

Is that Gun for the Bears? The National Park Service Ranger as a Historically Contradictory Figure

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Abstract

The “Yellowstone Model” of exclusionary, or fortress conservation, has spread widely across the globe since 1872. While in many other countries there has been a concomitant ever-increasing militarisation of park guards, the history of the United States (US) Park Ranger offers an alternative narrative. This paper traces the complex history of the US Park ranger through time to show how the Ranger as an outward embodiment of state power has been contradicted by administrative and practical logics directing rangers to educate, welcome, and guide park visitors. Rangers’ work as territorial enforcers, and as strong-arms of the state has been tempered and defined by multiple disciplining forces over time. Using a political ecology approach, this paper examines how shifting political economic contexts, shifts in park use and park visitors, and a changing national law enforcement milieu influenced how and in what ways National Park Rangers have performed law enforcement in US parks over the past 100 years. The paper concludes by laying out why comparisons between US National Park Rangers and park guards in other parts of the world may be troubled by a number of socioeconomic and political factors.

Keywords: National park; protected area; ranger; park guard; law enforcement; conservation; militarisation

INTRODUCTION

“Why do you have a machine gun in your car? Is that for the bears?”—A Park Ranger describing a visitor inquiry about his weapon in 2014.

As we walked out into the great flat plain of Death Valley National Park’s Badwater Basin, the heat rippled up around us making the mountains soaring in the distance seem like murky dreams. The Ranger by my side struggled to keep his classic ‘Smokey the Bear’ hat on his head as wind filled with gritty salt particles gusted around us. Several tour buses disgorged their passengers nearby, and we were soon surrounded by people taking photos, poking at the ground, flinching at the brightness

of the white cracked soil beneath our feet. Many of these folks waved to the Ranger next to me, happily observing him almost as a fixture of the park’s landscape—an American icon to be witnessed and photographed. One rather weather-worn woman, wearing faded jean shorts and a bright t-shirt, approached us with her husband and adult son. The wind whipping her bleached hair, the woman began pelting the Ranger with questions about drive times within the park, where the nearest bathroom was, and about what the current temperature was in the basin. Suddenly, she stopped. “Well my goodness!” She cried, “Look at you. You’ve got a gun!” The surprise on her face was palpable, even behind her wide reflective aviator sunglasses. The Ranger beside me did indeed have a gun. He also had handcuffs and a fully-equipped law enforcement duty belt. He wore a badge and body armor. He had several larger weapons back in his patrol vehicle which sported a blue, red, and white light bar typical of police vehicles, and a ‘cage’ for the transport of prisoners. “Yes, ‘ma’am,” he replied, explaining that he was a law enforcement Ranger. The woman slowly repeated his words with incredulity, “A-law-enforcement-Ranger,” as if they did not go together. After a pause she asked, “Since when were Rangers police too?”

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This woman's surprise at seeing an armed National Park Ranger (Park Ranger) runs counter to many of the practices of park policing taking place across the globe, as well as to the literature that focuses on this type of policing today. Political ecologists who examine the inherent violence in the production of conservation territories in the Global South have described the seemingly relentless militarisation of these practices. This body of research highlights the larger weapons, more powerful surveillance technologies, increasing rates of violence against unsanctioned park users, and new justifications for these things in the Global South (see Peluso 1993; Neumann 1998; Brockington 2002; Ybarra 2012, 2016; Duffy 2014, 2016; Lunstrum 2014, 2015; Buscher and Ramutsindela 2016; Masse and Lunstrum 2015; Dwyer et al. 2016). In these analyses, park guards work as the violent arms of the nation-state to produce and maintain territory by enforcing boundaries, punishing and even killing those who defy the new laws produced by these territories of conservation. As Lunstrum (2015: 367), writing about militarisation in Southern African parks, points out, however, "there is nothing inevitable about the meeting of conservation and military activity." The violent practices of policing parks are not inexorable.

The United States (US) exported the 'Yellowstone Model' of exclusionary or 'fortress conservation' to the rest of the world after the conception of the nation's first National Park in 1872 (Brockington 2002). As analysed by Brockington and many others (*cf.* Peluso 1993; Neumann 1998), in these models of conservation, local inhabitants or users of these areas were violently evicted and excluded from their lands and resources for the sake of nature conservation, despite the fact that humans were integral parts of these landscapes and ecologies. Following almost exponential growth in the number of sites and area conserved, these conservation-driven enclosures now cover over 15% of the planet's land area (Juffe-Bignoli et al. 2014), having displaced countless local natural resource users, managers, stewards, and residents. What I show here is that while this model of exclusionary conservation has been exported wholesale across the globe, the same cannot be said for models of park law enforcement and territorial control. In many ways, the figure of the friendly US Park Ranger represents the diametric opposite of the militaristic spectacle of park guardians described by scholars like Ybarra (2012, 2016) who studies the remilitarisation of the Guatemalan Maya Forest, or Lunstrum (2014, 2015), Buscher and Ramutsindela (2016), and Duffy (2016) who research the violent shoot-on-site policies and militarisation of conservation efforts in Southern Africa. These authors show that as conservation and national security blur in practice, park guards are often given military training and/or mandates, military-style uniforms, and weaponry to violently police conservation spaces and national boundaries. In these contexts (and many others), political ecologists have documented how there seems to be a one-way trend toward increased violence and militarised conservation practices.

The US Park Ranger has had an inconsistent history of both militarised practice and appearance over time. US National

Parks were de-coupled from the US military when they were transferred to the civilian-run National Park Service (NPS) in 1916. Since their very conception in Park Service strategic planning meetings in 1912 and 1915, US National Park Rangers have been explicitly asked to fill a suite of roles beyond that of enforcer of territorial conservation spaces and national law—as friendly hosts and guides, as rescuers, as firefighters, and as medics (National Park Proceedings, Yosemite 1912; National Park Proceedings, Berkeley 1915). While these men and women's work and bodies have been entangled in nationalist practices of claiming, taming, and defining territory and territorial subjects for a century, their outward embodiment of state-power imbued with the threat of violence and control has not always been so clear. Arguably, the work of US Park Rangers has been far less overtly violent than that of many of their counterparts across the globe.

