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Deputies: Armored Vehicle Saves Lives

By Elizabeth Piazza
The Daily Times

FARMINGTON, N.M. (AP) - When San Juan County Sheriff's Deputy Dave McCall stared down the barrel of an AK-47 semi-automatic rifle, his first instinct was to duck.

"Even though you have armored glass in front of you, it was still very tense," McCall said.

McCall was one of three sheriff's deputies to find himself inside the sheriff's SWAT team's **Lenco BearCat**® armored vehicle earlier this year during a nearly hourlong standoff with a man threatening to kill them.

Although the steel-encased vehicle's primary purpose was to save the lives of the deputies inside, the vehicle also may have saved the life of the other man.

"The No. 1 goal is to preserve life," Sheriff's Lt. Brice Current said. "Because we knew the SWAT team members were safe inside while the suspect was aiming the rifle at them, we were able to make the decision to not shoot him and wait for the opportunity to disarm him safely."

Sheriff's deputies responded at about noon March 31 to a home on County Road 2400 where a man was reportedly threatening to commit suicide. When two deputies arrived, they discovered a middle-aged man in the backyard waving two machetes and spouting threats, McCall said.

Family members told deputies the man had threatened to kill himself and any police who showed up.

The officers backed off and established a perimeter around the home after the man went inside.

Relatives told deputies the man had an AK-47 semi-automatic rifle and two 30-round magazines in the house, McCall said.

Deputies ordered area residents to evacuate, and the SWAT team responded in the **Lenco BearCat**®, which McCall parked within 5 feet of the front door.



*Farmington, NM Police Department
Credit: Amanda Goodman/KRQE*

Sheriff's Sgt. Scott Facka contacted the man by phone and negotiations began.

"We just wanted to get him help and get him out of the house," said McCall, who was driving the **Lenco BearCat**[®].

"We wanted him to come out without any weapons."

The man entered and exited the house several times while holding the gun. He leaned across the front of the vehicle and pointed the weapon at each of the three deputies.

"It made you question a lot of things including how good your equipment is," Sheriff's Sgt. Shane Ferrari said. "He was angry and crying, his face was red, and he was holding the weapon so tight his knuckles were white."

Despite the steel frame and armored windows protecting them, the three deputies instinctively ducked each time the man pointed the gun in their direction.

"He scraped the window with the muzzle of his gun," Current said.

Scratches remain on the vehicle where the suspect dragged the gun.

"He wanted suicide by cop," McCall said. "He wanted us to kill him."

Deputies are told the **Lenco BearCat's**[®] armored windows can withstand multiple hits from high-powered guns, including a .50-caliber rifle.

"He put the muzzle right against the glass, 10 inches from my face," McCall said. "We've been told this **Lenco BearCat**[®] can withstand multiple hits, but still that muzzle was pretty big."

While the three deputies were safe inside the vehicle, not far from their thoughts were the five other deputies hiding unprotected around the residence, McCall said.

"We all were happy we got through it without having to shoot him," McCall said. "The **Lenco BearCat**[®] allowed us to get close enough to use the Taser."



*The San Juan County Sheriff's Office SWAT team posing with their new **Lenco BearCat**[®].*

After nearly an hour, deputies were able to deploy a Taser through one of the vehicle's 11 ports.

SWAT team members were able to subdue the man and take him into custody. He was charged him with 12 counts of third-degree felony aggravated assault against a peace officer.

"I can honestly say that the **Lenco BearCat**[®] saved the suspect's life," Current said.