



AIRSOFT IN THE NETHERLANDS

AIRSOFT IN THE NETHERLANDS IS, TO PUT IT SHORT, FORBIDDEN. AT THE MOMENT WE HAVE NO POSSIBILITY TO PLAY OUR BELOVED SPORT ANYWHERE IN OUR COUNTRY, BECAUSE IT IS FORBIDDEN BY THE LAW. AS YOU CAN GUESS, THE STORY DOESN'T END HERE.

THE ONLY WAY TO PLAY AIRSOFT is to go to the neighbouring countries. Airsofters from the Netherlands often keep their gear in Belgium, and if we play in Germany, for example, we get our gear in Belgium and drive to Germany to play. The same goes for playing in other countries: Always Belgium first.

STATISTICS

There are about 500 to 1000 airsofters in the Netherlands, and they have formed about 15 to

25 teams. Every team has about five to twenty-five players, which means that active players are from 400 to 600. Nobody knows the exact number of players, but the majority of teams can be found from the www.nlairsoft.com web site. All teams however, don't have a web site, and some haven't even been mentioned.

THE NABV

The NABV, or the Nederlandse Airsoft Belangen Vereniging is, when freely translated the Dutch

Airsoft Association. At this point there are four persons in our board; one chairman and three members. Our goal is to legalise airsoft in our country. We continue to make contact with national and local authorities to spread and share information with everything related to airsoft, although it sometimes feel like fighting wind-mills. Last year the local commercial TV channel did a programme about our sport. Later this year we're going to be in the media again, but I won't talk about that any more.



Our priority is naturally to be an association for the players, so we deal mostly with them. We try to stay in touch with teams and players. Contrary to what you may have heard, Dutch players use lots of money to get the best gear available.

The web site of the NABV is in construction at the time, because we are working with a new web 2.0 based site. If you are however interested, the site can be found at www.nabv.nl.

AND WHAT ABOUT AIRSOFT ITSELF IN THE NETHERLANDS?

Like I said before, airsoft is not allowed in Holland, so it is not played in here, which leaves some other options open. For the most part we play in our more tolerant neighbour Belgium, and playing there is very nice. In most cases it however requires a very early wake up, or in other words, a cup of coffee is needed to get the drive to Antwerp going. Most of us keep their AEGs and other illegal gear in Antwerp, and some keep their gear with friends or in the storage facilities of teams.

In any case we Dutchmen have to keep our guns outside the borders of our homeland, which naturally means that we can't bring them home for maintenance, for example. We also can't clean or tune our guns as much as we would possibly want – and all this only because of the laws of our homeland! The NABV is still trying to find ways to make our hobby legal, so that we could keep our gear closer to our home, inside the borders of the Netherlands.

For the time being we organize our games mainly in Belgium. Also I know that some of my fellow countrymen have played in the United Kingdom, France, Poland (Red Storm Rising), Spain, Sweden (Berget) and even in the United States and Thailand, where the Mongoose of

the Hunters team visited the Thai Flying Dragon team.

BELGIUM

There are about 10-12 fields used for airsoft in Belgium. Each of them have their own special features. Some of the fields are only about a hectare in size, while some span over several square kilometres. In the largest of the fields big LARP games are held. Large airsoft games often involve about 300 players and we're hoping to increase that to 400 this year. Even owners of WW2-era vehicles are invited in. They will come with army jeeps and APCs, and from what I've read, even 200 players can be transported with one convoy to any place on the field! This is what they mean by good organization!

The terrain varies from open forest scenery to a more bumpier forest terrain and even to small mountains in the Belgian Ardennes. Some regions have small water areas and at least one of the fields has sand dunes. One of the game areas also has a kind of underground fortress, where we can improve our CQB tactics.

There also exists a group that is specialised in CQB combat, and they've used much time and effort to find abandoned office buildings, railway stations or factories that can be used for gaming. As good as this sounds, the association also plays in regular forest games and their modest goal is to arrange the best airsoft experiences in Belgium.

As can be guessed, all of the arranging groups are from Belgium. The Dutch sometimes rent areas in Belgium to arrange single games, but apart from one exception the Dutch don't arrange regular games. The web site of the Dutch game arrangers can be found at www.airsoftadventure.nl. All of the members of the group are Dutch and they arrange skirmishes regularly.

Common game and safety rules are valid in Belgian games, just like all over the rest of the world. The most important rules are naturally eye protection and tuning rules, which are based on British regulations. As far as I know, the limit in the United Kingdom is 328 fps (about 100 m/s) with normal AEGs. In Belgium the limit is 350 fps. Furthermore, there is a so-called five metre rule, according to which no closer from the opponent than five metres can be shot from, but one has to shout "bang!" very loud. This rule exists to prevent damage for sensitive and unprotected areas of skin.

THE GAMES

Mainly there are three different types of games: basic skirmishes, small milsim games and large milsim games. There has been a lot of discussion lately about the meaning of the word "milsim" and the term seems to create a lot of different opinions. Some think that milsim equals LARP. Although I'm not the person to define the meaning of the term, I think that there are lots of different forms of milsim and one's personal experience from games has a lot of influence on this.

