

MRAP keeps SWAT deputies, residents safe

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JEFFERSON — The ground shakes as the new Jefferson County Sheriff's Office SWAT team vehicle approaches.

An imposing black armored military-style Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) carries members of the tactical team to various emergencies.

Due to its size and nature, it is not intended to be used in daily law enforcement operations and is considered to be defensive in nature.

“The main usages for this vehicle by the sheriff's office will be victim rescue, natural disaster rescue and aid in officer safety during tactical operations,” Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Jeff Parker said, adding that in a perfect world, the MRAP would see little to no use in any given year.

The vehicle has been utilized on a number of SWAT-related responses since being put into operation last year.

“For the most part, we're using it right now for transporting the team from point A to point B,” Parker said. “We have not had to use it whatsoever for any type of negotiation or victim retrieval or any type of cover.

“Unfortunately, with the ever-increasing incidents involving active shooters, we are reminded of the world that we live in,” Parker added.

He pointed out how in the recent Orlando and Dallas massacres, law enforcement officers used tactical equipment to save lives. A SWAT member from the Orlando shooting took a round to the helmet, saving the officer from certain death.



ARMORED ENFORCEMENT

ARMORED ENFORCEMENT — The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office recently added a new tool to its ongoing fight against crime. The imposing Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle carries the members of the SWAT team to various scenes involving victim rescue, natural disaster rescue or officer safety. Acquired through the Department of Defense 1033 program, the vehicle serves as a replacement for a former Brinks armored truck that had been the SWAT team's transport. For more photos [click here](#).

“Our job as a law enforcement agency is to have a pre-practiced plan of response to any and all situations,” the chief deputy said. “To not act accordingly is to be a disservice to the community that we serve, as well as affording the proper level of protection for the officers who put their lives in harm’s way. The goal of the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office is to maintain public trust, to serve in a dutiful and courageous manner, to protect those whom are preyed upon and to do so in a highly effective manner, always using the minimal amount of force necessary to control the situation that we have encountered.”

As one might expect, the MRAP is rated as bullet-resistant.

“This type of cover allows us to enter an active shooter situation using the vehicle as a cover point, and if other factors are in place, to try and rescue those victims who are injured before they die,” Parker said. “Without an armored rescue vehicle such as this, we could not safely accomplish this task.”

The MRAP was acquired through the Department of Defense 1033 program to replace the aging Brinks armored truck previously utilized by the SWAT team. Under 1033, the Department of Defense publishes a list of surplus equipment that is available to local governments.

Prior to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, many of the items were simple things such as office supplies. But afterward, the program resulted in local governments around the country acquiring an array of military equipment, including armored personnel carriers, assault rifles and other equipment more traditionally recognized as being designed for combat.

According to a federal database, the Department of Defense has given Wisconsin law enforcement agencies \$25.6 million worth of surplus military equipment since 1997.

Among the equipment sold in Wisconsin has been 24 mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles. Agencies all around the state, including Racine, Madison, Superior, Forest County and elsewhere, acquired MRAPs, while eight other departments received smaller armored vehicles.

Since 2003, the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office has utilized an old retired Brinks armored vehicle for its SWAT personnel carrier. The Brinks truck originally was built in 1986 and purchased for \$10 from the Brinks Corp. in 2003.

The idea for the company to donate the trucks to law enforcement agencies came to Brinks managers as a result of a high-profile incident in which the driver of an armored security truck in Southern California had driven into a bank robbery in progress that was interrupted by police. The perpetrators had holed up in the bank with weapons and injured individuals were on the street in front of the bank as the armored truck driver maneuvered the secure vehicle to points where he could help the victims into the truck.

Before acquiring the Brinks vehicle, the SWAT team members arrived in separate vehicles, showing up on a scene carrying their gear. The truck provided transport for the team and gear, as well as increased safety for the officers and those they were seeking to protect or rescue.

Parker noted that two years ago, it was determined that the Brinks truck was in need of substantial repairs, including a new engine, brakes and transmission. Estimates were in excess of \$25,000.

Around the same time, he said, Sheriff Paul Milbrath was notified that after several years, Jefferson County was next on the list to be considered to receive an MRAP vehicle. Through the 1033 program, the MRAP vehicles were being transported back from overseas after being deployed in active-duty areas such as Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The only condition was for the sheriff's office to be financially responsible in shipping it from Sealy, Texas, to Jefferson. The tab was \$6,800.

"A small price for a vehicle worth \$733,000," the chief deputy said.

Prior to considering an MRAP, the sheriff's office looked into acquiring Lenco Bearcat armored vehicles, which ranged in price from \$200,000 to \$280,000, depending on the option packages chosen.

"We are accountable for being fiscally responsible with the taxpayer's money," Parker said. "We were left with the choice of repairing an old vehicle, not knowing when the next major repair would occur, or acquiring an MRAP."

The decision was made to take the MRAP, which was delivered on May 23, 2014.

Parker told the SWAT sergeant that he could continue using the Brinks truck as long as it provides a safe ride. Once major repairs more than basic oil changes are needed, the truck will be returned to Brinks.

For now, it remains in use, but no extraordinary amount of taxpayer dollars will be used to maintain it beyond routine maintenance.

Meanwhile, since obtaining the MRAP, the county has put minimal work into it.

"When our vehicle came back from Kuwait, it went through a complete refurbishing that was done by the U.S. military," the chief deputy said.

He said the armored personnel carrier section of the vehicle was lifted off of the frame and then affixed to a brand-new frame that included a new engine, transmission, brakes, wheels, etc. Before any deputies were allowed to drive the MRAP, they underwent training sponsored by Delia Tactical International, a Michigan-based company owned by a police officer and former SWAT team breacher and commander with more than 27 years of police service.

The owner, Kurt Delia, is a private contractor who specializes in breaching, hand-to-hand combatives, tactical driving and armored vehicle operations. Delia has conducted numerous training programs for the Department of Defense and Special Operations Command Units (SOCOM), as well as hundreds of police departments throughout the United States and abroad.

At the end of this instruction, SWAT deputies were trained on illustrating the historical basis of the MRAP; proper storage of the vehicle and understanding of how to conduct various operations in recovery and towing, crew rescue and recovery of personnel and civilian rescue utilizing the MRAP.

Two or three of the SWAT team members have attended the school.

Through basically monthly training, the entire SWAT unit has been acclimated on how to do the basics: how to get in the vehicle, turn it on, move it and drive it for a short period of space. Everybody can do it.

This fall, members of the unit will be attending an emergency vehicle operation course specifically for MRAP use.

In addition, Parker said, the vehicle has been repainted and new rescue vehicle decals were applied. New seats from the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office (DRMO) were obtained at no cost. New braces and wall mounts were designed and all the seats were professionally installed to provide a safe and comfortable ride for the team.

“We had to repair some hydraulics on the doors and rewire some of the vehicle’s internal electrical wiring,” Parker said.

Area businesses and individuals contributed time and labor for the refurbishing adjustments to the MRAP. These included electrician John Will; Nick Wendt, owner of AOK Signs; Ed Owen Jr., owner of Arrow Inc. of Jefferson; and painter Willie Osborne of Waterloo, with the paint donated by Martin Senour.

“Our job at the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office is to protect the people within our communities,” the chief deputy said. “We thank you for supporting the men and women who wear the uniform and are willing to put their lives on the line each and every day.”