

# Why do Lewiston cops need military hardware?

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## **Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Lewiston is not a big city - at least not in the sense of Boise, Spokane, Las Vegas or even Coeur d'Alene or Nampa.

Fortunately, it has seen little in the way of violence or gang activity.

Terrorists will find few soft targets here - no major power plants. No huge sporting arenas. No sprawling commercial centers or government complexes.

This is just a humble community a little bit off the beaten path where people tend to know each other.

So why does Lewiston Police Chief Chris Ankeny feel the need to acquire a piece of military surplus more suited to the streets of Fallujah?

Sure, the MRAP (mine-resistant ambush protected) vehicle he picked up didn't cost more than the \$2,000 price of shipping it here. But consider the features: armor casing, slit window guards, weapon mounts and a bullet-proof windshield.

Odds are whenever the LPD employs this hardware, it will be the equivalent of bringing a tank to a fist fight.

It's the kind of militarization of police that was on display a couple of years ago at Ferguson, Mo.

That incident provoked former Ada County Sheriff Gary Raney to observe: "We learn in law enforcement that using force against a person or group often causes them to respond with more force."

On the other hand, Lewiston does have a couple of junior high schools, Jenifer and Sacajawea.

For years, Ankeny's department assigned school resource officers to those schools.

Those SROs might spot a child who is enduring some kind of distress - and refer her to other adults who might be able to help.

Or that police officer could be in a position to steer an impressionable adolescent toward a more stable path in life.

That cop's low-key, everyday interaction provides those kids with a friendly face behind the uniform.

How many mid-morning greetings or acts of encouragement does it take before a cop has persuaded a young person not to assume the worst about the people in his profession?

If nothing else, an SRO is eyes and ears. He's the ultimate first responder.

"The whole SRO program is designed to build relationships with the students with that individual," Lewiston School Superintendent Bob Donaldson told the Tribune's Mary Stone. "The obvious is the security piece, but they're almost like counselors, friends."

Now, for the first time since LPD assumed full responsibility for the program in the 1990s, police will not be staffing the junior high schools. Turnover and difficulty in filling vacancies have resulted in Ankeny pulling his officers out of the program. Nez Perce County sheriff's deputies may fill the void under an arrangement being negotiated between the county and the school district.

But what you have is a Lewiston Police Department that is withdrawing its investment in proactive law enforcement, the art of preventing problems.

Instead, it is investing in reactive police work - and planning for the kind of once-in-a-lifetime event that if it comes may occur somewhere else within the region.

It's the difference between what some hardened officers see as "RPW" - real police work - and what they dismiss as "soft police work."

It's choosing between nightsticks and walking the beat.

It's as different as Tasers and talking it out.

Coming on the heels of the SRO withdrawal, bringing this hardware to Lewiston isn't merely an exercise in political tone deafness.

It makes you question the LPD's priorities. - M.T.