

Bloodhounds, Bootleggers, *and a Rope on a Limb*

The six men ran into the Louisiana night. What followed was a three-parish manhunt fueled by grief, rage, and a very fast car — and a courtroom showdown played out under the twin shadows of the Mafia and the Ku Klux Klan.

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Roy Calmes, Dallas's nephew, was only half a block away when the shots rang out. He was at the scene within minutes. And when witnesses told him they'd seen a Hudson automobile speeding west on Robertson Road, Roy didn't hesitate. He ran to the home of Tom Candiotta — close family friend, unlicensed seller of alcoholic beverages, and owner of the fastest car in Independence — and the two of them went screaming down Robertson Road after the killers.

Roy and Tom pulled a log across the road and waited. When the Hudson came barreling down, there was a brief exchange of gunfire. The assailants were forced to abandon the car and flee into the woods on foot. Roy and Tom captured one man, Pietro Liotta, tied his hands behind his back, put a rope around his neck, threw the other end over a tree limb, and started asking questions.

It was at this moment that Rene Calmes — Dallas's brother, the Chief Deputy, grief still fresh and raw — arrived on the scene and ordered them to take the rope down immediately. He knew that a lynching, even of a guilty man, would poison any future trial. It would give defense attorneys a weapon. It might get the case moved to New Orleans, where Mafia money could reach jurors. Rene handcuffed Liotta and took him into legal custody. As it turned out, Liotta was innocent — just a man who'd given the group a ride, knowing only one of them — and was eventually released.

"If I have to come back, it will be a personal visit from me."

— Rene Calmes, warning troublemakers in town alongside Mayor Anzalone

The remaining five men scattered into the swamps and fields. Deputies with bloodhounds captured two in the woods by dawn. Roy helped the Albany Police catch a third. The Ponchatoula Police nabbed a fourth after he was spotted hitchhiking south of town and gave himself away immediately: when asked what he was doing there, he claimed to be visiting family. Problem was, not a single Sicilian family lived in Ponchatoula. Not one. The last two were run down near Albany after hours of pursuit through the swamp. All six were in custody within two days.



Sicilians Executed for the Murder of Dallas Calmes
The Six Sicilians (left to right): Natale Deamore, Rosario Leona, Joseph Boccio, Andre Lamantia, Joseph Giglio, and Joseph Rini.

Archival Restoration, [Date].

They were arraigned for the murder of Dallas Calmes — all six charged together, to be tried as a single group. Guilty or not guilty, they would all share the same verdict. The prisoners were quietly transferred to New Orleans Parish Prison for their own protection while the town of Independence simmered with fury.



Photo of the prisoners being returned to Tangipahoa Parish Jail in Amite from Parish Prison in New Orleans for execution. Prisoners accompanied by the Louisiana National Guard unit from Bogalusa.

And the town was genuinely dangerous. The KKK was blaming all local Sicilians for the crimes of men who had come from New York and Chicago. The Mafia was bribing witnesses and issuing death threats. Crosses were burned in front of Sicilian homes. Bessie Calmes and even Governor Parker received threatening

letters signed with a black handprint. Ammunition disappeared from shelves all across the parish — everyone was scared, everyone was armed, and everyone was waiting.

Mayor Anzalone later described waking in the night to find his wife at the kitchen table, rosary in hand, staring at the light still burning in Bessie's window next door. "I want to go home," she told him. He said, "You are home." She said, "No — I mean home. Sicily." The Mafia had driven them out of their homeland. Now it seemed to be following them here.

Rene Calmes took the situation in hand. He and the mayor went door to door — to every person running their mouth in bars, every cross-burner, every agitator — and Rene delivered the same quiet, close-range message each time: "Keep your damn mouth shut." He never raised his voice. He never cursed. He just got three inches from their faces and made himself very clear. Then he'd leave with: *"Consider this an official warning from the Sheriff's Office. If I have to come back, it will be a personal visit from me."* The town calmed down.

The first trial opened June 20, 1921. Forty witnesses. A week of scorching testimony. The courtroom was packed to the walls and beyond, with people standing in doorways and out on the street. Rene Calmes walked the floor throughout, maintaining order himself. After deliberation, the jury found all six defendants guilty. Then the defense took the verdict to the Louisiana Supreme Court — and got it thrown out on a technicality. There would be a second trial.

Coming in Post IV

In the second trial, one of the condemned men makes a jaw-dropping confession. A widow and her brother-in-law travel to Baton Rouge to beg the

governor for mercy. And a state executive with known KKK ties makes it brutally clear: he doesn't care who pulled the trigger.

