

Bloomington Indiana Police Department
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Addendum:
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Executive Report:

The history and use of armored vehicles
by the Bloomington Police Department



'Trust between law enforcement agencies and the people they protect and serve is essential in a democracy. It is key to the stability of our communities, the integrity of our criminal justice system, and the safe and effective delivery of policing services'.¹

Trust is also the key component in community oriented policing. Trust is established through transparency in action, communication and the willingness of all parties to realize the part that they play within the larger overall community. Often government, specifically law enforcement, does not fully explain topics or events to the public in a transparent, timely or understandable fashion. As a result preconceived notions, often driven by initial media reports, or 'word of mouth', where incomplete versions of events make their way into the public conscious before all facts are laid bare, take hold, leading to a distrust of the authorities.

Such is the case with many items of police equipment, in particular armored vehicles. Armored vehicle use by police departments is not new but has recently become quite controversial due to some individuals misconceptions of the intended use of these vehicles. Unfortunately some law enforcement agencies have used the vehicles in what, even to the greater law enforcement community, would seem to be, given what is known, an inappropriate fashion.

Without any doubt law enforcement agencies are not, and should never be seen as an 'occupying army' to any portion of the community that we serve. Law enforcement is, however, charged by that same community to have the capabilities to safely and effectively deal with situations which could be reasonably foreseen that threaten both life and property.

While it is important for law enforcement administrators, elected officials and the public at large to question whether equipment choice is appropriate to a given circumstance, it is important to address the misconceptions which seem to now permeate the topic.

Law enforcement armored vehicles are not tanks, as some have mistakenly alluded, nor are they new to police service. They are heavy duty trucks which have ballistic grade metal plating on the sides, top and bottom in order to resist the penetration of bullets or other fragments and have been in service with law enforcement since the 1930s. It is important to note that these vehicles are *armored*, not armed.

An armored vehicle is designed to protect officers from known high risk situations where a suspect is armed with a weapon. In this situation the vehicle itself, due to its armor, actually makes a lethal confrontation much less likely as there is very little risk to the officers in approaching the suspect to try and end the situation.

¹ *'United States Department of Justice, Final Report on the Presidents Task Force on 21 Century Policing' Pg 19, Para 1*

Similarly the vehicle provides for a safe and secure area from which officers may undertake negotiations. The armor plating of the vehicle precludes the need to place the officers or the armed suspect in jeopardy while these negotiations are on-going.

When however it is determined some level of force is needed to end the situation, the vehicle may be used as a platform for safely delivering less lethal munitions potentially ending the confrontation without use of lethal force.

As an example, the Bloomington Police Department's tactical unit, known as the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) used an armored vehicle to successfully negotiate an end to a standoff with a group of robbery suspects who were barricaded in a residence in the 1100 block of South Fairview. Rather than place nearby residents and officers at risk by attempting to force entry into the home to arrest the suspects, the armored vehicle was positioned in a manner which allowed for the negotiators to see the home and to safely be seen by the suspects who, understanding that they could pose no reasonable threat to the officers, chose to surrender without incident.

An armored vehicle also provides a rescue option for those who are in a gunman's line of fire. Due to the safety afforded by the vehicle armor, innocents may be evacuated when trapped in hazardous areas. In October 2007, CIRT used an armored vehicle for such during a well publicized sniper incident at an apartment complex on Arch Haven on the City's near west-side. During this event the suspect was armed with both AK47 and AR15 style rifles and had been firing from a balcony toward several restaurants in the area when patrol officers arrived. This endangered not only the patrons of the restaurants which were in the suspect's line of fire, but also the officers who were arriving to assist.



In another incident CIRT used the vehicle to remove patrol officers and bystanders from the area of a large apartment complex when they were threatened by a suspect with an AK47 style rifle who had barricaded himself in an apartment at 3000 South Walnut.

There are times however when officers must approach and enter structures known to contain persons who have committed serious criminal acts and who are known to possess weapons which can penetrate bullet resistant vests and standard patrol vehicles. A vehicle which has an armored capability allows a safe approach to the location.

CIRT used an armored vehicle in such a manner to arrest a homicide suspect in a home on East State Road 45 that had to be approached over a long open distance where no cover was available for the officers. After his arrest, the suspect made comments about not resisting officers after seeing the armored vehicle as he knew that it would be futile.

Likewise, CIRT used the vehicle in a similar manner during the arrest of another homicide suspect, who had killed a law enforcement officer and was located within a home in Kelly Heights in Ellettsville. The suspect, who had been involved in previous events where he had fired on law enforcement, was armed with multiple weapons and had vowed 'not to be taken alive'.

