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## Park Police Shift Duties To Increase Mall Patrols

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U.S. Park Police shifted their hours and their patrol duties to swarm the Mall yesterday, declaring the nation's back yard "safe for everyone, day and night," despite a recent string of robberies.

"The Mall is safe," U.S. Park Police Chief Dwight E. Pettiford said. "It is safe, but just like anywhere we go in the world, we have to take our own precautions."

Pettiford is beefing up patrols and shifting around his officers to convince criminals that the Mall is not an easy target. "This reallocation of personnel is not just for a two-week period or a one-month period," he said, promising to maintain the staffing levels until a sense of safety has returned.

"The criminal element looks for opportunities to commit crimes," he said. "What I'm trying to do is diminish those opportunities."

Some sources said the entire length of the Mall was being covered by only six police officers Tuesday night, when a pair of masked robbers preyed on six tourists, holding them at gunpoint, taking their cash and roughly groping one of them.

Sgt. Scott Fear, a Park Police spokesman, said roving officers were on patrol that night in cars, on scooters and on bikes, in addition to the ones standing guard at the monuments. That was one of the changes made after an earlier series of Mall robberies in May, when six people were held up in three attacks. Those robberies grew increasingly violent against women, ending in the rape of a teenage girl near the Smithsonian Metro stop.

Park Police detectives have been working with other agencies to solve the crimes since the May attacks. Although no one has been arrested in the robberies, police have pursued the case so doggedly, Fear said, that they have put behind bars several robbers who operated in other areas of the city.

The crimes are the very scenarios that former Park Police chief Teresa C. Chambers warned of when she spoke about the lack of resources for her department in 2003. She lost her job for her candor.

"Teresa Chambers complained years ago, and I'm afraid she was right," said Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.). "This police force is underfunded."

Norton said there is quite a contrast between her experience in the evening, when she sees no more than a couple of officers, to a day at work in the U.S. Capitol.

"We are over-policed here in the Capitol. Everywhere I look, there's an officer," Norton said.

"I've got a problem with the U.S. Congress," she said. "There is much criticism to be made for so underfunding the police who protect the constituents of members of Congress while funding our own protection so amply."

That omnipresence of police at the Capitol and in the neighborhood and grounds surrounding the complex is what Chambers was striving to achieve for the Mall when she was chief three years ago, she said.

"You drive in the neighborhood and they're everywhere: on a bike, in a car. And that's the message I was trying to get us to send," said Chambers, who is still trying to win back her job.

Chambers estimates that the Park Police force for the entire Washington area is smaller today than the approximately 400 officers she had in 2003. Fear declined to confirm that, saying the department does not release numbers.

With all the trees and valleys and dark areas of the Mall, it would be impossible to constantly keep the entire area under patrol. But with more roving officers making themselves visible, a signal would be sent to criminals, Chambers said.

"But when you're stretched so thin, where are you going to move your resources from?" she said. "The chief has been silenced from an official perspective," she said, referring to her firing. "But the problem did not go away."

The Park Police union also has been asking for help. "More people and better equipment would have helped the situation," said Jim Austin, chairman of the Fraternal Order of Police labor committee for the U.S. Park Police. "Unfortunately, these events clearly illustrate our need for more resources."

Continuing cuts to the National Park Service are thinning a force that patrols not only the Mall, but numerous neighborhood and pocket parks throughout the city, Austin said.