In this paper, I explore how a US Park Rangers' outward embodiment of state power has been contradicted by administrative and practical logics directing rangers to educate, welcome, and guide park visitors while at the same time upholding the law, enforcing conservation territory, and protecting natural resources. I elucidate how rangers' work as territorial enforcer, and strong-arm of the state has been tempered and defined by multiple disciplining forces over time. Using a political ecology approach, I examine how varying political economic contexts, shifts in park use and park visitors, fluctuating discursive productions of rangers, and a changing law enforcement¹ practices in the broader national context influenced how and in what ways National Park Rangers have performed law enforcement in US parks over the last 100 years.

Here I identify three moments when critical shifts away from or towards more militaristic styles of policing occurred over the past 100 years. I first examine the post-World War II (WW-II) era of what the NPS called "Mission 66," a period during which the NPS produced rangers as almost entirely non-violent hosts to the parks, a stark shift from previous decades of frontiersman policing. I then focus on the aftermath of the 'Yosemite Riots' in July 1970. It was during this time that a tension arose within the NPS over what a ranger's role as law enforcer should be, how he/she should be trained, and how he/she should look. I then turn my attention to a period in the late 1990s where the struggle between Ranger as a host or a policeman swung definitively towards the policeman role. This period, punctuated by tragedies and embarrassments within the law enforcement community inside and outside of the NPS, pushed NPS to further professionalise their law enforcement group and offer clearer directives to its rangers. In order to highlight how Ranger mandates have been contradictory over time, rather than following a unitary logic of militarised control over territory, I use the US Park Ranger's gun and badge as a synecdoche for authority, power, and the spectacle of violent enforcement in conservation spaces. Struggles over these objects also represent struggles over the meaning of what a Ranger is, and what this figure represents. Internal contestations over the visibility of the Ranger's badge and gun help illuminate the fact that the project of park disciplining

was and continues to be one of multiple rationalities, at times conflicting, to serve multiple purposes. The tension between the logics of recreation, policing, and conservation within US National Parks creates a model of protected areas that is neither uniform nor internally coherent. This lack of a unitary and coherent logic pushes against those that are presented as the ‘Yellowstone Model’ of militarised parks as they are readily exported elsewhere in the world.

My analysis is based on interviews and participant observation with over 70 National Park Law Enforcement Rangers across five states and over 20 units of the National Park System. I also draw heavily on the memories of retired Park Rangers, several of whom began working in the NPS in the 1970s, and one of whom began working in 1960, providing almost 60 years of first-person perspective on the shifts the NPS has undergone. Most of my interviewees were primarily front-country rangers, as the lion’s share of NPS rangers are. These rangers work, and sometimes live, in the areas closest to the highest concentration of visitors in parks—near visitor’s centres and roads. While some of my interviewees were involved in back-country and wilderness patrols, due to budget constraints and staffing shortages, few were able to stay out in the back-country for long periods of time. The paper also uses archival information located in various NPS and National Park Police Archives. This paper was shared with some of my interviewees to ensure accuracy in my reporting. Finally, I draw upon various print and animated depictions of National Park Rangers in popular culture to underline their constructed typologies over the decades.

TRANSFORMING THE RANGER (1947-1960S)

The period following WW-II is an important entry point for examining contradictions in ranger roles. By the end of WW-II, Rangers were expected to be friendly, unarmed hosts to the National Parks, despite the fact that these Rangers remained to be the parks’ primary law enforcement officers. Law enforcement rangers during this time were often operating unarmed—instructed to perform law enforcement “behind the scenes” by their superiors for fear of marring park-visitor experiences (Ranger Interviews 2014; Berkowitz 1995: 30, 201). The popular cartoon figures of Rangers during this period reflect the warm, welcoming personas expected from Rangers in the increasingly popular parks across the country. The bumbling, unarmed Ranger Woodlore, the docile, unarmed Ranger Dave Smith of the “Yogi the Bear Show,” and later the iconic unarmed Ranger Rick either did not enact law enforcement duties at all, or reduced them to a silly footnote. (*cf.* Hannah 1956; Barbera and Hanna 1961-2; NWF web, n.d.). As Hermer (2002: 27) points out in his examination of park Rangers in *Regulating Eden*, “Certainly, Ranger Dave’s bumbling efforts to carry out spot checks on the picnic baskets of Yogi Bear and Boo-Boo became the prominent impression of the activities of the park ranger to a generation of North American park users.”

However, just a few decades earlier (between 1915 and the 1930s), these same Rangers cut a very different figure on the

American landscape. As it was with the US War Department before them, the earliest Rangers carried out the state’s project of territorial claiming with force and threat of force. Rangers were openly equipped with weapons to make this clear to the general public from the very beginning of the Park Service (Jacoby 2003). Descriptions and many photographs of Rangers during this time period depict them as armed—carrying rifles, pistols, revolvers, shotguns, and, in some cases, Tommy-guns (a sub-machine-gun) (see NPS uniforms 1920-1932 n.d.). For example, a 1919 description of a Ranger’s altercation with ‘outlaws’ in Yosemite Valley describes a Ranger using a shotgun to threaten the armed car thieves (Mather 1919). The NPS’s first Director, Stephen Mather, used his own money to purchase a group of Colt Model 1917 .45 calibre ‘New Service’ revolvers for the Rangers of the day to carry out the work of law enforcement in the parks during this period (Smith 2005; Berkowitz 1995: 27; McLane n.d.). These early rangers reflected the relatively violent, unregulated, unprofessional police practices found in the American West of that period² (Deakin 1988). Describing an interaction with a poacher he had apprehended, a Ranger working in Glacier National Park in 1929 freely reported the violence he applied while hiking the man out of the back-country: “the third time I had a good chance to slam his head against a tree. I knocked him out cold and he dropped like a log.” (Ranger log entry quoted in Berkowitz 1995: 178). Similarly, incidents where a Ranger reported firing upon a vehicle for a routine traffic stop were not unusual (Mather 1919). Such images are a far cry from the downright cuddly Ranger Woodlore and Ranger Dave indeed.

