



NTOA's Armored

Rescue Vehicle Tactics course: How it can benefit you

BY ADAM SWON

During the NTOA's national conference in Kansas City in 2021, I sat in on a few after-action reports highlighting the role of armored vehicles in tactical operations. My agency has been discussing obtaining an armored vehicle since 1999, following a shooting that left five officers wounded during a standoff in Huntsville, Missouri.

In 2016, our department began to look into the acquisition of an MRAP through the Department of Defense 1033 program. After some research, we decided it wasn't a good fit for us for a number of reasons, including the vehicle's size and other limitations. Shortly after, the director of our

state 1033 program stated that an old Peacekeeper was available. The broken-down piece of armor had been sitting in a field in Warrensburg, Missouri, for at least a few years. The Peacekeeper arrived with two flat tires, peeling paint and a blown motor. Using inmate labor, we brought it back to life for very little investment. That Peacekeeper has been on more than 10 deployments a year since 2018. Last year, the department restored a second Peacekeeper vehicle.

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Officer prepares to use a tow rope to remove a barricading vehicle during an officer down scenario.

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Officers learn to provide lethal cover from the turret of a Bearcat in a simulated barricade vehicle incident.

Finding armored vehicle training to learn more was tough because those classes are hard to find in rural Missouri. With the after-action reports from the NTOA conference fresh in my head, I jumped on the chance to attend the NTOA's Armored Rescue Vehicle (ARV) course in Lenexa, Kansas, this past April.

According to the NTOA, the course "is designed to provide instruction on deployment methods of the armored tactical rescue vehicle in hostile environments. The different roles of the armored tactical rescue vehicle, including victim rescue, utilization as a weapons shooting platform, deliv-

ery of team elements, negotiation phones, chemical agents and other techniques will be discussed." That's just what instructors Chad McDaniel and Chris Maiorano delivered.

Training was set to start at Lenexa Police Department at 0800. I was met in the parking lot by some very shiny Bearcats. After introductions and course logistics, the instructors laid out their background with their agency in Florida and why they teach this course. The students ranged from newly assigned drivers to much more seasoned operators like myself. There was also discussion about what ARVs they use and the cool stuff they've done with them.

TRAINING

Being a poor, Peacekeeper-based department, I was happy when someone else said they were running an old Brinks truck, and there was an MRAP thrown in. Most other departments' trucks ranged from brand new to first-generation Bearcats. There was a good mix of larger metro departments, task forces and agencies with more modest resources and staffing. There were officers who were looking for guidance on how to operate their trucks, and others were looking for policy and procedure that made better sense than what they were doing.

After some after-action reports from incidents from the instructors' personal experience and a few borrowed ones, we covered most of day one's administrative tasks. The discussion was pretty open about how different teams did different things, with ideas being exchanged between the 27 students and directed by the instructors. The idea of a department keeping "parade trucks" and fearing to use them the way they were made to be used popped up, along with my new favorite phrase, "tactical destruction." There was a lot of discussion about the liability in using an ARV, and the importance of considering innocent victims, the public, officers, suspects, and property was stressed.

After lunch, we moved to a local baseball park and after a safety brief and equipment check, we moved into the hands-on portion of the course. Lenexa PD had secured an area for us that had plenty of room and privacy for class.

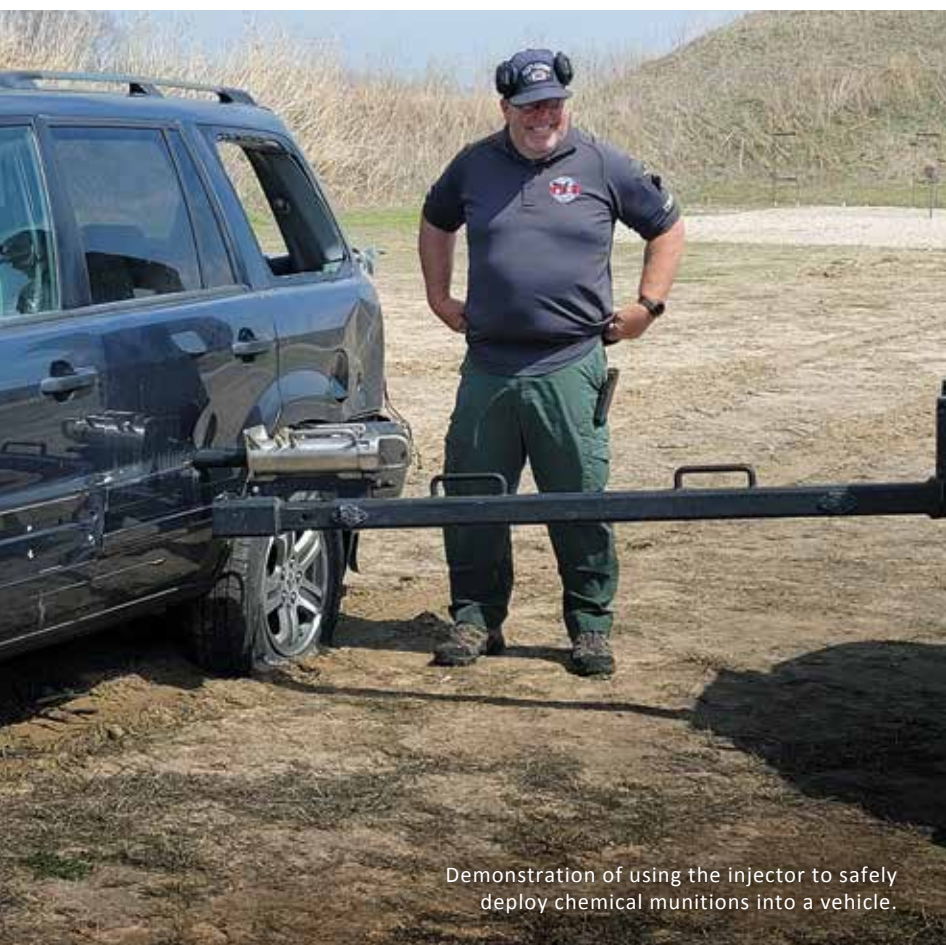
Students split into two groups with three ARVs (a Bear, a Bearcat G2 and a Bearcat G3). The trucks were all from the Kansas City region and their loan was much appreciated. I ended up in the officer/victim down group. I've run this kind of officer-down drill before, but many never had. It was interesting to pick up new techniques for my own classes. They covered the physical tactics and skills involved, but also stressed the most important part, which is communication and planning. The drills improved as people began to talk before they started to move. After the drills and some scenarios, I got to use the trucks in a way I wasn't familiar with, as a big, armored tow truck.