During the search for a suspect who had tried multiple times to kill his own small child with a heavy caliber rifle and was believed to be located in a mobile home deep inside a tree line on Burma Road, the vehicle was used to initially approach the residence so that officers could then enter and secure the home.

As has been noted, for over ten years the Bloomington Police Department maintained an armored vehicle for emergency use. The acquisition of this vehicle came about as a realized need after a tragic event which saw a loss of life that might have been otherwise avoided.

The need for acquiring a vehicle of this type was brought into focus as a direct result of a September 2000 incident on Bluebird Lane, just outside the southeast city limits of Bloomington. During this incident, which actually started at the Woodbridge III apartment complex on East 10th Street, officers were pinned down by a gunman who had entered a home and shot his estranged girlfriend.

The gunman, who had previous set several fires and attempted to blow up his own apartment at Woodbridge, withdrew from the house on Bluebird after shooting the female and hid in a wooded area waiting for officers to arrive. As officers approached the home they were repeatedly taken under fire and were unable to get near the home to affect a potential rescue of the female or deal with the gunman.

In the end as BPD had no effective way to deal with the situation, an armored vehicle belonging to the Indianapolis Police Department was dispatched to assist, arriving some 90 minutes later, more than three hours after the incident began. This vehicle allowed CIRT officers to quickly close in on the gunman who unfortunately chose suicide rather than being taken into custody. Tragically the female who had been shot died of her wounds by the time that officers were able to reach her.

Throughout the entire incident, which spanned several hours, the Bloomington Police Department and its tactical unit, the Critical Incident Response Team, were held at bay by the gunman and were unable to effect either the potential rescue of the victim or deal with the suspect due to the lack of the ability to approach the area.

In early 2001 the Bloomington Police Department sought and acquired a used bank truck from Brink's Inc. This vehicle, a 1975 International Armored Truck with more than 300,000 miles, had been used in the Chicago area and was in need of some repair, however, it did offer armor protection for officers and civilians who would find themselves at risk.

Once the vehicle was acquired from Brinks, the Bloomington Police Department understood the potential public concerns and undertook a very pro-active policy of education by means of featuring the truck in numerous public displays such as the Park's Department yearly 'Touch a Truck' gathering, giving tours of the truck to various interested groups, and using the truck as a means of soliciting community involvement with the Police Department at social gatherings and neighborhood festivals such as 'National Night Out'.

Since it was such an unusual vehicle and was marked in a very conspicuous fashion, the armored truck always turned heads and drew attention as it made its way down the road, facilitating a great deal of police / citizen interaction on a very positive level, as the public would stop to ask questions about this unique piece of equipment.

In fact, community support was such that when repairs were required to place the vehicle in service, the Hoosier Hills Vocational Training School located at Bloomington North High School volunteered to make the vehicle a class project.

This community project was so successful it was featured in a 2003 article entitled *Rebuilding the Dinosaur: The cost effective restoration and modification of an armored police tactical vehicle* in *Law and Order Magazine*, an international periodical which is geared toward police administration.

During the semester that Hoosier Hills had the truck for their project, the vehicle was completely refurbished with repairs to the body, new paint and markings, and repairs to the heating and air conditioning systems as well as improvements to maximize the overall use of the vehicle in a law enforcement capacity.

'Upon learning that the Department was going to be able to acquire a vehicle such as the International truck, contact was made with a very special group of people operating out of the back corner of Bloomington North High School.

Hoosier Hills Vocational Training Center is from the old school way of doing things. No shortcuts, learn it right by doing it right the first time. What was delivered to them in September of 2000 was an aged and decrepted dinosaur'.

'While the truck had seen over 300,000 miles of urban driving the mechanical aspects of the truck were sound. The motor, transmission and other running gear was the recipient of the Chicago Brinks' facility's excellent in-service upkeep and ongoing maintenance program. The overall body of the truck, while still structurally sound, was found to be suffering from the effects of the elements and needed to be returned to its original look and capabilities'.

'The truck once delivered was bereft of any type of amenities that many would consider basic. Delivered with a non-functional HVAC system as well as other more minor problems such as significant rusting in non-critical areas the truck was taken in by the Hoosier Hills facility for a complete overhaul and facelift' 'The HVAC plant within the vehicle presented another obstacle. Delivered to the police department as a non-working unit it was found that to commercially repair or replace the unit would be extremely costly. Again enters the knowledge and innovation of Hoosier Hills. What was quoted as costing over \$4000 dollars was fixed and improved upon for much, much less. The cooling system on the truck is now so effective that if not moderated by the operator within the cab the unit will ice over the windows in mere minutes of full bore use. While that kind of performance would seem extreme it is more than necessary in order to provide for the rapid cooling of fully outfitted tactical officers during operations in the high heat and high humidity of summers in the Midwest'.