This shift from violent, armed, visible enforcer of the law in the pre-war years to friendly host in the post-war years had not been a necessarily conscious one on the part of NPS. Indeed, since the very beginning of the park service, the line between interpreter, naturalist, and park law enforcement had been fuzzy. The Organic Act that established the NPS in 1916 actually assumed that *all* NPS employees would have the authority to conduct law enforcement activities (Lukas 1999: 72). As a result, the NPS had no single group of commissioned law enforcement officers. Technically, everyone employed by NPS—naturalists, interpreters, and maintenance staff included—was capable of enforcing park law. In the NPS’ earliest days, administrators viewed law enforcement as a primary role of rangers—seeking to have them act as police and representatives of federal law in the rugged and newly settled³ landscapes of American West (National Park Conference Proceedings 1912: 191; Albright 1926 letter to applicants cited in NPS 1999: 8-6). However, by the end of WW-II, the emphasis of the ranger had shifted for three important reasons.

First, the need for parks to act as fortresses and rangers to act as visible arms of the federal government in the far-flung reaches of the US was not as pressing as it had been in the nascent years of the NPS. By the end of WW-II the use of national parks for the purposes of claiming and taming territory and people in the west was no longer primary (see Cronon 1996; Runte 1997; Hazen 2008). A part of this claiming and taming process, the NPS had, sometimes violently,

cleared park lands of the indigenous and non-indigenous hunter-gatherers, herdsman, and agriculturalists who had used them in the past century (*cf.* Horning 1999; Jacoby 2003). After WW-II, the groups using park land had been replaced by park visitors—generally white, upper middle class people who were defined by their newly available leisure time and mobility⁴. Thus, while crime certainly did not halt in national parks in the post-WW-II era, the project and purpose of disciplining these spaces was very different than it had been only a few decades earlier. In the post-war era, the maintenance of parks as economic engines and environmental sanctuaries became the primary work of National Parks and their managers.

Second, after WW-II the need for law enforcement in the parks was less obvious than it had been prior to the war. Even though the claiming and taming territorial projects of National Parks had diminished well before WW-II, these parks continued to experience crime—Park Rangers apprehended car thieves, murderers, and bootleggers in the parks in the 1920s and 1930s (Mather 1919; *Mariposa Gazette*, Number 26, 17 December, 1921; primary documents cited in Berkowitz 1995: 160-162). However, recorded crimes in the US had hit an all-time low during the war period (FBI UCR). Indeed, during WW-II the “protection concerns” of National Parks had little to do with crime or law enforcement. Rather, the day-to-day practices of Park Rangers during this time generally involved “‘protection’ work, including stocking streams and lakes; reducing elk, deer, and bison populations; and fighting forest fires, insects and disease” (Sellars 1997: 155). This shift in emphasis from territorial law enforcement to environmental management brought with it a new crop of administrators and effectively shifted the conversation about what a Park Ranger should be and how he/she should appear to the general public. During and just after WW-II, NPS leadership shifted towards those more committed to the interpretation and development of the parks rather than law enforcement within them (Dwyer and Howell 1985: 11).

The third reason for a shift in emphasis away from the frontiersman sheriff-type towards a ranger who was a welcoming host was economic in nature. Though parks had always been economic engines for railroads, hoteliers, and the tourism industry (Runte 2010), their importance as income generators for local communities and the federal government became all the more prominent as visitor numbers increased and hinged on their continued positive perception by visitors. The overt practice of law enforcement was not part of that positive perception. Post-war park visitation exploded—jumping from around 7 million in 1940 to nearly 60 million in the 1950s (NPS 1966; 1968). At the same time, however, these economic engines and sites of national pride and recreation were in states of severe disrepair. With a war-time collapse of park funding and the end of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) improvements to parks in 1942, park staff and infrastructure were found lacking in the post-war period (Sellars 2009). As a result, critiques focused on the state of the parks began to appear in public forums in the post-war years. Newspapers and park advocates called for park closures

until they were properly funded. Popular magazines of the day warned visitors to ensure that they were “prepared for almost anything in the way of personal discomfort, annoyance, and even danger” and dubbed parks “Twenty-four Million Acres of Trouble” (Carr 2007: 55). In response to growing critiques over the condition of National Parks and their safety, and a concern over what the stigma of being “dangerous” spaces might do to these economic engines, the NPS worked to transform visitor experiences.

In 1955 National Park Director Wirth initiated the congressionally funded ‘Mission 66’ Project which dealt with insufficient and poorly maintained infrastructure. Pouring millions of dollars into Mission 66, the NPS sought to reinstate parks as spaces where park visitors felt that they were safe, welcomed, and well-treated (NPS 1957, cited in NPS Uniforms 1970; Carr 2007: 119). As a result of Mission 66, parks were physically dominated by Federal infrastructure like never before, in some ways mirroring amusement parks like Disneyland that were springing into existence during this same period. Visitor centres, observation towers, visitor service ‘villages’, as well as new roads, and toilet facilities were constructed at a rapid pace during this time (Carr 2007). While these structures physically represented the nation state in these places, the Park Ranger’s embodiment of state power began to change.

Producing National Parks as ‘safe’ spaces also meant hiding the fact that these places required any type of law enforcement to maintain their territorial limits, rules, and regulations. As a result, NPS administrators reversed the roles of law enforcement rangers. During the Mission 66 period Park Rangers who were previously understood as hardened and well-armed law-men, who dealt with infringements on park or federal law with violence and a heavy-hand, were re-branded by the NPS as naturalists, hosts, or entertainers for visiting park patrons. It was for this reason that park superintendents and upper-level managers asked Park Rangers to perform law enforcement ‘behind the scenes’—rangers as symbols of territorial authority or potential violence were hidden, and the ranger’s gun was further obscured (Berkowitz 1995: 30).

The emphasis on park development and interpretation rather than territorial enforcement resulted in the NPS continuing to attract applicants at all levels who were largely uninterested in law enforcement throughout the 1950s, and the 1960s (Berkowitz 1995: 30; interviews with Rangers between 2013 and 2015). This shift in recruitment and mandate, combined with those that had occurred in the 1940s, would come to be significant as Park Rangers focused more on visitor experience or ecology than law enforcement advanced into management and administrative positions in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s.

INTERNAL DEBATES: RANGERS AS HOSTS & NATURALISTS OR LAWYERS? (1960S-1990S)

Over the 4th weekend in July 1970, 500-700 so-called “hippie youth” gathered in Yosemite National Park’s Stoneman

Meadow to “party” (Avedisian 1998: 29). In an attempt to control this crowd in response to complaints by other park visitors, NPS Rangers tried to enforce curfews in the park which resulted in rising tensions as the weekend progressed. Finally, Yosemite Rangers ordered that the meadow be cleared, causing a large number of these “hippie youth” to stand their ground and refuse to leave, rejecting alternative gathering sites suggested by the Rangers (Avedisian 1998: 32). Losing patience with the group, the NPS decided to clear the meadow violently, using ropes, Chemical Mace, and nightsticks (Jones 1971; Avedisian 1998: 34; Runte 2010: 159). By the end of the weekend, more than 138 arrests were made (Avedisian 1998: 42-43).