I've only seen a suspect use a vehicle to barricade a house a few times in the rural environment I've worked in, and getting around that vehicle hasn't been hard. The day before in the incident debriefs, I had seen how moving obstructions like cars out of the way can be a great help in the deployment of not only a team but things like robots and drones. Pushing in a door on a house isn't a new concept, but the idea of carefully planning "tactical destruction" to best come to a solution was new. The conversations were geared to "we do this because," not just "we do this." I got to push around an SUV and learned plenty about moving one with chains and ropes. The tire marks on the parking lot spoke to the number of reps students were getting.

We all agreed to meet at the Mill Creek Gun Club early the next morning to get as much training in as we could. The facility was very nice, with big enclosed bays, plenty of parking and a law enforcement-only section. The early morning focused on some live fire from the ARVs, then on to shooting while moving, which was new to me on these platforms.

The live fire was very controlled and honestly a lot of fun. Hitting steel from the ports on a moving ARV is something not everyone will get to do.





Demonstration of using the injector to safely deploy chemical munitions into a vehicle.



Class photo

We switched to SIMS to find safe shooting locations from the outside to reduce the risk of damaging ourselves or the trucks. It had the benefits of live fire and less risk.

A lesson learned was that while working from an ARV, all the “tacti-cool” equipment we carry tends to get caught on everything in and around the truck. Hanging up in a turret was an issue for a few. After the shooting, we focused on using the hydraulic ram to move vehicles and mounted a gas injector to it. I have always thought of the ram as a hammer for doors and windows and not so much for doing other things.

Next, we got back to using the trucks as rescue vehicles. After a demonstration and walkthrough, we moved on to some scenario-based training using the SIMS. The 50 mph winds kicked up enough sand to induce stress. The instructors walked us through where and why they prefer to place their personnel in relation to the vehicle, and how a bit of planning just makes things smoother. I found that although the Bearcats and Bear are really great, there are some advantages to the smaller platform of the Peacekeeper.

After the scenarios, we all got together to discuss the course and the scenarios, and check the trucks for damage. I gathered up my gear and headed the 2½ hours home. As with most training, I try to think about my bring-backs on the drive home and jot them down as soon as I can. It ended up being more than two pages by the time I wrote it all down. Simple things like honking when backing up and gear selection, to some more complex thoughts in regard to memos of mutual understanding and multi-jurisdictional training events.

This class isn’t so much about skill-building like some I’ve attended.

TRAINING

It's more about recognizing the many uses of an ARV and finding better ways to utilize them in a safe manner. You then go home and put those thoughts into action. With the ever-increasing move to "breach and hold" or "call out" search warrants across the country, using an ARV can become a real game-changer. The ARVs can benefit almost any kind of tactical incident that's up to us to safely resolve, and this class will help you begin to recognize those.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Officer Adam Swon is a Community Police Officer with the City of Moberly, Missouri. He's been involved in Special Police Operations since 1995 serving in a wide range of roles and is currently in charge of their ARV program. He is a firearms and tactics instructor as well as a specialty sniper instructor. Swon is his department's Grant Officer and 1033 Program director. He has been published on the topics of school violence and physical fitness for police. He also works as a professional boxing/MMA judge through the State of Missouri.

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My department's original Peacekeeper as it was delivered in 2017



The pair of restored Peacekeepers that are still in use by Moberly Police Department