'While undergoing that facelift there were other mission specific modifications that were requested by the police department's tactical unit, the Critical Incident Response Team'.²

Hoosier Hills converted the truck to the standards requested by the Department so as to facilitate its primary use as a Rescue Vehicle. In doing so, the entire interior of the rear of the truck was removed so that it could, in an emergency, evacuate a large number of people simultaneously in the safety afforded by the truck's armored plating.

² Excerpt from *'Rebuilding the Dinosaur' Law and Order*. Hendon Publishing

'What was delivered back to the Police Department was a truck totally unlike what was originally acquired. The truck now rather than being rusty and having mechanical deficiencies was now returned to near original manufacture status. Painted in keeping with other departmental vehicles the truck received subdued markings similar to those found on the Departments standard patrol cruisers. A large POLICE painted on both sides of the truck in almost two-foot high letters leaves little doubt as to exactly who inhabits the truck and befits its official status. The truck also bears the mark of its function; RESCUE. Displayed in large letters on both sides of the front of the truck it was felt that actually marking the unit for its intended function was necessary so as not to cause any type of misunderstanding within the community. The truck was not intended as some type of urban assault vehicle. It is a measured, professional law enforcement response to extremely critical incidents'.³

During more than ten years of service, the vehicle was used on countless occasions to effect a safe outcome to critical events, however, in the end, the vehicle succumbed to the elements and the lack of available funding to facilitate needed repairs.

In 2012, the vehicle was destroyed via dismantling at an automobile reclamation yard.



Since that time, the Bloomington Police Department has been without the protection and capability afforded by such a vehicle, placing officers, suspects and, most importantly, innocent civilians at risk.

Instances such as a stand off with an armed suicidal suspect on South High, a confrontation with an armed suspect on Strain Ridge Road, an incident on West Vernal Pike where a group of home-invasion robbery suspects had barricaded themselves, and a hostage taking on South Rogers, which ended with the law enforcement use of lethal force, are but a few of the instances where the lack of an armored vehicle added to the danger level faced by all involved.

³ Ibid

Ideally a specifically designed law enforcement armored vehicle would be procured as a replacement to the former vehicle; however, this would result in a significant budgetary impact. The 'low end' price for a vehicle with the needed capabilities nears the \$200,000 mark, similar to the cost of a Fire Department Pumper Truck.

A specifically designed law enforcement armored vehicle such as the Lenco BearCat, seen below, which is the most popular such vehicle in the United States, retails for almost \$200,000 at its base price. In the standard configuration with upgrades such as rear air conditioning and heating the price increases to more than \$218,000. A vehicle such as this ordered in 2014 by the Ft. Wayne Police Department, invoiced at \$218,544.00 and required over nine months to construct and deliver.



An alternative replacement source which has recently come under much discussion, is the Defense Reutilization Marketing Office (DRMO), a United States Government run program which makes surplus military equipment available to law enforcement agencies for no or limited cost.

Through the DRMO program the Department can access a vehicle known as a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle. These vehicles, which were designed to transport troops safely in Iraq, and to a much lesser extent Afghanistan, are now being made available to law enforcement agencies, sans any armament, for the cost of transportation of the vehicle to the Agency's location.

In 2008 as these vehicles were starting to be released to law enforcement and the need for the former Brink's trucks' ultimate retirement was being realized, the

Bloomington Police Department submitted a request through the appropriate channels to acquire such a vehicle as there seemed to be no other way to bridge the financial gap required to replace the vehicle.

Since the time of the initial request, the Department has faced budgetary challenges and has had to decline vehicles which were offered under the program. Twice in the last year alone BPD has not taken vehicles, which would have been both suitable and affordable, due to the public concern which has arisen from the misconceptions which surround this type of vehicle.

Many people have the mistaken belief that an MRAP, which is actually the designation for a series of different vehicles, is designed for offensive purposes and that the vehicles which are being acquired by law enforcement agencies are equipped with an array of weapons. This is simply not the case.

The MRAPs being made available to law enforcement agencies, of which there are several types, are all wheeled vehicles which are designed to operate in an urban or moderately suburban environment. They are not tanks and are not designed to perform any function of the like. They are, like the former Brinks truck and the aforementioned Lenco Bearcat, designed to protect the occupants of the vehicle from projectiles and other ballistic shrapnel.



