

Ex-boxer DiGilio pulled no punches

By **MATTHEW DIETRICH**
Staff Writer

The discovery of John DiGilio's corpse in a body bag floating in the Hackensack River on Thursday ended speculation that the outspoken and unpredictable crime boss might have orchestrated his own disappearance.

It also ended an era of entertainment for courthouse reporters across North Jersey for whom DiGilio's trials had provided more amusement than P. T. Barnum ever envisioned.

In an interview with The Hudson Dispatch just five days before he disappeared, DiGilio, a member of the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame, pulled no punches in explaining his views about lawyers, prosecutors, civil rights and life in general.

"If you have an Italian name, these things happen," DiGilio said of his two decades of court appearances. "It seems that the John DiGilio name has been targeted for 20 years. Law enforcement gets frustrated when anyone takes them on."

In a high, raspy voice much like that of former heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali, with whom he used to spar, DiGilio accused federal prosecutors of grandstanding in their prosecution of reputed organized-crime figures.

"The propaganda must continue so they can show they're doing something besides ripping off the people's money. They have to go after an Italian name to get money from Washington. All nationalities in this country need a group like (the Italian-American Defense League, a civil rights group mentioned during his April trial) to keep government from running wild.

"The authorities want anyone that has the spotlight on their name.

"They're a bunch of windbags trying to justify their employment through innuendo, surmise and false reporting. They're a bunch of screwballs."

During the week before his disappearance, DiGilio had been pegged by Justin Dintino, the chief of intelligence of the State Commission of Investigation and an expert on New Jersey organized crime, as the boss of a multimillion-dollar check-cashing fraud operation run out of City Check Cashing in Jersey City. DiGilio angrily disputed the charge.

"I don't know them, I've never heard of them. You know what they should do? They should indict me. They shouldn't (mess) around. They ain't got the nerve because it's a lie. It's just another fabrication by Dintino.

"They're just using my name because they have to put somebody there. I'm becoming the new Kilroy. It used to be 'Kilroy was here,' now it's, 'John DiGilio was here.'"

Dintino also said DiGilio's boxing skills had helped him into the Genovese organized crime family, and that the welterweight-middleweight contender, who quit boxing in 1959, had participated in six to 10 murders as a hit man early in his

“They're a bunch of windbags trying to justify their employment through innuendo, surmise and false reporting.”

JOHN DIGILIO

mob career.

"The bigger guys liked to spar with me because I was quick," DiGilio said of his practice rounds with heavyweights such as Ali, then known as Cassius Clay.

At the time of the interview, DiGilio had just won his own acquittal on federal racketeering and conspiracy charges. He said he defended himself because he did not trust attorneys, although organized-crime experts said self-representation is usually a sign that a family subordinate has fallen out of favor with his superiors, who refuse to pay his legal fees.

"I feel that lawyers bend to government pressure. I can't trust a lawyer to do my work because 90 percent of lawyers would bend to government pressure. They're all self-centered, egotistical money-loving individuals."

DiGilio said he expected to travel a rough legal road in bringing a \$1 million civil suit against the federal government that he had recently resurrected. He was optimistic, however, about his pending appeal of an October loan-sharking conviction, for which he was to have been sentenced May 20 in Morris County Superior Court in Morristown.

"I'm asking the judge for a jury trial. I expect a strong motion to throw it out," DiGilio said of his lawsuit. When discussing his appeal, DiGilio's recent legal victory appeared to affect his vocabulary.

"There are serious questions of law which are not frivolous to overturn the verdict. I am definitely going to appeal. I feel the issue of appeal is meritorious."

Asked how he earned his living, DiGilio blamed state and federal prosecutors for having caused a long streak of poor health that made him unable to work, beginning in the late 1970s.

"Due to high blood pressure problems, I have been disabled. I intend to get back into the construction business soon."

On his alleged association with the Genovese crime family, believed to be the largest Cosa Nostra group operating in New Jersey, DiGilio replied:

"I don't know nothing about no Genoveses. I'm not even affiliated with Genovese drug stores."

