



Bubba – that's the name of the armored personnel carrier that the directors rode in during the 2008 Tyler Conference with Sheriff J.B. Smith of Smith County.

Photos show police well-equipped for polygamist raid

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- Photos, video taken by polygamous sect members show police armed during raid
- Law enforcement agencies conduct raid after allegations of child abuse
- More than 400 children taken; court hearing set for Thursday to determine fate

SAN ANGELO, Texas (AP) -- Police wore body armor, toted automatic weapons and were backed by an armored personnel carrier for a raid on a West Texas polygamist retreat, photos and video released Tuesday show.

Four still photos and a slice of video were released to The Associated Press by Rod Parker, spokesman for the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which owns the raided Yearning for Zion Ranch near San Angelo in Eldorado.

Sect members took the photos and video during the first few days of a seven-day raid that involved police agencies from six counties, the Texas Rangers, the state highway patrol and wildlife officers. Authorities were looking for a teenage girl who had reported being abused by her 50-year-old husband.

A sect member whose wife shot the video said sect members got the impression that state officials "were doing something more than they said they were going to do." The man declined to give his name for fear that speaking out would cause problems for his children, who are in state custody.

Tela Mange, a state Department of Public Safety spokeswoman, said officers are trained to protect themselves.

"Whenever we serve a search warrant, no matter where or when, we are always as prepared as possible so we can ensure the operational safety of the officers serving the warrant, as well as the safety of those who are on the property in question," Mange said.

The armored car was precautionary and designed to remove someone from the property, not to force entry onto the ranch, she said.

Parker said rumors have circulated since the 1950s that the [FLDS](#) would respond with violence to threats on their way of life. "It's never been substantiated at all. Nobody who knows these people could possibly believe that," he said.

"It's not in their nature," he said.

Parker said that if there was any suggestion that the FLDS would respond to police with violence, there would have been a cache of firearms found during the raid. "Instead they responded by singing and praying," he said.

While there were hunting rifles at the ranch, search warrants filed in district court in Tom Green County, Texas, don't show that police seized any weapons.

Eldorado is about 200 miles southeast of Waco, Texas, where federal authorities tried to arrest Branch Davidian leader David Koresh for stockpiling guns and explosives in 1993. Four federal agents and six members of Koresh's sect died in the shootout that ensued. After a 51-day standoff, Koresh and nearly 80 followers died in an inferno that the government says was set by the Davidians but that survivors say started when authorities fired tear gas rounds into their compound.

Law enforcement surrounded the FLDS ranch April 3, carrying a warrant seeking a 16-year-old girl who claimed she was trapped inside the church retreat and had been beaten and raped by her husband. The search also revealed that a soaring white limestone temple at the ranch held a bed where officials believe underage girls were required to consummate their spiritual marriages to much older men.

More than 400 children -- all of whom lived in the large, dormitory-style log homes -- were seized in the raid on suspicion they were being sexually and physically [abused](#). They are being held in the San Angelo Coliseum and are awaiting a massive court hearing Thursday that will begin to determine their fate.

FLDS members carefully documented the raid in notes, video and still pictures of police and child protection workers talking with families, but much of that material was seized when police executed one of two search warrants on the ranch, Parker said.

"We've known from a little bit of experience to document it and prepare to have that presented in court or wherever it's to our benefit," said the FLDS member who declined to give his name. Law enforcement in Arizona and Utah raided FLDS sites in 1935, 1944 and 1953.

The 416 children held by Texas authorities had been accompanied by 139 women until Monday, when officials ordered all the women away except for those whose children are under 5.

The mothers have complained the state deceived them, revealing the plan only after they and their children boarded buses from historic Fort Concho, Texas, where they had been staying, to the larger San Angelo Coliseum. State officials defended that decision Tuesday.

Texas Children's Protective Services spokeswoman Marleigh Meisner said officials decided that children are more truthful in interviews about possible abuse if their parents are not around.

"I can tell you we believe the children who are victims of abuse or neglect, and particularly victims at the hands of their own parents, certainly are going to feel safer to tell their story when they don't have a parent there that's coaching them with how to respond," Meisner said.

 [Watch Meisner update status of children taken during raid »](#)

Meisner said child welfare officials still can't find birth certificates for many of the children, making parentage and age determinations impossible. She said many of the children don't know who their parents are and many have the same last name but may or may not be related.

"It's a difficult process," she said.

Officials have yet to identify the 16-year-old whose call for help to a Texas domestic violence hotline triggered the raid.

About three dozen of the women who returned to the Eldorado ranch spoke out Monday. They said in interviews that police surrounded them Monday and gave them a choice between returning home or relocating to a women's shelter.

"It just feels like someone is trying to hurt us," said Paula, 38, who like other members of the sect declined to give her full name. "I do not understand how they can do this when they don't have a for sure knowledge that anyone has abused these children."

The renegade Mormon sect is led by [Warren Jeffs](#), who was convicted last year in Utah of being an accomplice to rape and is awaiting trial in Arizona on similar charges.

A company founded and run by members of the church received more than \$1.1 million in government contracts between 2003-2007, a federal online database shows. Most of that money was spent by the Department of Defense on aircraft wheel and brake parts.

NewEra Manufacturing's president and CEO is John Wayman, a sect member who runs the Las Vegas, Nevada, business. NewEra was previously known as Western Precision Inc. and based in Hildale, Utah, where thousands of church members live.

In a 2005 affidavit filed with a Utah lawsuit, former church member and Western Precision worker John Nielsen said workers were underpaid or not paid at all for work they did because they were told their time and earnings were being donated to the church.

Associated Press writers Michael Graczyk in San Angelo and Brock Vergakis in Salt Lake City contributed to this report.

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