By their own accounts, Park Rangers were unprepared for such a confrontation. The Chief of the NPS’s Western Region at the time admitted to a New York Times reporter, “to tell the truth, we handled the situation badly” (Jones 1971). Rangers were found to have incorrectly inventoried confiscated property, performed illegal searches in camp-grounds and vehicles, and were castigated by witnesses for using unnecessary force (Avedisian 1998: 42-3). The negative publicity surrounding this event culminated in calls for training Park Rangers in modern policing techniques, legal procedures, and crowd control to avoid a repeat of such an embarrassing event (Jones 1971). At the same time, however, the general public lambasted the NPS for practicing “high visibility law enforcement” (Jones 1971).

The Yosemite Riots crystallised what had come to be increasingly polarised views of law enforcement and the figure of the ranger within the NPS. On one hand were those who thought that the NPS needed to professionalise their law enforcement programme, to enhance training, and to make the roles of Rangers as law enforcement officers clearer and more explicit. On the other hand were those who were anti-law enforcement or who wanted law enforcement to remain invisible in the parks. The struggles between these two camps became ever more apparent when Congress appropriated USD 550,000 for NPS law enforcement development in 1971 following the Yosemite Riots (Mackintosh 1989: 48).

Those who saw a growing need for professionalism and clarity in the ranger ranks were particularly concerned with large-scale protests, different user groups, as well as rising crime rates in the parks. Recorded crime, particularly “major crimes” like rape, homicide, assault, larceny and robbery had more than doubled in the parks from 1966 to 1970 (Sellars 2009: 208). New user groups in the parks also challenged Ranger capabilities. As one retired Ranger remembered, “The Park Service was unable to handle...the changing society in America at [that] time. They were prepared for the ‘Leave it to Beaver’ type of users who had come since WW-II, and then this whole new group of users were coming into the parks—back to nature people, civil rights people, anti-Vietnam people, people doing drugs, drop-outs, people trying to escape civilization” (Interview 2015).

The camp opposing the ‘police-ification’ of Rangers was comprised of many of the men and women drawn to the

Park Service for its peaceful, environmentalist ‘Ranger Dave’ image of the 1950s and the early 1960s. Many of these folks, drawn from generalist or naturalist-interpreter Ranger ranks, were now in management positions—working as park superintendents and NPS regional or national administrators. As one Ranger put it, the new requirements for law enforcement professionalism in NPS placed many of these administrators “really out of their comfort zone and probably out of their own areas—they probably were not very friendly with law enforcement from their college days...their own political beliefs [did] not allow them to embrace law enforcement under their command” (Interview 2014). Thus, people whose cultures in many ways had traditionally pitted them against law enforcement were now actively managing law enforcement programmes that were increasingly dealing with serious crimes involving guns, drugs, and groups like the “Hell’s Angels” (Interview 2014). Describing the 1960s and the early 1970s, a retired Ranger remembered that park administrators had grown accustomed to a:

“Nice vanilla, managed park experience, and then the change and transition was very difficult for them...They [managers/administrators] resented the image of the Ranger in law enforcement attire...they didn’t want the fact that law enforcement was needed to be visible. If you’ve ever been to a theme park like Disneyland, there are a lot of law enforcement officers there but it is not visible. There are not people in uniform—they are all in plain clothes and they are hiding the fact that law enforcement is necessary, and that’s how they [park managers] wanted it. They wanted the Rangers to greet the public and be the smiling, happy-faced, ‘there’s no problem, there’s no law enforcement issues in the park’ kind of guys...” (Interview 2015).

Based on the perspectives of the rangers I spoke to, these naturalist- or interpretive-oriented administrators (and some field rangers as well) may have felt more comfortable with the ‘Hippie Youth’ in the parks than rangers conducting law enforcement duties. Further, some Rangers I interviewed observed that individuals within park and Washington NPS Administrations seemed to want the NPS Ranger to be viewed as different from urban law enforcement agencies who that at the time were very negatively viewed by much of the American public. Instead, my interviewees noted, these administrators wanted parks to be perceived by the public as havens of peace and the Park Rangers to remain generalists, without guns or uniforms that were different from the rest of the NPS staff (Interviews 2014-2015). In a sense, these administrators sought to reproduce the cartoon images of rangers like Ranger Dave and Ranger Rick that remained prominent fixtures in popular culture of the time.

Perhaps because of this rift in opinions about the role of the ranger, the NPS continued to ignore external reviews that admonished the NPS to institute a specially-trained, differently uniformed Ranger police force in every park (IACP Report 1970; Mackintosh 1989: 48). Indeed, the NPS made few

dramatic shifts in its law enforcement directives after the 1970 Yosemite Riots until 1975,⁵ when a new NPS guiding document (NPS-9 1984) was issued, calling for *all* permanent commissioned law enforcement employees to attend and pass “Basic Law Enforcement for Land Management Agencies” held by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). This translated into Public Law 94-458 that required all law enforcement personnel to meet law enforcement training requirements (Charles 1982: 216). All seasonal commissioned officers were required to complete a law enforcement training course as well. This was the first service-wide standardisation of law enforcement authority and training standards in the NPS’ history. However, NPS-9 and Public Law 94-458 reflected ongoing ambivalence about the figure of the Ranger as they did not require Rangers to wear firearms, leaving considerable discretion to park superintendents as to when and how guns should be worn in the parks (Public Law 94-458, Dwyer and Howell 1985: 11).

Further, Congressional reports and hearings determined that law enforcement in the NPS was still in need of clarification stating, “The general authority which the NPS now has to protect persons and property within the National Park System is not sufficiently clear to allow for effective law enforcement in the National Park System” (Report No. 94-1190, Aug. 27, 1976-Senate Bill 3430). This report called for a clear mandate for law enforcement in the parks. As a result, the General Authorities Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1a-6) was promulgated.⁶ The Act stated that the “Secretary of Interior is authorised to designate...*certain* officers or employees of the Department of Interior who shall maintain law and order and protect persons and property within areas of the National Park System (emphasis mine).” In making this specification, the General Authorities Act, 1976 superseded the 1916-law that gave arrest authority to all park personnel. Thus, after 60 years wherein all NPS employees had law enforcement capabilities, commissioned NPS Rangers were now the *only* employees authorised to perform law enforcement duties, carry firearms, make arrests, execute warrants, and conduct criminal investigations (NPS-9 1984: Chapter 1 and 3).

