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Ex-Police Chief Gets 4 Years for Corruption

January 06, 2000 | From Associated Press

CAMDEN, N.J. — A former police chief was sentenced to four years in prison Wednesday for leading a band of rogue officers in what prosecutors say was the most corrupt department in New Jersey history.

Retired West New York Police Chief Alexander V. Oriente "represented a nightmare scenario in law enforcement," said U.S. Atty. Robert J. Cleary.

Prosecutors say Oriente and members of his 140-officer department took hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes and kickbacks from 1989 to 1997 to shield prostitutes, illicit liquor sales and illegal gambling operations in the town of 50,000 just across the Hudson River from New York City.

Oriente, 67, said the corruption began almost as soon as he joined the force. He retired in 1997 after a 40-year career in West New York.

In court on Wednesday, he apologized, adding "I know that the things I did in the Police Department were not correct, but I have started a new life."

Oriente struck a deal with federal prosecutors after a 69-count racketeering indictment returned in January 1998 named him and nine current or former West New York police officers.

Oriente pleaded guilty to a single count each of racketeering and conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service by failing to report \$80,000 in bribes on his income tax returns.

He received a reduced sentence for testifying against four officers, the only defendants to go to trial among more than 30 charged.

"If the chief of police is corrupt, who is going to police them?" U.S. District Judge Jerome Simandle said Wednesday during Oriente's sentencing.