MURDERED MOB BOSS

Who'll replace DiGilio?

Hudson czar holds key

By **MATTHEW DIETRICH**
Staff Writer

The decision on who will succeed murdered waterfront mob boss John DiGilio of Bayonne will most likely be made by the alleged Genovese crime titan authorities suspect urged his killing, a law enforcement source said yesterday.

The source said Louis "Bobby" Manna, a Jersey City resident reputed to be the second most powerful figure in the nationwide Genovese crime network, will have the power to approve a successor to DiGilio, who was found dead last week in what authorities believe to be an inter-family dispute.

DiGilio, whose control of the

lucrative waterfront labor and loansharking rackets made him one of the organization's three top soldiers in New Jersey, had "long-standing bad blood" with Manna, according to Justin Dintino, the chief of intelligence for the State Commission of Investigation.

Manna is the reputed "consigliere" of the Genovese family and a direct adviser of family boss Anthony "Fat Tony" Salerno, according to Dintino.

While saying any of DiGilio's close associates could succeed him as waterfront kingpin, the source said alleged Genovese

soldier Joseph "Pepi" LaScala and DiGilio henchman Richard "Bocci" Desciscio are the most likely candidates. Both live in Bayonne.

"LaScala is one of the likely ones, but we're not counting anyone out yet," the source said.

DiGilio's badly decomposed body, with a credit card bearing his name between his legs, was found in a zippered rubber bag in the Hackensack River in Carlstadt last Thursday. He died of several gunshot wounds to the head.

The Bergen County Prosecu-

tor's Office is investigating the murder with intelligence assistance from state and federal law enforcement agencies.

Although he was considered a soldier in the Genovese organization, DiGilio was considered as powerful as a "capo," the next rank up on the family ladder because of the important operations he controlled along the Hudson waterfront and in North Jersey.

Dintino estimated that DiGilio had up to 40 subordinates, and it is believed that one of his close associates, possibly Desciscio, led him to his execution.

Speculation that the outspoken DiGilio had been rubbed out on orders from his superiors in the Genovese family began immediately after he was reported missing to Bayonne police by his wife Ellen.

Organized crime experts suspect DiGilio had angered his bosses by making himself a well-known and highly visible public figure, thus attracting attention to Genovese operations throughout New Jersey.

On Tuesday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey A. Bronster filed papers in U.S. District Court in Newark requesting that another Genovese strongman, Vincent "The Fish" Cafaro, be allowed to testify in an upcoming trial of four DiGilio associates. Cafaro's testimony is expected to shed light on Mafia operations in Hudson County.

A \$1 million civil rights lawsuit DiGilio was preparing against federal prosecutors, which threatened to heighten scrutiny of mob operations, may have been the final prompt for his killing. After acting as his own attorney and winning his acquittal on federal racketeering charges last month, DiGilio was reviving the suit.

Please see **DiGILIO** Page 18

Court acquits DiGilio

Gallagher, Carson guilty of charges

By **MATTHEW DIETRICH**
Staff Writer

NEWARK—John DiGilio, who federal authorities believed to be the Genovese crime family foreman along the New Jersey waterfront, has been acquitted of racketeering and conspiracy charges.

The jury on Saturday found the ex-heavyweight boxer's co-defendants, former union officer Donald Carson and businessman Anthony Gallagher, guilty of the same charges for their parts in a



scam that extorted thousands of dollars from a Bayonne shipping company in exchange for labor peace.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Bronster said the government was satisfied with the verdict because Donald Carson, the second-ranking member of the International Longshoremen's Association, was convicted.

The jury, which had deliberated since Wednesday morning, also convicted trucker Anthony Gallagher, 55, of Bayonne.

Acquitted with DiGilio was trucker John Sharkey, 34, of Bayonne, Gallagher's cousin.

The jury returned the verdicts about 4 p.m. Saturday, said Tom Meisner, a deputy clerk to U.S. District Judge Dickinson R. Debevoise.

In DiGilio's hometown of Bayonne, some longtime residents applauded the decision, which they said vindicated a local hero.