With these new mandates for a dedicated, professionalised law enforcement branch of Rangers, the administrators committed to the image of the unarmed, friendly ranger did not disappear. Instead, the tensions between this group and those in support of an armed, professionally trained police force only heightened. Push-back against the role of Rangers-as-Policemen could be found at the highest levels.⁷ For example, NPS Director Everhart commissioned a “Ranger image task force” in 1976 to ensure that Rangers’ appearances were not too police-like, and to ensure that a “police sub-culture” did not arise within the park service (Morris 2009: 4). Everhardt (a naturalist and civil engineer by training) declared, “I firmly believe that in some parks the law enforcement specialty has gotten out of balance with other responsibilities of park Rangers” (Memorandum, “Law enforcement in the National Park Service,” August 13, 1976, USPP historical file).

Administrators’ push-back to visible and overt law enforcement in the parks also led to what is termed by many

Rangers as the “Gun in the Glove-box Policy.” This policy, though never officially decreed, meant that Rangers were directed by park managers to continue to hide their weapons and their roles as federal law enforcement officers. Reflecting the views that led to the “Gun in the Glove-box Policy,” the Director of the NPS Mid-Atlantic Region stated in a 1975 memo that “...the ranger who wants to wear a side-arm to fulfil an image of himself as a ‘law officer’ is, in our judgement, not measuring up to the ranger image or the goals of the Service” (Brooks 1975, cited in Dwyer and Howell 1985: 9). In some parks, Rangers were even required to carry handcuffs in their pockets rather than wear them openly on their belts (Muehleisen 1977, cited in Dwyer and Howell 1985: 9). Into the early 1980s, rangers were “expected to further the capable and friendly ranger image of the ranger force,” sparing no effort “to enhance the ‘park experience’ of the visitor” and practice “low-key” law enforcement (Charles 1982: 218-219). Having experienced the effects of such views, a Ranger I interviewed noted that administrators of that time “didn’t want us Rangers to be carrying our guns or to show ourselves doing law enforcement in the park.” (Interview 2014). Rangers interviewed by retired park Ranger Paul Berkowitz (1995) have similar memories. According to Berkowitz’s interviews, in 1978, the Yellowstone Superintendent prohibited Yellowstone’s Rangers from carrying weapons during the day. When confronted by Rangers asking what they should do if engaging in or called to potentially dangerous incidents, the superintendent reportedly insisted they ought to call Highway Patrol for backup rather than wear their guns during the day. When he was reminded that the park was Exclusive Jurisdiction (meaning Highway Patrol had no authority within its boundaries and legally *could not* respond), the superintendent reportedly replied, “Well, then I guess I would just as soon see you shot and killed, and go out in a blaze of glory, like a man, without a gun” (Berkowitz 1995: 51).

Top NPS administration also pushed back against the 1976 Congressional mandate by actively discouraging Ranger law enforcement careers. In some cases, Rangers who chose to work as law enforcement Rangers were demoted—receiving lower pay or fewer benefits than they had before (Interviews 2013-2015). In other cases, Rangers were simply never promoted, left to stagnate at low-pay grades (Interviews 2014-2015). Some Rangers felt that they were treated so poorly that they resigned in disgust (Interview 2014). Jim Tucker, a plain-clothes Yosemite Ranger featured in the 1986 PBS Documentary “Law of Nature” poignantly framed the conflict between pro- and anti-law enforcement factions in the NPS saying, “The Rangers themselves are the losers because we are undergoing a tremendous internal schism and conflict right now and it’s bad for us, morale is low and that’s not what we joined the national park service to experience.” (Philbin 1986). This schism would persist for over twenty years.

Pushback against the ‘policefication’ of Rangers was not only occurring at the administrative level. Some field Rangers were resistant to this change as well. In a 1974 report entitled

Law Enforcement: Should the law enforcement function be centralized throughout the Department of Interior and its various bureaus? researchers who interviewed NPS Rangers found that, “Attitudes about law enforcement among Park Rangers vary considerably” (University Affiliates 1974: 5). One group was represented by people “who are concerned with preserving the traditional view of the Ranger as an interpreter of nature and a guide and helper to the visitor... Those who hold this view believe law enforcement activities are a necessary but distasteful Ranger function. (“If I wanted to be a cop, I wouldn’t have become a Ranger.”)” (University Affiliates 1974: 5-6). Describing this group, one retired ranger and NPS special agent stated, “During the 1960s there was a huge cultural shift, and a lot of people were affected by that and strove to get college degrees and work in the resource... A lot of these people did FLETC [law enforcement training] to advance their careers, but many of them said that they would never pull their guns because they were philosophically opposed to authoritarian law enforcement or weapons.” (Interview 2015). The opposing group felt that a “police Ranger” was a good idea, but were careful to state that “The image of this ‘police Ranger’ would be...very professional, helpful and sensitive to visitor needs rather than the ‘hard-hat’ urban police” (University Affiliates 1974: 5). Some Rangers were particularly concerned with the imagery the gun provoked, worried that it would destroy the image of the ‘approachable Park Ranger’ (see Blehm 2007: 23). In short, very few people in NPS, administrators and Rangers alike, wanted Rangers to be *only* police. After all, Rangers still also acted as firemen, medics, and rescuers, tasks they took great pride in performing.

CHANGING LAW ENFORCEMENT AND NEW TERRITORIAL THREATS: TAKING THE GUN OUT OF THE GLOVE BOX (1990-2001)

The 1990s saw a series of tragedies and embarrassments that changed how law enforcement was done at Federal, State, County, and Local levels across the US. First, the findings of the 1991 Rodney King Trial condemned police brutality and exposed a need for better and more conscientious police training in use of force and due process. This trial was a catalyst for establishing stricter standards for professional training in law enforcement agencies across the US. Second, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, where US law enforcement agencies were caught unaware by a domestic terrorist, primed Federal agencies to devote more resources to law enforcement. Third, a 1997 robbery gone awry in North Hollywood, California also changed policing dramatically. In this incident two gunmen armed with automatic machine guns and wearing body-armor were engaged by Los Angeles Police who at the time only carried pistols, revolvers, or shotguns, leaving them impotent in the ensuing gun battle. The resulting 44-minute shoot-out on the streets of the city led to the perception in the law enforcement community (and beyond) that officers needed to be better armed if they were to effectively carry out law enforcement in the United States (Parker 2012; Interviews 2014-2015).

