

Clovis Has An MRAP. Is That OK With You?

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The August 9 shooting death of Michael Brown, a black unarmed teenager, by a white Ferguson police officer resulted in multiple violent protests in Middle America. The way police handled the situation with equipment like armored vehicles has left communities questioning the use of military grade weapons by local law enforcement. FM89's Ezra David Romero climbs into one of these machines in an unsuspected Valley city.

Listen to what it sounds like inside an MRAP here.

I'm at the Clovis police department. I'm not here to pay a traffic fine and I'm not locked up in a cell. I'm climbing into a mine resistant military vehicle that looks like a cross between a tank and hummer. The 4 X 4, diesel powered, three doors, blast resistant armored vehicle is designed for transporting troops.

Now Clovis is known for its cowboys, rodeos and its cute downtown. Not for its military equipment. But spotting's of this giant impenetrable human mover have gained some attention. One person spotted the mine-resistant ambush protected vehicle, otherwise known as an MRAP, last November at a popular intersection in Clovis and posted his experience on YouTube.



The department received the MRAP free of charge through the Department of Defense Excess Property Program last September. The programs motto is "From War Fighter to Crime Fighter." In the past the department has received sleeping bags, a bomb truck, a few high end safes and helmets from the government.

"We don't patrol in it, we don't use it as a show of force driving around town," says Mike Casida a captain with the Clovis Police Department. "This is something that gets used very infrequently. Hopefully it's not needed very often."

"Just going down the street in an MRAP sends a message to the community about who the police are and how they are and how they operate and the message that it sends is that police are essentially an army." - David Sklanksy

He says the giant desert tan armored car is going through a demilitarization process. Off come gun mounts and military communication equipment and on go a new intercom system, a backup camera like you'd see in a Prius and a fresh coat of black paint.

So far the MRAP has been used twice. Both cases involved search warrants and people with extremely violent police records. Fresno PD and Clovis PD share the MRAP and a smaller armed vehicle called a BearCat.

Captain Casida remembers the first time the MRAP was used on a search warrant on a Fresno County home.

"We were able to clear buildings and put ourselves in a position so that officers weren't exposed and everybody came out peacefully because we were able to be right there rather than trying to do it from a bullhorn several hundred yards away," Casida says.

Stories about armored vehicles like the MRAP have circulated in the media and in Davis city officials have told their police department to return their vehicle because of fear of militarization after the protests in Ferguson Missouri.



David Sklanksy is a Stanford law Professor with a specialty in criminal procedures and policing. He says the use of military grade equipment by law enforcement has the potential to do more harm than good.

“Just going down the street in an MRAP sends a message to the community about who the police are and how they are and how they operate and the message that it sends is that police are essentially an army,” Sklanksy says.

“I’ve been part of SWAT for a lot of years. I did not go into the military, but I’ve gotten to do a lot of military type things and play with the big toys I guess as you call it, but the truth is when the call comes it’s all business.” - Captain Mike Casida

Others like UCLA Public Policy Professor Mark Kleiman say a change in police culture is needed in order to use military equipment effectively or at all.

“Part of the problem is that we are still using militarized training,” Kleiman says. “The police academy is modeled on a boot camp. That’s not a good way to get people to do the actual job of policing.”

He says this type of training encourages the use of military style equipment even if it isn’t needed.

“If you got a hostage situation you probably want a well-trained squad team,” Kleiman says. “If you’re serving a search shark or someone who said he smelled marijuana you probably don’t want to bust in the door. Clovis is not going to have a terrorist incident. I’m sorry, but they want the toys to play with.”

But back in the front seat of the MRAP Clovis Sargent James Boldt and Captain Casida admit the MRAP brings out the little boys in them.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Casida says. “I’ve been part of SWAT for a lot of years. I did not go into the military, but I’ve gotten to do a lot of military type things and play with the big toys I guess as you call it, but the truth is when the call comes it’s all business.”

And despite the idea that MRAP’s are just big toys for law enforcement, the two agree that the armored vehicle is just as valuable a resource as any other motorcycle, horse or car in their force.