

Airmen test new security forces vehicle

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1/21/2005 - **MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. (AFPN)** -- Airmen with the 91st Security Forces Group here are testing a new armored personnel vehicle which may someday replace the ones Minot cops currently use in the missile field.

The Lenco BearCat vehicle has a V-8, diesel turbo engine combined with armored plating, said Tech. Sgt. Kevin McDonald, 91st Security Support Squadron vehicle noncommissioned officer in charge.

"(It is better suited) for what we do in the missile field as far as maneuvering, accountability, reliability and deploying out of it," he said.

The vehicle sports features not found in current Humvees, Sergeant McDonald said.

"It has dual tires on the back, half-inch armor plating throughout the whole thing to protect the troops," he said. "It also has a heater in the front and back of the vehicle so the troops don't freeze out (in the field) and a top-of-the-line, state-of-the-art turret (on top of the vehicle)."

Other amenities include heat-seeking ability, red lights along the cab interior for map reading, heated windshield wiper blades and no middle console so Airmen can get in and out of either side of the vehicle quickly and easily, officials said.

To test the vehicle, the Airmen use it on routine weapons movements and drive it on different types of road surfaces, Sergeant McDonald said.

"We're using it on convoys right now for 30 days, and we're checking to see how it drives on gravel and paved roads and ice- and snow-covered roads," he said. "Next, we're going to use it for fire teams, which are actually in the field 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Airmen of Minot's 5th Security Forces Squadron also get to use the new vehicle, Sergeant McDonald said. "It will go to the 5th side which will put it in the munitions storage area for 30 days to let it idle all day and see how it handles there," he said.

Senior Airman William Stark, a 791st Missile Security Forces Squadron fire team member, said the new vehicle is definitely a step in a positive direction as far as getting better equipment to Airmen who need it. "It is) much roomier," he said. "In the Humvees, you were confined, and you had to sit almost sideways when you had all your gear with you. With the (new vehicle), there's room to breathe."

The vehicle is the first of three that Air Force officials are testing. Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont., and F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo., currently have the other two. Based on feedback from people at all three bases, 20th Air Force officials will decide which vehicles to purchase, Sergeant McDonald said.

"Each base has a different vehicle, and we rotate (vehicles every 90 days) because there's a different climate in each area," he said. "Before, the Humvees were just given to the Air Force. Now, (20th Air Force officials are) thinking maybe they should test these vehicles beforehand and figure out what each base really needs for their troops."

Every time a driver or passenger uses the vehicle, he or she must fill out a written evaluation, Sergeant McDonald said. Those evaluations follow the vehicle to its next test base.

"When they do decide to pick one of these vehicles, it'll definitely be a well-thought-out process and definitely be whatever is best for the troops," he said.



MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. -- Senior Airman Kevin McKiernan prepares to load a grenade launcher onto the Lenco BearCat turret here Jan. 18. The vehicle is a test vehicle that may one day replace Humvees at places like Minot. Airman McKiernan is assigned to the 791st Missile Security Forces Squadron. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Katie Booher)