In the context of these upheavals in law enforcement in the US, the NPS suffered its own embarrassments and tragedies. Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s a man named Mark Huddleston committed approximately 1,600 auto burglaries in State and National Parks in Washington, California, and Oregon. The Huddleston case underlined how unable parks were to share information and apprehend serial criminal perpetrators (pers. Comm. 2015).⁸ Further, between 1990 and 1999 three Rangers were killed in the line of duty (ODMP, n.d.). As one Ranger bluntly put it, “there were a lot more Ranger fatalities and people started to pay attention” (Interview 2015).

These events helped catalyse changes in NPS law enforcement, pushing it more towards a highly trained, well-armed force of rangers. At the same time, however, a shift in administrators at the highest levels of NPS also played an important role in the changes that law enforcement in the NPS underwent in the 1990s. Rangers I spoke to commented that in the 1990s the “Ranger Rick” interpretive or environmentalist types who had held administrative positions in the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s were replaced by, and intermixed with, those who had an understanding of the benefits of law enforcement or had been enforcement Rangers themselves. As one Ranger bluntly put it, “enough of the dinosaurs died. A new generation came in and saw a need and the logic [of law enforcement]” (Interview 2015). Indeed, a series of National Park Directors who had opposed Law Enforcement in the Parks were replaced in 1990 by a new director, James Ridenour, who, despite his naturalist background supported law enforcement in the parks. Further, mid-level managers with enforcement experience in the NPS’s Washington DC office influenced top administrators there as they made arguments in favor of the Ranger law enforcement programme (Interviews 2013-2015). Many of these changes, as one retired ranger noted, were due to the fact that “A lot of pressure was coming down from DOI [Department of Interior] which was a bit more politically astute. They [DOI] saw the studies that had come out addressing what should be done [for LE] and pushed that down to the bureaus.” (Interview 2015).

Director Ridenour publicly stated that he supported law enforcement in the Ranger force and signed a 1993 Organizational Position on Law Enforcement which offered a boost in morale for Visitor and Resource Protection Rangers (Park Ranger interviews 2013-2016). Special Agent positions were formed and Criminal Investigator positions that had been done away with in the 1970s and the 1980s were reinstated (Berkowitz 1995: 53). In 1994, a “Ranger Careers Directive” was created to make Ranger position requirements and pay-scales clear and transparent (105th Congress Senate Report Year: 105-202 1997). Ranger pay-scales were also boosted. NPS Director Roger Kennedy (successor to Ridenour) supported the idea of Rangers being equipped with firearms, contradicting decades of informal NPS administrative directives aimed at discouraging this practice. Under Kennedy’s (1993-1997) direction, law enforcement Rangers received new semi-automatic Sig-Sauer pistols and assault rifles acquired from the

US Army (pers. Comm. 2015). As one Ranger remembered, the changes that came about in the Ranger ranks in the 1990s were “a long time coming. Our LE and firefighter peers out there had different benefits. NPS...couldn't *not* make these changes and still have an LE programme.” (Interview 2014).

Despite some changes in practice and top administration, there remained a significant number of administrators who were resistant to the idea of law enforcement in National Parks. The NPS' commitment to its 'traditional' Ranger—i.e., unarmed Ranger Rick—image made any change in uniform, appearance, or practice particularly difficult to push forward. As a result, a survey performed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) in 2000 was strikingly similar to the 1970 IACP report in their identification of issues and their recommendations for change. Many of the same significant issues were stated again thirty years later. The 2000 report found that though Rangers had made progress in the professionalisation of their law enforcement capabilities and training, they still felt like the black sheep of the NPS. For example, the report states, “From the ground up, the law enforcement voice appears to be less audible than it should be within the parks and at the DOI/WASO [Department of the Interior/Washington Office] headquarters level. Second only to perceived staffing shortfalls, Rangers wish to emerge, in their own view, from second-class status.”

One major complaint during the 1990s and the early 2000s was the issue of NPS badges. While NPS administration had sanctioned the open carry of firearms, the thought of changing Ranger uniforms, of un-blurring the lines between law enforcement rangers and interpretive rangers, however slightly, seemed to be a bridge too far. Rangers were denied the right to wear their government issued, eagle-emblazoned 'shields' (police badge typical of those worn by other Federal Law Enforcement Officers) on their uniforms (Interview 2015). Fearing that this minor change to the Rangers' uniforms would mar their 'traditional appearance,' NPS administrators instructed rangers to carry these shields in a credential case or wallet rather than wear them openly (NPS badges and uniform ornamentation n.d.; Interview 2015). Instead, they were instructed to continue wearing the 'Bison Badge,' typical of all NPS uniforms. As a result, law enforcement uniforms continued to look no different from those of maintenance or interpretive staff into the early 2000s.⁹

CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS: LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE NPS AT 100

Today, Ranger Steve featured in Comedy Central's 2012 National Park cartoon *Brickleberry* visibly wears a gun, handcuffs, and a badge (Black et al. 2012-2015). Reflecting on similar changes out in the real world, one retiring Ranger said, “This job's changed a lot... They used to make you keep your gun in the glove box. Now, I've got a 9 mm with a box of shells and 46 rounds and two sets of handcuffs, pepper spray, a shotgun and an M-16 rifle.¹⁰” (Gardner 2006). Many of the tenuous shifts towards a well-armed, highly-trained,

clearly defined Ranger law enforcement unit in the 1990s were solidified with the events of September 11, 2001. With these attacks and subsequent fears over security threats in iconic national parks, the days of the gun-in-the-glove-box policy rapidly came to an end. A report considering the Park Services' Response to the September 11 terrorist attacks noted that as Rangers “were drawn to a greater degree into security and law enforcement functions as a part of their day-to-day responsibilities...after September 11, the pressure to narrow the park Ranger's function from a generalist to more of a law enforcement function increased.” (McDonnell, 2004; 108) Rangers were quickly outfitted with a wider-array of weapons, including M-16s and assault rifles (McDonnell 2004). The Visitor and Resource Protection Division of the park service also began to receive more equipment, improved communications systems, longer and more in-depth training, and higher staffing levels (Interviews 2013-2014).

