

JACK ANDERSON

Unsafe Parks

AS THE vacation season opens, our national parks are being hit by an epidemic of muggings, rapes and drug trafficking.

Especially in the nation's capital, which probably has more law enforcement personnel of various kinds than anyplace in the free world, visitors are not immune from criminal elements who look on the federal parks as happy hunting grounds: drug pushers, for instance.

U.S. Park Police routinely find dozens of syringes littering a scenic Potomac River outlook in nearby Virginia. On April 21, a Park Police detective and an alleged dope pusher had a shootout at the Washington Monument after a busload of South Carolina high school students had been harassed on their sightseeing tour. The suspect was killed; the officer was wounded.

THE NATIONAL Park Service's response to this mounting evidence of crime has been curious. Instead of beefing up the 535-member Park Police, officials have been letting it wither away through attrition and are relying instead on park rangers with little or no crime-fighting experience.

Rather than admit the need for more professional police officers, Interior Department officials have for years minimized the threat to public safety. Many actual crimes were downgraded to less serious offenses. "The rangers



believe if you don't have a reporting system, you don't have a crime problem," one disgruntled Park Police officer told my reporters Dale Van Atta and Leslie Adler.

The April 21 incident at the Washington Monument finally convinced the understaffed, overworked Park Police officers that they should take their complaint to Capitol Hill, where they found a receptive audience in Representative Stan Parris, R-Va. They unloaded one horror story after another.

Parris asked Interior Secretary James Watt to confer with him and Representative Manuel Lujan Jr., R-N.M., a member of the House Interior Committee. They got together on May 17, and Parris began to read from 100 Park Police officers' reports.

Watt seemed shocked by the accounts. After hearing only a half-dozen of the reports, he said that was enough; he was convinced. "We have a serious problem," he told the congressman.

The secretary immediately promised to set up a special narcotics task force for the national parks.

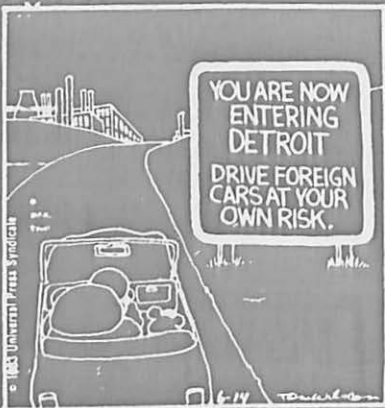
THE TROUBLE WITH that response is that the members of the task force will be drawn from the ranks of the understaffed Park Police force. This will leave even fewer officers to patrol the parks.

And it will do nothing to solve what Park Police sources see as the underlying problem: Park Service Director Russell Dickenson and top Interior Department aides are "uncomfortable" having cops in their organization and favor the ill-trained rangers over the police.

Footnote: A National Park Service spokesman maintained that the narcotics task force "is sufficient." Nor does his agency prefer rangers over Park Police, he added. "That's absolute bunk. The U.S. Park Police is the law enforcement arm of the National Park Service," he said.

S.F. Chronicle June 14, 1983

ZIGGY





United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

JUN 27 1983

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Editor
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Sir:

I am deeply disturbed by the views expressed in Jack Anderson's column ("Arm of the Law has Short Reach in Park Lands") that appeared in the Washington Post on June 14.

I categorically deny any allegation of an "epidemic" of crime in the national parks. And I am saddened that a small number of ill-advised, anonymous park police officers can be taken as representative of the views of the United States Park Police.

A few facts for your consideration:

* Park Rangers serving in a law enforcement capacity are well trained. In addition to initial training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Georgia, they are required to have continued refresher training to retain their law enforcement credentials.

* The United States Park Police is an integral element of the National Park Service holding primary law enforcement responsibility in selected urban park areas; specifically, the National Capital Parks, in and around Washington, D.C., Gateway National Recreation Area, N.Y., and Golden Gate National Recreation Area, California.

* Senior officers of the Park Police coordinate law enforcement programs in the Service's geographic regions. Contrary to your report, I have not advocated eliminating this role for the Park Police.

