in case of a dispute between management and labor. In this their sole duty would be to keep the peace. They cannot afford bias in such situations and they cannot help but be biased if they are a part of the labor organization."

Giarrusso said the changes he has brought about are probably more appreciated by veterans of the department than by newer personnel.

He said he feels the department will continue to progress if the new administration follows the suggestions of a recently announced study by experts from the International Association of Police Chiefs.

THE LIST OF improvements in the police force made under Giarrusso's direction is impressive. More than 100 policemen have received college educations under an educational program he instituted. Full integration of the department has been implemented: there are now 188 Negroes on the force, 81 of them commissioned officers and several in key positions. New appointments are made from Civil Service lists.

The new five-story police administration building was completed in 1968, with computerized operation and a well-



equipped crime lab.

Also completed was a new 10-story Central Lockup and House of Detention and a new Municipal and Traffic Courts Building.

The department's communications facilities have expanded to an 8-channel radio transmission system with car-to-car communication through a mobile repeater. Rolling equipment is the newest and best available.

GIARRUSSO IS quick to share the credit for these advances with his fellow policemen, the city administration, the news media, business leaders and all the citizens of New Orleans.

The retiring top policeman also has found time to be a family man. He and his wife of 20 years, the former Doris Loup, have an 18-year-old son, Joseph Jr., who recently graduated from De La Salle High School and is headed for Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. this fall. (Giarrusso denies rumors that his son chose a school in the nation's capital because he himself is in line for a federal post.)

Much of the credit for his success must go to Mrs.

(Continued on Page 33)

Giarrusso--

(Continued from Page 15)

Giarrusso, the superintendent says. "A policeman's wife must be patient and understanding over the years as Doris has been."

LAW ENFORCEMENT is not the easiest job in the world, Giarrusso points out. "A policeman is like a priest, if you will, with an obligation to his job. He must split himself between his job and his wife and his home life. This is always a mental problem for a police officer. He must put in the hours; it's the nature of his work."

Giarrusso's work has won him numerous personal hon-

ors. He holds diplomas from the Federal Bureau of Investigation Academy, the first narcotics school conducted by the federal government, and the Harvard Management Institute. He has participated in police seminars throughout the U.S. and recently was selected as the only police officer in the nation on the U.S. Attorney General's Law Enforcement Education Program.

NOW HE LOOKS back on all of it with satisfaction.

"It has been rewarding, personally," he said. "This job has done a great deal for me. I like to think, with a lot of humility, that I have contributed something. If others think so, I am happy."

"But it has been challenging."