Last year the same discussion was on in the Berget 5 event in Sweden. There was a former American major present, who didn't agree for the use of the milsim term to describe Berget events. The major in question arranges very large airsoft events in Poland, and even real army vehicles can be seen in these events. I've even heard that in the future, Polish Mi-8 Hip helicopters would be used in the games. I would only like to say that this American major does great work for those who can take part in these remarkable airsoft events. This doesn't, however, in my opinion mean that Berget events couldn't be described as milsim.



A part of Fort Core's game area in France.

In my opinion it is impossible to draw a clear line between what milsim is and what it isn't. The definition is rather a series of experiences and opinions of one's own. As a matter of fact, this kind of discussion isn't even important, I think. I've learnt this much about airsofters: everyone has only one thing in their minds apart from shooting and airsoft guns: talking about shooting and airsoft guns. More interesting than the milsim debate are talks about heroic deeds in combat and the functioning of guns. Anyway you put it, airsoft is mainly our way to take a little break – that's all.

SHOOTING AROUND

To continue about the subject itself or games, basic skirmishes can be played in a lot of different ways. For the most part, games last for about 30-90 minutes and after this everyone returns to the break area to eat or drink. After



this a new mission is started. The missions vary from i.e. capturing the flag or saving a pilot, or some other a bit more complicated and multi-layered tasks.

There are naturally many different traps in use. One group uses balloons to mimic land mines by burying them in the ground so that they explode when trodden on. The group in question (www.airsoftkempen.de) continues to come up with all kinds of new ideas to make one's airsoft experience more interesting.

BIGGER AND SMALLER MILSIM

Some game organizers constantly attempt to renew the gaming experience and interpret the world of milsim in their own ways. The usage of the term milsim is a somewhat new phenomenon, but the rule seems to be that the smaller the gaming group is, the realistic the game. To pursue authenticity some organizers only allow

lowcap or realcap magazines in game, whereas some use planned and detailed medic system, and some use some kinds of military rank system. Anyway any game isn't similar to other – a bit like in the film *Fog of War*.

Larger milsim games are usually about weekend games and weekend games with hundreds of players or even the aforementioned military vehicles. The major difference are in the surroundings or the game areas, which are of course larger in bigger milsims. As well as the amount of players being bigger, the missions are usually longer in duration. When talking about the basics, the games in Belgium are very much like the games in Germany, Italy, Ireland or any other place in the world. Some like more fast-paced game in Thai style, whereas some play with a slower tempo like the French. (Maybe the local wines are actually as good as they say).

THE TEAMS

BlackwaterCRG and Team Osnaz are teams that spend much effort to dress like soldiers from actual armies. BlackwaterCRG wears Dutch army gear, and they are very strict about this. The equipment of this group is pretty much identical to that of corresponding real soldiers, and there is no *Fostex* in their use. Unlike many other teams, BlackwaterCRG doesn't have a discussion forum on their web site, which in its way tells something about the team's ways.

Team Osnaz travels perhaps the biggest distances to reach the game fields. The members are from the Friesland province and they travel up to 450 kilometres to play. Their gear is modeled after the Russian army. Some prefer to use Spetsnaz gear, but other gear is also used. The members of Osnaz are very handy; they have

tuned real AK magazines to fit their guns and one constructed a RPK with real metal parts.

Apart from the close and well-organized teams formed by groups of friends, there also exist teams born on the field, which like playing and have decided to continue playing together, like the Silent Hunters. The squad, which was born in northern France decided to continue cooperating under a new name, although they don't have much to do with each other besides playing airsoft. Besides the nine Dutchmen there is also one Belgian in the team. (These days more and more Dutch teams have locals met in Belgian games in them.) As can be seen from the picture, the Silent Hunters aren't too strict about what they wear.

Some teams think that less is more. The PCU only has five members, but their squad is very close, and their cooperation is sure to last for many years to come. The PCU knows, that it is harder to keep everyone satisfied in a bigger group.

I can't naturally tell about all of the Dutch teams, but I must mention SpecOps, which was assembled after the Berget 5 event in Sweden. Most of the players were in international gaming grounds for the first time and saw what special forces were like.

The players decided to cooperate more and they were asked to play as special forces in a couple of games. These games often had a big role for special forces for the game's outcome. SpecOps doesn't play as so-called regular airsofters. Regular airsofters often play in a bit more relaxed way and enjoy the game instead of high speed, low drag style playing. This kind of more aggressive gaming is pretty new for the Dutch and the Belgians, and it will surely take some time before it is accepted fully.

It however seems that other teams too are beginning to take a more aggressive and victory-oriented approach, because it is quite rewarding to see the opponent fall back in terror and to win the opponents over and over again. The spetsnaz squad, which generated much terror in Berget combined with the Dutch squad which played as US special forces, and so SpecOps was born.

THE FUTURE

More and more people are beginning to be excited by airsoft and the number of players is increasing constantly. This also means that more and more serious airsofters make their ways into the game areas.

The quality of games is constantly evolving and the organizers work harder to standardize rules and to make sure that everybody plays according to them. This initiative has been taken by our comrades in the BAA, or the Belgian Airsoft Alliance.

The NABV continues to interact with ministers, police chiefs and even some representatives of the European Commission. As we wait for the law to change we continue to bother our Belgian neighbours.

NEDERLANDSE AIRSOFT
BELANGEN VERENIGING (NABV)



Silent Hunters



Osnaz

