



RANGER ACTIVITIES INFORMATION EXCHANGE

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Chief Ranger's Comments

It's hard to believe that over three years have already passed since leaving the field and moving to Washington. Looking back, it has been an adventure, though different from the one expected - as has been the case at previous posts. We've spent time restructuring our staff and the work they do through position management, and we're getting close to having the organization the way it needs to be to work effectively in all three branches.

I have been genuinely pleased with the people who have moved into positions in the Branch of Fire Management and the Branch of Resource and Visitor Protection. The staff has significant field experience in numerous park areas. You have seen - and will continue to see - staff members come into the division, do a good job, then head back out to the field. These folks will tell you that they learned a great deal, had some fun, and had the chance to make a difference. You can get in and out of a central office assignment. Give future vacancies in here serious consideration, and feel free to call anyone on the staff here or in Boise to talk about the pro's and con's of such a move in your career.

We are excited that the Associate Director for Operation's position will soon be filled. Jack Morehead is coming to WASO from the superintendency of Yosemite with over 30 years of NPS experience in numerous parks. He will be a strong representative for field area needs in the Directorate. It's also likely that the selection for the Assistant Director for Visitor Services, a position Jack will supervise, will be made by the end of June, as the announcement closes on June 11th.

Times are tight from the standpoint of both budgets and personnel. Many of you have shared your frustrations with our staff members at chief ranger meetings, training sessions, etc. To the extent that we have specific information, we are trying to address some of these issues. We need to devise a mechanism to accurately articulate field problems in a number of areas, including the real attrition in numbers of seasonal and permanent ranger staffs in the parks over the last few years. Without specific, accurate examples of problems, it's hard to successfully make a case for their resolution. So we'll be trying to fill in our information base with solid facts.

There has been progress in some significant areas that will help field operations. The most exciting program improvement currently underway is the expansion of FIREPRO and the identification of specific, appropriated money for fire management and pre-suppression in the FY 1990 budget. This will provide money and dedicated positions to implement this program at a more realistic level. Also identified in the FY 90 budget are 25 RTE's and \$2.7 million to supplement enforcement operations in park areas with drug-related problems. If the money and positions identified are in fact appropriated, then some

tangible assistance will be forthcoming. We are phasing in FIREPRO in 1989 by filling a number of fire positions, implementing an enhanced hazard fuel reduction program, acquiring equipment and increasing training funds.

We are currently trying to identify Servicewide needs in ARPA enforcement, wildlife protection, wilderness management, handicapped accessibility, structural fire, health and fitness and aviation management for the FY 91 budget. We have worked closely with WASO budget to insure that these submissions do not duplicate requests made by the parks and regions. This money, however, would be primarily for funding of the listed programs in field areas and regions, not in WASO.

On the personnel side, several actions have occurred which at least recognize that we're trying to improve some things. Position management training has begun in virtually all regions. Personnel just completed a two-day workshop in which WASO and regional personnel worked with OPM on the possibility of establishing special pay rates in areas where there are recruitment and retention problems. We will be working with personnel to correct problems with seasonal hiring before the applications are released for the 1990 season.

This is the beginning of a new visitor season in most areas. Times are tight and we know you are doing more with less. I really think we can continue to improve some areas of frustration by working together. There's plenty to do and more challenges than ever before. I guess that what keeps us all going in the same direction (and in some cases while living mostly on dedication) is that the park system is worth it all. Nonetheless, we are committed to the extent possible toward improving the "livability" of employees Servicewide.

Have a good summer in the parks and be careful out there.

Field Incidents

Upper Delaware River: On the evening of February 27th, park ranger Robin Daniels, who was a member of a local rescue squad, was killed in a motor vehicle accident while responding to an emergency during off-duty hours. Her husband, Cliff Daniels, is also a ranger at Upper Delaware. A memorial fund has been established in her name; contributions should be made to: Robin M. Daniels Memorial Fund, c/o American Legion Ambulance, Eldred, NY 12732.

Grand Canyon: On the afternoon of March 9th, Gisela Elixmann, 34, of Hasbergen, Germany, was visiting Mohave Point with her husband when she became dizzy and fell over the canyon rim. Her husband called after her; when she failed to respond, he went to one of the lodges and sought help. Rangers searched the area until 9 p.m., but were unable to find her. The search was begun again with helicopters at 7 a.m. the next morning, and Elixmann's body was found just after 9 a.m. She had fallen 260' and was apparently killed on impact. Four days later, a Japanese tour group stopped at Second Trail View on West Rim Drive. Although the tour leader advised the group of the dangers of standing near the rim and told them about what had happened to Elixmann, Yuri Nakata, 22, moved close to the rim to pose for a photo, lost her balance and fell backwards. She initially fell 12', then slipped over a ledge and fell an additional 340'. Rangers found her body 40 minutes later.