"We're elated," said Fred Marrale yesterday as he waited for a table at La Strada Italian restaurant. "He's a nice guy, a friendly person. The papers make him out to be a mobster and he's not."

Please see **DiGILIO** Page 2

DIGILIO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Others said DiGilio's celebrity status as a former prizefighter, which brought boxing greats including Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and Jake LaMotta into the courtroom during the four-month trial, may have been the root of his legal problems.

"He was a big name, so they decided to pick on him," said Walter Jackson. "Nobody else would have gotten as much bad publicity."

Carson, 49, of Scotch Plains, executive vice president of the International Longshoremen's Association, and Gallagher were convicted of extorting money from a stevedoring company in exchange for labor peace.

DiGilio, 55, and Sharkey had faced the same charges.

Prosecutors charged that in 1981 and 1982, when Carson was ILA general organizer and secretary-treasurer of two Bayonne ILA locals, DiGilio controlled the union. Authorities also charged that DiGilio received payoffs of \$90,000 over a 15-month period during that time from Stevedore United Terminals Inc.

Gallagher controlled a trucking company used to funnel money to the mob, prosecutors said.

"We had charged that Gallagher personally engineered the scheme and carried it out. The jury apparently believed that," Bronster said. "As to Mr. DiGilio, the jury has spoken."

DiGilio and the others left the courtroom immediately after the verdict and could not be reached for comment. DiGilio, who acted as his own attorney, has an unlisted home phone number.

Leonard Meyerson, Carson's attorney, did not return phone messages to his New York City office. There was no answer at the offices of Rita Donnelly of West Orange, Sharkey's attorney, or John Whipple of Newark, Gallagher's attorney.

The government played a series of taped conversations during the trial that prosecutors contended showed DiGilio controlled union officials and commanded respect on the waterfront as a reputed member of the Genovese organized crime family.

The tapes were of conversations between DiGilio and Carson and John Barbato, a 53-year-old co-defendant from Staten Island, N.Y., who was removed from the case for medical reasons and will be retried later.

DiGilio was heard on some tapes saying, "Bayonne is mine," and speaking of the "respect" due him by another reputed mob figure.

He called the charges against him ridiculous and said, "Gossip in an apartment is not criminal."

MONDAY, MAY 2, 1988

ULTIMATUM

DiGilio issues answer

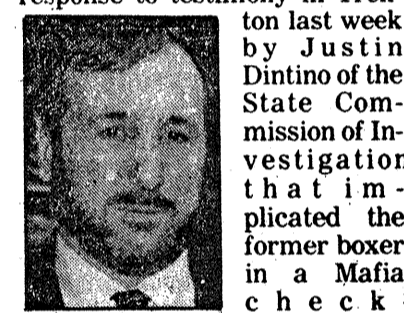
Ex-boxer denies links to check-cashing scam

By **MATTHEW DIETRICH**
Staff Writer

BAYONNE—Barely two weeks after his acquittal on federal racketeering charges, reputed waterfront crime boss John DiGilio yesterday issued an ultimatum to prosecutors who have linked him to check-cashing corruption in Jersey City.

"They should indict me," DiGilio said. "They ain't got the nerve because they know it's a lie."

DiGilio's comments were in response to testimony in Trenton last week



by Justin Dintino of the State Commission of Investigation that implicated the former boxer in a Mafia check-cashing scam that used City Check Cashing of Jersey City as a front.

An employee of the company, Robert Santoro, was identified by Dintino as an associate of DiGilio.

DiGilio said he had never heard of nor does he know anyone at City Check Cashing, and said the latest accusations are another example of government prosecutors trying to use his celebrity status to further their own careers.

"They're nothing but a bunch of windbags trying to justify their own employment through innuendo, surmise and false reporting," he said of the law enforcement agents who have kept him court for much of the last decade. "They're a bunch of screwballs."

The 55-year-old DiGilio said he plans to prove that prosecutors have unfairly picked on him in a \$1 million civil suit against the U.S. Attorney's Office in New-

Please see **DiGILIO** Page 4

DIGILIO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ark, which he will renew in the wake of his April 16 acquittal.

