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Jefferson County Sheriff's Department to get \$600,000 19-ton anti-IED military vehicle for free

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The 2008 International MaxxPro Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle was developed by Navistar Defense for the Pentagon as part of a program to protect American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan from debilitating and often fatal blasts from roadside improvised explosive devices.

It looks like a Humvee after years of a steady regimen of daily workouts, human growth hormone and anabolic steroid injections. It's big, it's heavy, and it's not here to mess around. The vehicles, generally painted a desert tan, are built to withstand ballistic arms fire, mine blasts, IEDs, and nuclear, biological and chemical environments.

But in the immortal words of Bruce Wayne, "Does it come in black?"

Now, apparently, it does.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Department is the proud owner of a \$600,000 2008 MRAP, thanks to a federal law that allows local law enforcement agencies to take possession of excess Department of Defense property at no cost.

The vehicle will be used by the department's Sheriff's Emergency Response Team, or SERT, to handle situations in which people barricade themselves in their homes or take hostages, according to Undersheriff Paul W. Trudeau.

The team is roughly analogous to the Special Weapons and Tactics, or SWAT, teams that gained prominence in police departments around the country beginning in the late 1960s.

"They'll get some training on it, driving on it, and then we'll go from there," Mr. Trudeau said. "We've responded to a lot of barricaded individuals."

SERT personnel are trained in breaching and entry procedures and tactical movements, according to team commander Lt. Kevin M. Amann.

According to a description on the department's website, the SERT is called upon when crisis situations arise throughout Jefferson County. These situations include barricaded gunmen, suicidal persons, civil disturbances, high-risk warrant executions and drug raids.

The team, which is composed of 10 individuals from the road patrol and detective divisions, trains regularly to stay current with equipment and techniques.

The MRAP, with its specialized V-shaped hull design and bulletproof glass, will replace an armor-plated Humvee donated to the Sheriff's Department last year and will allow deputies to safely approach dangerous situations.

"We're excited to be getting it," Lt. Amann said. "It's another tool for the SERT team to use."

The department has responded to a variety of high-risk situations over the years, including a 2010 homicide and attempted suicide at Madison Barracks in Sackets Harbor. The nearly five-hour standoff ended after the Onondaga County Sheriff's Department assisted with a BearCat, an armored personnel vehicle capable of administering tear gas.

"Without the BearCat, we would probably still be out there," Sheriff John P. Burns remarked at the time.

BearCat is an acronym. It stands for Ballistic Engineered Armored Response Counter Attack Truck.

The truck, which is produced by Lenco, Pittsfield, Mass., is built on a commercial truck chassis.

It is big, but at 9 tons, it weighs half as much as an MRAP.

An empty MRAP weighs nearly 19 tons. Fully loaded with fuel, equipment and personnel, it can weigh up to 21.7 tons.

That's about the same weight as a single-axle dump truck, according to County Highway Superintendent James L. Lawrence Jr. The MRAP will be able to travel on any roads or bridges in the county that are not posted with a 20-ton weight limit, Mr. Lawrence said.

BearCats sell for \$200,000 to \$275,000 depending on optional equipment. The cost of an MRAP can approach \$1 million. The department's Humvee is valued at \$47,000.

The Onondaga department's BearCat was involved in two other incidents in the last five years: a six-hour standoff in Rodman in 2011 that ended without injury or arrest and a four-hour standoff in Champion in late 2012 in which a Fort Drum soldier was taken into custody after allegedly firing several rounds from a shotgun and a rifle at police.

In August 2012, a man rammed his 2012 Dodge pickup into the department's Humvee while trying to flee the scene of a standoff at his residence in the village of Black River. He was armed

with a tactical shotgun and semiautomatic pistol and was wearing a military ballistic vest at the time, according to deputies.

What is today commonly known as the “1033 Program” has its roots in an obscure section of the 1990 and 1991 National Defense Authorization Acts that authorized the transfer of excess DOD property to federal and state law enforcement agencies for use in counter-drug activities.

In 1997, the program was expanded to include counterterrorism activities.

Preference is assigned to counter-drug and counterterrorism activities when requesting excess DOD property, according to a history of the program available on the website of the Defense Logistics Agency.

Since its inception, the 1033 Program has provided more than \$2.6 billion worth of DOD property to law enforcement agencies in all 50 states, four U.S. territories, the District of Columbia and hundreds of federal and tribal law enforcement agencies, according to the history.

The MRAP program, on which the DOD has spent more than \$45 billion, has met with both praise and criticism since production of the vehicles was ramped up in 2007 after a steady increase in the number of IED attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A Time.com Battleland blog post from October cites two conflicting accounts of the rise of the MRAP.

According to a 2010 USA Today article, the number of MRAPs in Afghanistan went from 1,800 to 12,000 in a period stretching from 2008 to 2010 and military officials estimated that MRAPs reduced deaths and injuries by 30 percent from January 2009 through July 2010.

But the post also cites a Foreign Affairs article written by two economists that questioned the military’s assessment by advancing the premise that heavily armored vehicles did not save more lives than medium armored vehicles, despite being roughly three times more expensive.

“The MRAP Boondoggle,” by Chris Rohlf and Ryan Sullivan, also suggested that some units may have been reluctant to use MRAPs because “they knock down power lines, have trouble on dirt and mud roads, and inhibit interaction with the locals.”

A September 2011 article in the National Defense Magazine pointed out that rapid deployment of the vehicles left many design flaws uncorrected, including problems with the pneumatic systems that open and close the heavily armored doors. The systems aren’t protected from blasts and can trap crew members in the cab after an IED blast. Early versions of the vehicle often were prone to rollovers because of their high center of gravity.

While the debate over the success of the MRAP program continues, there is one issue that will have to be addressed before the discussion is resolved: what to do with all the MRAPs in Afghanistan as the troop levels there are drawn down.

Ken MacNevin, chief of public affairs for the Defense Logistics Agency, said the MRAP being donated to the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department was used to train vehicle operators and had never been deployed overseas.

He did say, however, that its donation to the department was indirectly attributable to changing troop levels in Afghanistan.

At an actual cost of zero dollars to the county, the MRAP is more than a bargain. But some critics have pointed out that such deals may not necessarily be a good thing for the populace they ostensibly benefit.

In a white paper for the Cato Institute titled "Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Police Raids in America," journalist Radley Balko traces the proliferation of military-style SWAT teams across the country to the enactment of laws such as the one that created the 1033 Program.

"With all of this funding and free or discounted equipment and training from the federal government, police departments around the country needed something to do with it. So they formed SWAT teams — thousands of them," Mr. Balko wrote.

He argued that SWAT teams, once in place, inevitably are used in the service of drug warrants, often with disastrous results because of mistaken identity or bad information from informants.

The heightened posture of police using military tactics and equipment and wearing military-style clothing results in the rapid escalation of already tense situations, according to Mr. Balko.

According to its spec sheet, the MaxxPro MRAP is a 4x4 with four single rear wheels on run-flat tires. It can carry a two-man crew plus four to six passengers and a gunner. It is 21 feet long, 8½ feet wide and 10 feet tall and has a 62-foot turning radius. It has an 8.7-liter turbocharged diesel engine with a five-speed automatic transmission.

On Friday, the county's new MRAP was being painted black to match the rest of the Sheriff's Department fleet. It will have decals applied and be in service sometime next week, Mr. Trudeau said.