Big Bend: Late on the afternoon of March 22nd, three young men rafting on the Rio Grande in San Vicente Canyon were fired upon from the Mexican side of the river. The three jumped into the water; as they swam toward shore, more shots were fired at them. The shots continued after they took cover in river cane on the park side of the river, and the rafters soon heard the sound of someone crossing the river and scrambling toward higher ground above them. Since one of the rafters carried a .38 revolver and another had a .45, they returned fire. Shortly afterward, the shooting stopped. During the course of the incident, about 35 rounds were fired - more than 30 by the assailants and four by the rafters. The three rafters were able to walk the 15 miles to Rio Grande Village by dawn on the 23rd. Park rangers and a Mexican officer immediately headed to the scene of the incident, and the park closed about 20 miles of river (from Mariscal Canyon to below San Vicente). The rangers and Mexican officer arrived at the scene by mid-morning, and were supported by a Border Patrol aircraft overhead. The rafters' gear was discovered hidden in some rocks near a shepherders' camp on the Mexican side of the river; neither of the two young caretakers who tended the camp could be found. One of the juvenile caretakers reportedly owned a .22 caliber rifle. The rafters filed a complaint with the Mexican State Police, who assumed jurisdiction in the case. On March 30th, the state police apprehended a juvenile in Saltio, Mexico, who confessed to having shot at the rafters. The motive for the shooting remains unclear. The juvenile has since been sentenced to a detention center in Mexico.

Saguaro: BLM ranger Jim Huff was shot but not seriously hurt while driving his patrol vehicle on a county road in southern Arizona on March 25th. Huff was driving up to a residence near the west boundary of Saguaro to inquire about recent cactus thefts when he was struck by approximately six pellets of birdshot through the open side window of his vehicle. He was able to drive off, call for backup and obtain medical assistance. Park rangers from Saguaro and deputy sheriffs from Pima County responded to the scene. The shotgun employed in the shooting was recovered, and Pima County officers have arrested a 14-year-old male and charged him with assault on a police officer. Although Huff was not seriously hurt, doctors were concerned about his eye and kept him in the hospital for observation for two days. Before joining BLM, Huff was a ranger at Saguaro; his wife, Elaine Huff, is an employee at the Service's Western Archeological Center.

Shooting Incident at Lake Mead

At approximately 11:30 a.m. on the morning of March 4th, seasonal ranger Bob Judkins was stopped by a visitor and informed that there was a man - later identified as 28-year-old Brent E. Miller of Salt Lake City, Utah - on foot at the intersection of Lakeshore and Northshore Roads who was brandishing a weapon and pointing it at passing motorists. Judkins called for assistance, drove to the scene, and parked his vehicle in a defensive position across the roadway. At approximately the same time, rangers Tom Valenta and Clifford Spencer arrived from the opposite direction in separate vehicles. Valenta parked his car on North Shore Road in view of Miller; Spencer parked his on Lake Shore Road, then exited his vehicle in an attempt to intercept Miller on foot.

At this point, Miller advanced on Judkins and pointed his weapon at him. Realizing he was in a bad defensive position and had only a handgun to rely on, Judkins returned to his vehicle and withdrew to a safe distance. Miller then started walking towards Valenta, and pointed his gun at him. Although Valenta had a shotgun and was in a good position and prepared to shoot, he had to refrain from firing until Judkins stepped out of the line of fire. By the time Miller was close enough to be in effective range of the shotgun, a vehicle with visitors in it arrived on scene and headed toward Miller; Valenta again refrained from firing and instead returned to his patrol car, backing it up so as to force the visitors to back up out of immediate danger.

Valenta again got out of his patrol car with his shotgun and took a defensive position behind the open door. He ordered Miller to drop his gun (a 9 mm Luger pistol which was later found to be tied to his wrist), but Miller continued to advance, yelling repeatedly: "I'm not going back to prison!" At one point, he told Valenta: "I'm going to kill you. You'd better shoot me now because I'm going to kill you." As he approached, Miller pointed his weapon directly at Valenta; when he closed to within 12', Valenta fired one round of #4 buckshot from his shotgun and struck Miller with all 27 pellets in the left side just below his chest.

Miller was flown to the University Medical Center in Las Vegas, where he died on the operating table. Shortly after the incident, the park received information via teletype which identified Miller and advised that he and an accomplice named Arlan Joe Price were wanted for murder and armed robbery in Wyoming, where the two had allegedly killed Price's uncle by shooting and stabbing him. Both were considered to be armed and dangerous. Price was arrested at a casino by Las Vegas police later on the night of the 4th. Price subsequently revealed that he and Miller had sworn an oath to each other that they'd be killed rather than captured. The coroner found that Miller had 300 milligrams of methamphetamine in him at the time of his death, and records indicate that Miller had a long-term problem with drugs and alcohol.

The Clark County coroner's office conducted an inquest and ruled that the death of Brent Miller was a justifiable homicide. The National Park Service board of review found that Valenta was fully justified in his actions and commended him for handling himself in a professional manner. The three rangers, their dispatcher and Valenta's spouse all went through several post traumatic stress debriefings with a doctor beginning the day after the incident. The rangers also received assistance immediately after the incident from officers affiliated with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's police employees' assistance program.