However, the struggle between Park Rangers as the 'hard-hatted policeman' and friendly 'Ranger Rick' has continued within the park service. As one Ranger described it:

The National Park Service is not a law enforcement agency. It's an agency that tolerates law enforcement. Law enforcement is not their primary function. If you look at the DEA, FBI, and other agencies, their specific jobs are law enforcement. They don't think about rescuing people, emptying trash cans, keeping roads open, counting the bears. Law enforcement is just one of many things the National Park Service does. (Interview 2015).

Similarly, another ranger said:

There is still a lot of administration that don't like it [law enforcement], that don't get it, and don't want NPS to be engaged in a LE [law enforcement] function and don't understand why we can't rely on surrounding counties and probably resent the amount of money that goes to LE. (Interview 04/2015).

Some feel that discrimination against Rangers with law enforcement backgrounds has persisted at the highest levels of the NPS. As one Ranger candidly described why he thought fewer NPS staff with law enforcement backgrounds became superintendents saying, the NPS “doesn't want a cop in managing the wilderness.” Another said, “...the perception was that park superintendents should have resource management or administrative backgrounds and not VRP [visitor and resource protection] backgrounds.” (Interview 2013). Others complained pointedly that superintendents without law enforcement backgrounds would “tell you not to perform law enforcement duties. They tell you to take a step back. Of course as an officer, you have sworn an oath to enforce the law. This is the problem with having a civilian in charge of people who are LE.” (Interview 2016). These discussions about superintendents belie a continued sense amongst Rangers that the law enforcement programme is not a primary priority of the NPS.

This ambivalence towards the figure of a law enforcement ranger, and a desire for that 'traditional' unarmed ranger still

persists in the general public today as we saw in the opening vignette of this paper. The NPS' historically produced Ranger images, and those reflected in popular media are powerful, and difficult to undo. For example, one Ranger noted that "People are married to the idea of Ranger Smith and Yogi the Bear. Lots of people do not recognize the LE [law enforcement] aspects of Rangers because of these images." (Interview 2014) Rangers also hypothesise that the general public struggles to recognise their roles as law enforcement officers because they continue to wear almost identical uniforms as their non-commissioned counterparts (other than their larger badge, body armour, and duty belt), despite the 1970 and 2000 recommendations of the IACP.

As this paper has shown, changes in the enforcement role of Rangers in parks have all been heavily contested, halting, and incomplete. Striking a balance between naturalist-interpreter and primarily law enforcer is still an evolving project in the NPS. Framing the NPS' struggle to find a balance in law enforcement, one retired ranger related:

The Park Service responded over time, though it took a couple of decades, to deal with the problems they faced. It wasn't right for me to arrest a guy with no uniform, radio, or gun on a shuttle bus, but it also wouldn't have been right for me to arrest him with flash-bang grenades and four other guys armed to the teeth. (Interview 2015).

Like this ranger, most rangers in the NPS are careful about how to frame their work. Few want to be seen solely as a policeman. As one ranger put it:

Not being seen as an enforcement agency has pluses and minuses. That is actually what attracts me to the job. I would not work for DEA, I do not want to be primary law enforcement. I am an old-school Ranger, it is the variety of the job [that I like]." (Interview 2015).

CONCLUSION

The work of US Rangers as agents of discipline in fortress conservation spaces has changed as perceived threats to Rangers and the parks have changed—who and what is being disciplined, excluded, and surveilled has shifted over time. As differing territorial and economic strategies involving parks came and went, the role of Ranger as visible (and sometimes violent) enforcer of these territories changed as well. Shifts in park user groups over time, and changing ideas about how these groups should be welcomed or regulated oriented rangers as hosts at certain moments and as policemen at others. Changing national crime rates and trends, as well as ways of performing law enforcement has also influenced rangers' roles over the past 100 years. For example, no longer does the NPS discuss 'bootleggers' or 'hippies' a threat. Instead, contemporary NPS protection concerns lie with sovereign citizens, extremist groups, foreign terrorists, and drug cartels and serve to shape their law enforcement trainings and equipment. Lastly, the depiction of the ranger, and the expectations of rangers due to

their historically produced popular culture portrayals continues to affect how they are expected to act, look, and perform their duties.

As this paper has shown, US Park Rangers have followed a very different trajectory from those park guards in other parts of the world. What is critical about laying out the complex history of US National Park Rangers is that it offers empirical evidence that the 'Yellowstone Model,' often exported as a monolithic project of enforcement and control in other nations, is actually one of complex tensions between enforcement, economic gain, ecological conservation, and entertainment in the US. US Park Rangers' undulating history from cavalryman, to a frontiersman sheriff-type, to happy 'Ranger Rick,' to a ranger with a 'gun in the glove box,' and finally to the Visitor and Resource Protection rangers we have today is a far cry from the one-way trend toward militarism and overt violence that we see in places like Guatemala and Southern Africa (Lundstrum 2014; Buscher and Ramutsindela 2016; Ybarra 2016).

It is important to remember three key points when seeking to compare the US case to those protected areas most often discussed in the political ecology literature in the Global South, however. First, US Park Rangers are situated in vastly different political, economic, social, administrative, and historical contexts than many of the park guardians focused on by those who examine fortress conservation areas. US National Park Rangers operate in a nation whose population is 80.7% urban and only 19.3% rural (US Census web 2010) and is one of the wealthiest nations in the world (CIA World Factbook web 2016). The need to subsist off of the plants and animals found in the front and back-country of national parks in the US does not carry with it the urgency or ubiquity that it does in communities living adjacent to parks in many other parts of the world.