Should the decision be made to acquire a vehicle from the DRMO, the cost is projected to be under \$3000 to transport the vehicle to Bloomington with an additional \$3000-\$5000 in paint, livery markings and emergency equipment installation (consistent with a standard fully marked squad car). Even with total costs expected to be \$6000-\$10,000, this is off-set by an expected useful lifespan of more than 20 years.

Much of the controversy concerning MRAPs being acquired by law enforcement is due to their very public use during the riots which occurred in and around the Ferguson Missouri (St. Louis County) area in 2015 and the perceived 'militarization of the police'.

What is important to note is that, on numerous occasions during the life of the armored vehicle which BPD had in service, our Department successfully handled protests, demonstrations and other events, some of which became riotous in nature, yet never did our Department contemplate the need to deploy either a tactical unit or an armored vehicle in the same manner as the authorities in the St. Louis County region.

' Law enforcement agencies should create policies and procedures for policing mass demonstrations that employ a continuum of managed tactical resources that are designed to minimize the appearance of a military operation and avoid using provocative tactics and equipment that undermine civilian trust'⁴

The Bloomington Police Department has a long history and culturally ingrained methodology of dealing with protests and demonstrations which are considered a critical civil right, protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

'The culture of policing is also important to the proper exercise of officer discretion and use of authority. The values and ethics of the agency will guide officers in their decision-making process'⁵

It is the fervent belief of the Chief of Police and his Command Staff that even when conditions during a protest have deteriorated to the point of being riotous, those events are best dealt with using officers who are specifically trained in handling such matters and who use equipment which is specially suited to bringing those incidents to a quick and safe conclusion for all involved.

This does not include the use of armored vehicles or tactical units which, while certainly both are needed for dealing with armed individuals who have committed serious criminal offenses and represent a threat to the public welfare, have no place in the resolution of demonstrations or protests.

⁴ *United States Department of Justice, Final Report on the Presidents Task Force on 21 Century Policing' Recommendation 2.7*

⁵ Ibid

Addendum

Since the time of that this report was first authored there have been multiple instances where the Department was forced ask outside agencies for support or, in most cases, simply go without the protection afforded by an armored rescue vehicle, putting citizens, officers and suspects alike in un-necessary jeopardy.

In July of 2017, the City of Bloomington entered into a contact with Lenco Inc, the manufacturer of the Bearcat, to purchase a law enforcement specific armored vehicle. With a purchase price of slightly over \$225,000 the vehicle being purchased offers a twenty plus year solution to the needs of the Department in regard to protecting the community.

The vehicle, which is a Ford F550 truck, is plated with armor and outfitted to transport officers and civilians in crisis zones where they are at risk of death or serious injury.

The Ford F550, a workhorse civilian vehicle which is commonly used for ambulances, fire trucks and heavy construction and delivery vehicles, is specifically upfitted at Lenco to carry the armored plating required to mitigate the ballistic threats which exist.



The vehicle has been purchased but it takes almost 10 months to construct and deliver. In the meantime, the need for the vehicle has not ceased.

In the most recent incident, which occurred in November of 2017, the Department received a priority request for assistance from the Owen County Sheriffs Office where officers were under fire and at risk from an active shooter.

Owen County Sheriffs Deputies had responded to a call concerning domestic violence. Upon their arrival they had attempted to approach the door to the home but had been taken under fire by the suspect and were in immediate danger.

The Bloomington Police Department responded immediately to assist the Owen County Deputies who were reported to be pinned down and unable to evacuate the area as the suspect continued to fire at them with what was thought to be an assault weapon.

After the Deputies were able to be secured and removed from the scene by an armored MRAP vehicle from the Morgan County Sheriffs Office who had also responded to the request for help, a stand-off ensued where the suspect held two children and his wife hostage.

Over the course of the next 31 hours a combined task group consisting of the Bloomington Police Department Critical Incident Response Team, Morgan County SWAT and the Indiana State Police SWAT unit attempted to safely end the hostage situation. During that event officers were fired at on numerous occasions, with armored vehicles from Morgan County and the Indiana State Police being used to position the teams safely near the home to recover the children who were released or stage officers for a possible rescue attempt.

In total the suspect fired at officers on over 10 different occasions during this event. Only the armored vehicles brought to the scene by other agencies offered any protection.

While neighboring agencies, and the Indiana State Police have armored vehicles, in most instances these vehicles are 1-3 hours away, much too long in an emergency requiring the rescue of civilians or officers who are in immediate need.

While it is certainly hoped that the true capabilities of this vehicle will never be used, it is, sadly, a matter of history that circumstance arise that put the almost 100,000 people who call Bloomington home and

the 2.5 million visitors to the City every year at risk and clearly show the need for the City of Bloomington to possess the capability to safely handle any event which occurs.