Valenta has since had the opportunity to reflect on the incident and offer some observations on it. The foremost of these pertains to the value of a shotgun in an encounter of this type. Considering Miller's mental state and aggressiveness, Valenta believes that a revolver might not have stopped him. "If you've got a choice," he says, "always go with a shotgun." Valenta also says that he would've fired sooner if he had been using a double 0 round, since it has a wider pattern and would have been more likely to stop Miller at a greater distance. Based on his experience, the park is now issuing double 0 buckshot rounds to all enforcement rangers.

Valenta's second observation is that rangers on patrol should always wear their vests. Since he was just coming off three days on crutches for an ankle sprain, Valenta was on "light duty", and therefore left his vest at home. During the incident, he was "acutely aware" of its absence, he says, and adds that it was a mistake he'll never make again.

Valenta had high praise for the training he'd received at Santa Rosa and FLETC, and strongly advises that rangers take their training seriously because an incident like this one could've happened anywhere. "The training I received was perfect," he says. "I didn't have time to do anything but respond to training, and it was right."

He also points out the value of a patrol vehicle in such a confrontation. "You carry your cover with you every day," he says, "and it's your best friend. It's possible to maneuver to take the best position. I was basically reacting to what was happening, but was still able to get into a good position."

Valenta says that he received very good counseling and support after the incident. Immediately after he shot Miller, he said that his main feeling was one of anger at being forced to shoot him, followed by a sense of numbness - even though he'd been an EMT for six years, Valenta says he couldn't remember how to do anything. A Las Vegas PD officer met him at the hospital, however, and stayed with him throughout the events that followed. Valenta says that this was of great value, as were the subsequent debriefings with an experienced psychologist. He is now trying to organize a group debriefing for all those who vicariously participated in the incident over the radio.

Valenta is willing to go to parks to speak to refresher classes about the incident, subject to the park's approval. If you'd like to discuss this with him or ask him other questions, please write to him at the park's address.

Fire Weather Forecast

The Boise Interagency Fire Center has issued its May weather briefing, which discusses the outlook for the period from May through July:

"The same areas that were strongly deficient in precipitation and snowpack (in April) remain so into May. These areas include Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, Southern Nevada, (and) Southern Utah into Southern Colorado...Once again, from near to below normal precipitation is expected in the Southwest and Northern Plains as high pressure dominates. The normal progression of the storm track northward will allow only sporadic shower and thundershower (activity) over the West after mid-June. It would appear that the Southeast will also be under a more normal condition going into the summer which will allow more humid conditions along with thundershower activity...By far the most critical area of concern through this three month time period will be the Pacific Southwest. A lack of snowpack and no good indication of any upcoming storminess leaves the area prime for fire starts...To the north, a more normal progression of the season is anticipated due to the storminess that dominated through the winter months. It would also appear that Alaska will see a lack of any major storminess, which would continue the warm and mostly dry conditions in that area."

Health and Fitness Guideline

The first draft of NPS-57, the health and fitness guideline, is nearing completion. As noted in the December Exchange, Dr. Paul Davis, a noted exercise physiologist, conducted fitness task analyses in the areas of law enforcement, structural fire and wildland fire with about 60 rangers attending the ANPR Rendezvous last fall. The groups discussing each of these skill areas came to a consensus on the minimal fitness levels required to perform tasks in each area, and Dr. Davis then drafted recommendations for the appropriate standards. At present, it appears that a single fitness test will be proposed for people working in these areas; it will include tests for:

- aerobics - a 1 1/2 mile in 12 minutes (pass/fail), or 45 on a step test, or a 1 mile walk (age and sex adjusted) in a specified period of time;
- upper body strength - one palms out chin-up (pass/fail), 30 situps in 90 seconds and 20 pushups in an unlimited amount of time;
- flexibility - toe touch; and
- body fat - a skinfold caliper test.

Matching tests would also be available in lieu of the above in each skill area. A person engaged in structural firefighting, for instance, might climb a ladder in a specified amount of time with a hose and full turnout gear instead of taking the aerobics test. Such tests already exist in law enforcement and structural fire, and will be incorporated into the guideline; divers already have standards which will be accepted in place of the above test.

The tests will be mandatory in several skill areas, but each person required to take a fitness test will have a grace period of at least a year to prepare for the test. Anyone who fails the test will be retested. Tests will be given at least once a year, and probably twice. The guideline will recommend that employees who must take these tests be given up to three hours of work time per week to exercise. There will be screening exams and medical tests to identify employees who may have problems before the program gets underway. Coordinators will be identified to help individuals and parks develop fitness programs. Exercise equipment is already available through GSA contract.

Present plans are to have the draft guideline completed and out to the field for review by the end of the summer.

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The Ranger Activities Information Exchange is produced by the Washington Division of Ranger Activities. Walt Dabney, Chief Ranger. Address letters, comments and inquiries to: Ranger Activities (650), Stop 3310, National Park Service, Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127; FTS 343-4874 or (202) 343-4874. Attn: Bill Halainen, Editor.