Security at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) has been present in some form for over eighty years. Beginning with the night watchman concept in the early 1920’s to the modern day concept of a “high performance agency,” Dear Old NCCU’s faculty, staff, students, and properties have always been safe.

The first recognizable security at North Carolina College for Negroes began around 1925. Mr. London Whitted was the first night watchman and was later joined by Mr. Thomas Jeffers in 1937. In 1948 Mr. Charles Alston and Mr. William Jeffers joined the security force, and in 1957 Mr. Preston Kelly became a member of the security team. Their primary function was to guard university properties at night. In 1968, Mr. Phillip Marable, a native of Durham, NC, became North Carolina College’s first Chief of Security and held that position until he retired in 1976.

Faced with the challenges of a changing student body, civil unrest, and new schools of thought in law enforcement, NCCU hired its second Chief of Security in 1976, Mr. John W. Smith. Mr. Smith was also a Durham native and brought an academic background and prior law enforcement experience to a campus environment. Mr. Smith’s credentials included a BA degree in Criminal Justice from NCCU and experience from the Durham County Sheriff’s Department Civil Division. Mr. Smith furthered his education at NCCU by obtaining an MA degree in education in 1984.

Mr. Smith’s fourteen-year tenure (1976 – 1990) was notable for the following accomplishments:

- Trained the first “Basic Law Enforcement Trained” officer to work at NCCU,
- Increased Campus Police Department to 17 company police officers,
- Assigned first administrative clerk to police department,
- Installed information booth at Administrative Dr. and Fayetteville St.,
- Purchased and installed department’s first computer
- Created the “Detective and Crime Prevention Officer” position.

Chancellor Richmond formed a search committee in 1990 to find Mr. Smith’s successor. While waiting for the university’s search committee to recommend a Director, Duke Police and Safety Director lent his Chief of Detectives, Robert Dean, to serve as NCCU’s Police Director for a period of ninety days. Chief Dean’s tenure was noted for bringing the department’s statistical data collection system in place. This system gave the department the ability to map crime and increase patrol in high crime areas, thus reducing crime on campus. Chief Dean was also noted for bringing the department in line with the federal government’s Students’ Right to Know Act. Chief Dean’s knowledge and motivation carried the department long after he had departed.

During the period of 1990 –1992, the NCCU Campus Police Department functioned under three interim directors: Sgt. Robert Grimsley, Lieutenant John S. Sutt and Sergeant Reene S. Lynch. Of the three, Sgt. Lynch is remembered as the most innovative. Her accomplishments included:

- Transitioned the department from a .38 caliber revolver to a 9 millimeter semi-automatic pistol,
- Moved the department from a two channel radio to a more advanced sixteen channel system,
- Became the first female Campus Police Officer in the UNC system,
- Conducted the first university crime prevention street fair,
- Issued a proclamation from Chancellor Richmond naming the first week of October Crime Prevention Week at NCCU.

On September 1, 1992, Interim Chancellor Donna Benson named Mr. Anthony B. Purcell the first Police and Public Safety Director at NCCU. With an academic background and, more importantly, law enforcement training, Chief Purcell took the department to great heights. His staff grew to over 41 members and he organized an Executive Staff. Staff development...
training hours for the years of 1993 – 1994 exceeded 3300. The department’s first specialized instructors were certified by the state of North Carolina. Chief Purcell established a computerized data information system and filing system that made mandatory state reporting requirements easy to handle. The added bike patrol, Campus Appearance Tickets, installation of emergency telephones, service surveys, and victim assistance programs made the NCCU Police Department a model for the University of North Carolina system. Chief Purcell’s administration will be noted for lowering the liability risks and enhancing the security of students, faculty, and the university as a whole. Chief Purcell completed his mission at NCCU in July 1995 and moved on to become Director of Police at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Major A. Wall, Jr. was selected as the Interim Police and Public Safety Director in 1995. Major Wall’s short tenure included increasing the detective staff by two officers and creating the first part-time Traffic Officer. Major Wall’s vision was to create a self-supporting traffic and parking control unit, which would bring about more consistency with traffic and parking issues. He also wanted to free officers’ time so they would have more opportunity for community policing and increased patrol.

Durham Police Detective Corporal McDonald Vick was chosen as the next Public Safety Director in September 1995. Chief Vick made many administrative upgrades to the department when he moved the police headquarters from Cottage I on George Street to the current location of 2010 Fayetteville Street. Along with the new facility came laptops for office personnel, camera systems in dormitories, 800 mzh portable radios, and the implementation of the Computer Aided Dispatch record system. Chief Vick was instrumental in changing the department from a company police status to a municipality police status, using the current policy and procedure manual. Chief Vick left the department in February 2006 to take over as Director of Police at the University of Kentucky. From March-October 2006, Ms. Glenda Beard served as NCCU’s Interim Chief of Police.

In October 2006, Chief Williams, a three time municipal Chief of Police (Petersburg, Va.; Wilson, NC; and Rocky Mount, NC) was named NCCU’s Chief of Police. Chief Williams’ philosophy can be described as a “high performance agency” concept. He immediately re-defined the Investigative and Administrative Unit by hiring two retired Senior Administrators to lead these units. More accountability and direction have been added to the department. Other crime suppression strategies developed under Chief Williams’ leadership include the Strike Team, Crime Abatement meetings, Students chat-with-the-Chief Sessions, and the Segway patrol.

The NCCU Police Department has changed a lot over the last 88 years, but the motto of “Truth and Service” still prevails.

Prepared by Sergeant David Buie, Jr.
Sources – Department Records
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The Police and Public Safety Building