DiGilio and three associates had been accused in that case of extorting money from a shipping firm here in exchange for labor peace. Anthony Gallagher, a longtime DiGilio associate, and Donald Sharkey, International Longshoremen's Association leader, were convicted of racketeering and conspiracy. The fourth defendant, John Sharkey, was acquitted with DiGilio.

Gallagher agreed with DiGilio that the former welterweight's celebrity status had made him

an easy mark for prosecutors, saying that DiGilio is "the only game in town" for investigators.

Although he was found innocent in the most recent case, DiGilio could face up to 25 years when he is sentenced later this year on state loansharking charges stemming from his Oct. 19 conviction. DiGilio, who acted as his own attorney and won last month, said he will again represent himself when he appeals the loansharking conviction.

"I feel that lawyers bend to government pressure. I have found lawyers to be self-centered, egotistical and money-

hungry," he said.

DiGilio would not comment further on the appeal except to say, "There are serious questions of law, which are not frivolous, to overturn the verdict."

Despite his conviction, DiGilio insists it is his name rather than his actions that has made defending himself in courtrooms rather than boxing his occupation for the past decade.

"The propaganda must continue to show the public they're doing something besides ripping off taxes," he said. "The authorities want anyone who has the spotlight on their name."

DIGILIO MAY BE DEAD

DIGILIO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

pute between DiGilio and Bobby Manna, the third-ranking member of the Genovese organization, may also have led to the 55-year-old former boxer's mysterious disappearance.

Police here said there were no new developments on the fate or whereabouts of DiGilio, who was last heard from Thursday night.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Melvin Kracov, who unsuccessfully prosecuted DiGilio in the waterfront extortion case, agreed in part with Dintino, saying the chances are "50-50" that the reputed mobster was slain to keep him quiet.

DiGilio's sister Terry, who would not give her last name, appeared visibly shaken yesterday when interviewed yesterday at her home on Edwards Court, and said she doubted her brother had willingly disappeared.

"He would never have left us," she said tearfully. "We're waiting to hear from the police. It's all we can do."

Although he lived in a Kennedy Boulevard highrise in Bayonne, DiGilio was reported missing from his mother's home on Edwards Court, across the street from his sister's residence.

DiGilio's wife Ellen also owns a mansion in Holmdel. An unidentified man inside the home would not comment yesterday on DiGilio's disappearance and called local police to keep re-

porters off the property.

Neighbors in Bayonne said DiGilio visited his mother weekly, often meeting with his associates there while several limousines and chauffeurs waited outside. Holmdel neighbors said they did not know DiGilio, but were familiar with allegations of his Cosa Nostra links.

Dintino, a 20-year veteran of law enforcement, said he has been keeping tabs on DiGilio since the start of his career. He said DiGilio was considered a "soldier" in the Genovese family, who supervised up to 40 mob underlings while running waterfront labor rackets and loan-sharking operations.

According to Dintino, DiGilio, a member of the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame, started as "a pretty good hit man for the Genoveses" in the 1960s and worked his way up to become one of the organization's three most powerful men in New Jersey.

Although he was only a soldier, DiGilio is considered as powerful as a "capo," the next step up in the family from soldier, Dintino said. Louis Gatto and Andrew Gerardo, both capos, share control of the Genovese New Jersey operations, according to Dintino.

In an interview last week, DiGilio told The Hudson Dispatch, "I don't know nothing about no Genoveses."