* Although any crime in our parks is unacceptable, the crime rate in the parks is remarkably low. Last year, with nearly 350 million visits to our National Park System, including some urban sites in high crime areas, we recorded a total of 1,190 cases combined in the major felony categories for all 334 parks nationwide.

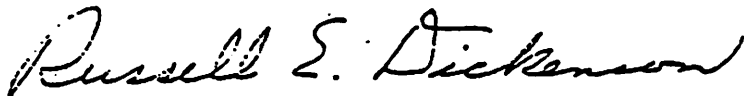
* During my 40 years of Federal service, I have been a ranger and I also supervised the Park Police. I have -- contrary to Anderson's report -- great respect for both groups and no prejudice for or against either.

* The unsubstantiated charges of a small faction are repudiated by the leadership of the Park Police, just as they are by the National Park Service.

Law enforcement is — and will continue to be — an important element of the management program of the National Park Service. Allegations that crimes are not reported, or falsely reported in lesser categories, have not been substantiated in the regular management evaluations we make at each park. Such conduct would not be tolerated.

I think Mr. Anderson owes an apology to the proud professionals who have handled law enforcement for the National Park Service — police officers and rangers, alike.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Russell E. Dickenson".

Russell E. Dickenson
Director

June 14, 1983

Congressman Manuel Lujan
House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Lujan

I am very happy to see that there is some interest in Washington concerning Law Enforcement in our National Park Service Areas. Various Rangers in the National Park Service have been trying for years to get changes made, but have failed as a result of pressure from management and tradition which are dominated by non-protection personnel. I must apologize for writing anonymously. There is so much pressure and management bias against rangers who do law enforcement or who express ideas about law enforcement in the national park service that I feel I would be jeopardizing my career if I identified myself. A few weeks ago I wrote to Senator Pete Wilson about law enforcement related problems, also anonymously, but as a result I'm sure the letter and information was placed in the circular file.

Mr. Anderson's article was very interesting, but it tells only part of the story. The US Park Police have authority in only Washington DC Parks, San Francisco, and New York. Law Enforcement in all the rest of the National Parks is performed by rangers. It is interesting that a NPS spokesman said that the USPP is the law enforcement arm of the park service. This is part of the rationale that management has used for years to prevent rangers from doing law enforcement. I do not think the problem of poor ranger performance in law enforcement has to do with training so much as with organization. Rangers are trained at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center just as Park Police officers are. The difficulty is that rangers are under pressure not to do law enforcement. I could tell you many horror stories about my experiences in parks where there were general verbal orders to not make arrests under any circumstances. This point of view of management is reinforced by personnel management policy. Even though many rangers are assigned to law enforcement positions, no rangers are given a law enforcement job title or classification. And even though law enforcement is the primary duty of many rangers, when it comes time to discuss job classification they are told that they should be doing other things besides law enforcement. Recently my unit went through an operations evaluation conducted by regional office team (no part of which was composed of law enforcement officers) that had no field expertise. Their final recommendation was that my people were doing too much law enforcement.

My opinion is that law enforcement will not be organized properly and armored with proper standards until that function is removed from the chain of command governed by superintendents. All law enforcement in the national parks should be under a separate sub-agency within the national park service.

Additional suggestions:

All personnel with primarily law enforcement duties should be classified as such, and thus obtain appropriate standards. All law enforcement personnel should be under the same grading and pay system as the park police.

Received in Congressional
Law Enforcement commissions should be removed from rangers not in law enforcement positions, or who do not perform a minimum level of protection work (eg 16 hours per month of assigned patrol).

A study should be made to produce a formula for establishing the basic sub-station size (of personnel) based on geographic area of park, number of incidents, type of incidents, number of part I offenses, etc.

Basic protection organization should consist of patrol officers, patrol supervisor, law enforcement specialist (or investigator), and a fire/rescue supervisor.

Any study of this problem should include all major Part I offense parks, and certainly the major parks of the west, not just Washington DC.

Your interest in this area is appreciated. I am sure that if Secretary Watt is made aware of all the inconsistencies between Department of Interior policy and National Park Service policy, he will do the right thing.