Of course, conflicts over rights to reside, subsist and use US national parks continue today (*cf.* Sharp 2015). However, encounters between rangers and those seeking to use resources for survival are limited in their parallels. The rules of the game are different. For example, US National Parks are defined by the Organic Act (1916) to be sites of recreation *as well as* for the preservation of natural and cultural landscapes, whereas in other countries parks are to preserve wildlife, period. The recreational aspect of parks may put a different spin on the work of US National Park Rangers than those of park guards charged solely with protecting wildlife and biodiversity in vast unpopulated spaces. While some US Park Rangers operate in wildernesses teeming with economically important species like those found in Denali or Yellowstone, others operate in urban historical parks, in battlefields, in national recreation areas or seashores, or in the front-country of national parks like Yosemite replete with grocery stores, hotels and restaurants. Thus, US National Park Rangers are often occupied with the detection and interdiction of person on person crimes or property crimes *as well as* with wildlife and biodiversity protection (Interviews 2013-2015). This emphasis places humans alongside nature in the category of things to be

protected rather than placing humans squarely among enemies to the park.

Second, while the US Park Ranger offers a far better alternative to park guards with shoot-on-site policies and little regard for due-process as has been recorded elsewhere in the world, US Park rangers and the parks they protect are not perceived in a positive light by everyone. Over the years indigenous and non-indigenous peoples alike have lost their lands to the National Parks, have been (sometimes violently) excluded from traditional practices, and have felt harassed by park management (Horning 1999; Powell 2002; Jacoby 2003; Kosek 2006; Sundenberg and Kaeserman 2007). These displacements and persecutions are not forgotten. Struggles over American Indian use and rights to park land continue to this day (Keller and Turek 1998). Further, recently a group in Virginia has acquired land and money to build a memorial to honour 200 families that were displaced by Shenandoah National Park in the 1930s (NewsPlex web n.d.). Battles over proposed parks are also ongoing. Currently, Maine residents are resisting the proposed expansion of Acadia National Park by thousands of acres, an act that they believe would further depress their local economies and restrict their freedoms (Denis 2016).

Third, the mutability of the figure of the US National Park Ranger has an effect on law enforcement officers at an individual level. Rangers that I rode along with and interviewed, approached law enforcement in many different ways. Some placed far more emphasis on the ranger-as-host persona, focusing on education rather than punishment, while others made their law enforcement duties far more central to their day-to-day interactions with park visitors and landscapes, citing people for minor offences and constantly on the lookout for violations of park law. Some worried that the ranger-role and persona was becoming too militaristic while others worried that rangers were not better equipped with weapons, vehicles, and body armour. These points of view and their embodied practices are based not only on directives from park administration, but also on different park milieus, different types and levels of crime in a park, different personal backgrounds and generations.

Due to their shifting images and directives over time, many Rangers would argue that their blurry roles put them in danger. They maintain that because their uniforms look almost identical to their interpretive counterparts, that the general public treats them differently than other uniformed law enforcers. Some rangers commented that they thought that their 'friendly ranger Rick' legacy led visitors to believe they could get away with things that they would never consider with other types of law enforcement present. These concerns are borne out to a degree in the statistics that revealed that Rangers were the most assaulted federal law enforcement officers in the country in the early 2000s (IACP 2000; Gould and Duncon-Hubbs 2004). While between 1997 and 2003 an average of 40 out of every 1,000 Rangers were assaulted in the line of duty, other Federal Agencies averaged only 6 out of every 1,000 officers assaulted (IACP 2000; Gould and Duncon-Hubbs 2004).

Despite important critiques that national parks function as fortress conservation areas that promote and maintain social and economic injustices (*cf.* Peluso 1993; Neumann 1998; Brockington 2002) these territorial entities will not simply disappear. We must acknowledge that they will continue to be established, demarcated, and managed. What the history of US Park Rangers helps us to understand is that there is no easy or clear path between hard-hatted policeman and friendly ranger. Despite the anxiety, difficulty, and potential threats posed by each of these two extremes, the conservation community must continue to find a balance between them to ensure a more just, safer, and sustainable future.

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NOTES

1. What counts as 'crime' in parks is a key part of law enforcement activity. In this paper I discuss crime as it is defined in Title 16, particularly 36 US Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), which deals with "Parks, Forests, and Public Property," as well as other titles such as 18, 19, and 21. This 36 CFR directs law enforcement in the NPS. By taking 36 CFR at face value I am not grappling with the fact that the definition and differential enforcement of these crimes have sometimes been economically, politically, and racially motivated. I am also not engaging with claims put forth by groups outside the Federal Government (indigenous and otherwise) that government seizure and regulation of certain lands is, by different definitions, a crime. While I touch on these issues as they obviously influence the *modus operandi* of US Park Rangers, to delve deeply into these topics and do them the justice they deserve would require far more space than I have here. For excellent engagement on these topics in the United States see Finney (2013), Sundberg and Kaserman (2007), Jacoby (2003), and Kosek (2006).
2. Police at this time had little to no formal training. It was not until the Hoover administration (1929-33) that the US moved to professionalize and standardize its police force (Deakin 1988).
3. Settled by Americans of European decent. Obviously, many of these areas had long been settled and used by Native American populations and/or Hispanic populations.
4. Visitor use was aided enormously by the US interstate system that came into being in 1956 (Carr 2007).
5. One exception: 1975 creation of a "strike force" that would be able to respond to any part of the park system within 12 hours (Interviews 2014; Mackintosh 1989, 48).
6. The NPS now has its own section of the USC – Title 54. So all references to 16 USC are now found in Title 54.

7. Concerns over rising costs may have also played a role in administrative push-back against a professional law enforcement programme in each park. Law enforcement Ranger positions became more expensive due to their increased training and equipment requirements. One generalist Ranger who went into Natural Resource Management after the 1970s shift in law enforcement noted, "Law enforcement was only about one-third of what I was doing [at the time]. The park I worked at wanted people who were resource-related to shift into LE [law enforcement] roles at certain seasons, but that was possible then because other than our initial training, the ongoing costs of us as LE Rangers at the time was the same as all the others. With increased costs, there was a move towards fewer people doing LE in the park" (Interview 11/2014). Law enforcement's expense was often perceived by non-law enforcement groups (e.g., Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Interpretation and Education, and Facilities and Maintenance) in the NPS as co-opting or restricting their already very limited budgets (interviews 2014-15).
8. Huddleston was eventually convicted of his crimes in California (pers. Comm. 2015).
9. In 2003 Rangers were allowed to openly wear these badges rather than carrying them around in their wallets (Interview 04/2015; pers. Comm. 2015).
10. Though a few rangers did get M-16s that were converted to being non-automatic weapons, most Rangers carry AR-15s or CAR-15s which are semi-automatic. US Park Rangers do not carry automatic weapons.

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