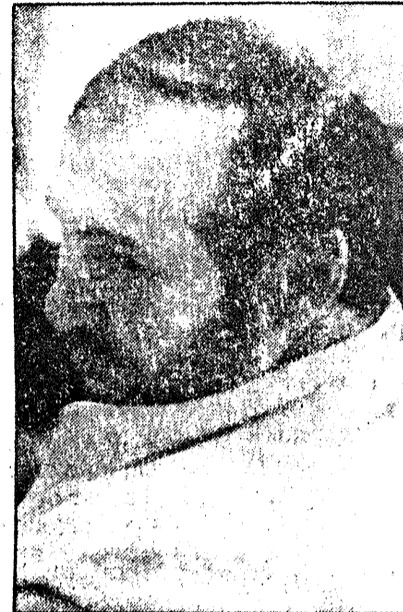
'90 percent chance' of rubout predicted

By **MATTHEW DIETRICH** and **JEFFREY RUBIN**
Staff Writers

BAYONNE—There is a "90 percent chance" that John DiGilio, the reputed Hudson County boss of the Genovese crime family, has been killed by underworld associates, a top law enforcement official said yesterday.

The outspoken DiGilio, who was reported missing by his wife Saturday, may have been slain on orders from members of the Genovese hierarchy who feared he was attracting too much publicity to their operations, said Justin Dintino, the chief of intelligence for the State Commission of Investigation.

"They were afraid his lawsuit would bring out a lot of information about their operations," Dintino said, referring to \$1 million civil suit DiGilio resurrected after his acquittal three weeks ago on extortion and conspiracy charges in U.S. District in Newark.



JOHN DIGILIO
Missing since Thursday

Dintino, who last month linked DiGilio to multimillion-dollar check-cashing scam in Jersey City, said a long-standing dis-

Please see **DIGILIO** Page 12

THE HUDSON DISPATCH, TUESDAY MAY 10, 1988

BETRAYED BY UNDERLING?

DiGilio: Mob war victim

MOB

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sociates indicate that the former welterweight may have been betrayed by the henchmen he trusted. New evidence, the source said, shows DiGilio may have been taken out by an underling vying for a spot in the Gambino family.

"All of his subordinates are accounted for," the source said. "Somebody knows, but they're not talking."

The Gambino organization, allegedly under the leadership of New Yorker John Gotti, has been trying to expand its New Jersey operations and may have recruited Genovese members to

help it gain control of the profitable waterfront labor extortion and loansharking activities, according to the source.

The defection of Genovese members to the rival family could spark, or may have already set in motion, an all-out war between the two groups as they cross the invisible lines that have long separated their operations, the source said.

Federal, state and local law enforcement officials still maintain, however, that DiGilio may have been rubbed out on orders from members of the Genovese organization who feared that his

outspokenness was attracting too much attention to their operations.

The theory that DiGilio may have been killed out of strife within the family is pegged largely on a \$1 million civil suit he was filing against federal prosecutors, who he said had harassed him. The suit, the officials said, threatened to bring Genovese activities under increased scrutiny and could not be tolerated by family hierarchy.

Last month, DiGilio acted as his own attorney and won his acquittal on federal racketeering

and conspiracy charges. He had been preparing legal notes to revive the lawsuit at the time of his disappearance, according to his attorney, Larry Bronson.

Federal and state law enforcement agencies are assisting the Bayonne Police Department in the search for DiGilio and were continuing yesterday to set up a far-reaching network of confidential sources to locate the 55-year-old former welterweight.

State police said their search, which consists chiefly of intelligence gathering, encompasses New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Control of rackets sought by families

By **MATTHEW DIETRICH**
Staff Writer

Reputed crime boss John DiGilio may have been the first soldier to fall in a mob war between the Genovese and Gambino crime families for control of the lucrative Hudson labor and loan-sharking rackets, a law enforcement source said yesterday.

Evidence uncovered in the 4-day-old investigation into DiGilio's disappearance last week has given more credence to the theory that the former boxer, allegedly a soldier in the Genovese organization, may have been killed by Gambino members trying to muscle in on

his South Hudson operations, the source said.

DiGilio was reported missing from his mother's Bayonne home Friday by his wife, who said she had not spoken to him since Thursday.

Interviews with DiGilio's 30 to 40 subordinates had produced no new leads about the circumstances leading to his disappearance as of yesterday, according to Bayonne Police, who are in charge of the investigation.

