

Officers dodged rifle fire, hand grenades to apprehend rural Viola man

Law officers attempting to arrest a rural Viola man Thursday had to withstand rifle fire and explosions from approximately 15 military-style hand grenades.

The Vernon County Sheriff's Department, which was acting in mutual aid of the Richland County Sheriff's Department, had 12 tactical team officers at the scene when Robert Bayliss, 60, was apprehended after he was subdued by non-lethal beanbag rounds. Vernon County Sheriff Gene Cary said the fact that officers were able to escape injury and also arrest Bayliss unharmed was a combination of having the proper equipment, training and a good plan. "We do a lot of training and sometimes it's so much you wonder if we'll ever use it," Cary said. "But yesterday I became convinced training saved lives."

On Monday, Richland County officers attempted to serve papers to Bayliss at his home on Co. G about two miles from Viola. When they approached his residence, they were fired upon.

The Richland County Sheriff's Department then sought mutual aid from Vernon and La Crosse counties. While they kept surveillance on Bayliss' residence, they formed a plan to arrest him.



Damage sustained by La Crosse County's armored rescue "Bear-Cat" vehicle was evident after two raids on the residence of Robert Bayliss in rural Viola, Thursday. The vehicle was shot seven times. Vernon County Sheriff Gene Cary said the impact points from the bullets fired at the vehicle showed that Bayliss was aiming to injure law enforcement officers. Bayliss was firing a high-powered rifle of unknown caliber. (Matt Johnson photo)

That plan included using La Crosse County's BearCat armored rescue vehicle and approaching Bayliss, who didn't have a telephone, and using the loudspeaker that the vehicle is equipped with to contact him. As the BearCat approached the residence, it was fired upon by Bayliss, Cary said. Two of the bullets impacted on the passenger's window, which was thick, high-density bulletproof glass. The vehicle retreated.

"We gave him every opportunity to surrender to us peacefully and he responded to us with gunshots," Vernon County Chief Deputy Jim Hanson said.

Then authorities from Dane, Sauk and Eau Claire counties were contacted and Dane and Eau Claire counties sent their BearCat vehicles to the scene.

Just after 4:30 p.m., a second attempt to arrest Bayliss was launched using all three of the armored vehicles. This time, law officers fired

on Bayliss' residence with cover fire, Cary said. Bayliss was also firing at the vehicles and struck all three of them. He also threw about 15 military-style grenades at the law officers, Hanson said. Between Thursday morning and afternoon, between 300 and 500 rounds of ammunition was fired at the scene by Bayliss and law officers, Cary said.

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Officers dodged rifle fire

The armored vehicles were able to approach Bayliss' residence close enough to deploy tear gas. Shortly after that, a fire broke out in the residence and Bayliss emerged. He was fired on by officers, who used non-lethal beanbag rounds, which are specialized to subdue people without injuring them. Bayliss was then apprehended.

"With everything that happened and the threat he presented, the total outcome of this couldn't have been better," Cary said. "Kenosha's Air One helicopter was on the scene and they said of all the missions like this they've seen, this plan came together perfectly. They complimented the radio communication and the tactics."

Vernon County Tactical Team Commander John Spears coordinated the final raid to apprehend Bayliss, Cary said. "While Eau Claire, Sauk, Dane and Richland counties all had their tactical commanders there, John really ran the whole show from the command center," Cary said.

All told, Vernon County had 12 tactical team members at the scene, some of whom participated in both the morning and afternoon raids.

Bayliss owed more than \$5,000 in back taxes to Richland County. Officers initially went to his home to serve him papers regarding the taxes, Lt. Robert Frank of the Richland County Sheriff's Department said.

The Associated Press reported that Bayliss had not paid taxes on his 18-acre property for seven years and Richland County took over ownership of the property late last year. Bayliss was being held by Richland County authorities after his arrest.

Hanson said officials in some of the jurisdictions that received the BearCat vehicles took political criticism for having them. He said they proved to be necessary, Thursday.

"There are officers who got to go home, hug their wives and bounce their children on their knees last night because of this vehicle," Cary said.