The source said the fact that DiGilio never went anywhere alone coupled with negative responses from his closest as-

Please see **MOB** Page 8

VICTIM OF GANGLAND VIOLENCE

DIGILIO FOUND DEAD

Mob boss' corpse discovered in river

By **MATTHEW DIETRICH**
Staff Writer

The bullet-riddled, badly decomposed corpse of Bayonne mob boss John DiGilio, who had been missing for almost three weeks, was found yesterday in a zippered body bag in the Hackensack River.

The body, which was found floating near the Sportsplex Marina in Carlstadt by a boat owner, was positively identified as DiGilio after fingerprint tests by the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office.

A VISA credit card bearing the name John DiGilio was found between the legs of the body, sparking early speculation about its identity.

DiGilio, 55, a powerful "soldier" in the Genovese organized crime family, was reported missing from his mother's Bayonne home on May 7. Law enforcement authorities had speculated that he was rubbed out on orders from members of the Genovese hierarchy, who wanted the outspoken ex-prizefighter silenced.

The decomposed body was clad in a gray tweed jacket, blue slacks, a gray-and-black-striped shirt and black boots — the same clothes described in a missing persons report filed with Bayonne Police on May 7 — with a gold ring on the right hand, according to County Prosecutor Larry J. McClure.

DiGilio had sustained



JOHN DIGILIO
Found in zippered bag

"several bullet wounds to the back of the head area," McClure said.

He said there was no evidence

Please see **DIGILIO** Page 16

DIGILIO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of mutilation of the body, which was not bound or tied, but that an autopsy scheduled for today could turn up more conclusive evidence on DiGilio's death. He would not speculate on how long the body may have been in the river or where it had been dumped.

The tell-tale credit card, the bullets in the head and the efficient disposal of the body in a rubber bag indicate that DiGilio's execution was most likely carried out by experienced killers, possibly associates of DiGilio, according to McClure.

"It would not be unreasonable to suggest that his criminal activities and the individuals he was associated with led to his death," he said. "I have no reason to believe (the credit card) was left there accidentally ... and it was not a haphazard, helter-skelter bagging job."

The identification of DiGilio's corpse yesterday ended almost three weeks of speculation as to his whereabouts. Immediately after the disappearance, experts on organized crime suggested that DiGilio had been killed by Genovese crime family leaders angered by his openness to the press and flamboyant style, which they feared was bringing too much attention to

their New Jersey operations.

DiGilio's wife Ellen who lives on an expansive estate in Holmdel, had not yet been contacted last night.

When he failed to appear last week for sentencing on an October conviction for loan-sharking in Morris County Superior Court in Morristown, most authorities and associates of DiGilio — who rarely missed appointments — suspected he had been killed.

In April, DiGilio successfully defended himself against federal racketeering and conspiracy charges and had recently revived a \$1 million lawsuit against the federal government, which he said had violated his civil rights.

"They would rather have just kept him out of the limelight," said Justin Dintino, chief of intelligence for the State Commission of Investigation and an expert on New Jersey organized crime. Dintino said DiGilio had been "rubbing salt in the wound of the mob" by drawing attention to himself and the Genovese rackets he controlled.

DiGilio attracted the spotlight of both the media and law enforcement officials throughout his criminal career with courtroom antics including faked epileptic seizures, heart attacks

and collapses. His trials were delayed for medical reasons including lung tumors and head injuries, and he once urinated before a judge in a futile effort to prove mental instability.

Experts believe DiGilio's execution may have been carried out on orders from Vincent "The Chin" Gigante, the reputed boss of the Genovese family. The hit may have been urged by reputed Genovese "consigliere" Bobby Manna, believed to be the second most powerful man in the organization, who had longstanding disagreements with DiGilio, according to Dintino.

Although he was only a "soldier" in the Genovese family, DiGilio was considered as powerful as a "capo," supervising 30 to 50 subordinates, because of the lucrative waterfront loan-sharking and union extortion rackets he controlled, according to Dintino.

Dintino said DiGilio, a member of the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame and a one-time sparring partner of Muhammad Ali, had started as a "pretty good hit man for the Genoveses" and had risen steadily through the ranks of the organization.