



A tank at West Point means something ... fully loaded with .50 caliber paintballs, automatics and mortars!

MANUEL NORIEGA CAPTURED IN UPSTATE NEW YORK!

COMBAT CLASSIC — LARGE MILSIM GAME AT WEST POINT

BY ANDREW LUTHER
PHOTOS COURTESY OF DON SUTHERLAND

When it comes to large-scale milsim games, nobody does it better than the U.S. Army ... and when it comes to the U.S. Army, no one does it better than the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Run by the cadets of the West Point Paintball team, the nation's oldest college team, the biannual tournament known as the West Point Combat Classic has been around for more than 20 years.

Starting as a small local tournament with a handful of teams, the event has grown into a sprawling, two-day event with more than 500 players and countless support personnel involved. Taking place on the gorgeous, but unforgiving terrain of one of the nation's premier military institutes, the U.S. Military Academy's Combat Classic is an epic and unforgettable experience.



The attitude and skill — all US Army! The hair... not so sure.

MANUEL NORIEGA WAS THE TARGET

This year's game paid homage to the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama to arrest the military dictator, Manuel Noriega, on charges of drug trafficking and human rights violations. One of the U.S. Military's first major operations since the end of Vietnam, this quick conflict starred U.S. Special Forces in operations that included the first major amphibious landing by U.S. Marines and Army Rangers and the first combat jump by the 82nd Airborne since World War II.

In less than a week, U.S. military forces had seized their objective and arrested Noriega — all with 1/10 the casualties suffered by the Panamanian Defense Force.

The set up for the game replicated that of the real invasion of Panama. Led by Stephen "Sabot Ranger" Barger, a retired

U.S. Army Airborne Ranger Lieutenant Colonel, the American team was to fight their way up the rough terrain of an infamous part of West Point's sprawling grounds known only as "The Hill."

With narrow mountain trails, steep cliffs and deep chasms, the terrain was so dangerous that even the Army won't let players use it at night. At the top of the hill and bearing down hard on the American positions at the base of the hill was the "Panamanian Defense Force," led by Eric "Manuel Noriega" Engler of Engler Custom Paintball.

CHALLENGING MISSIONS

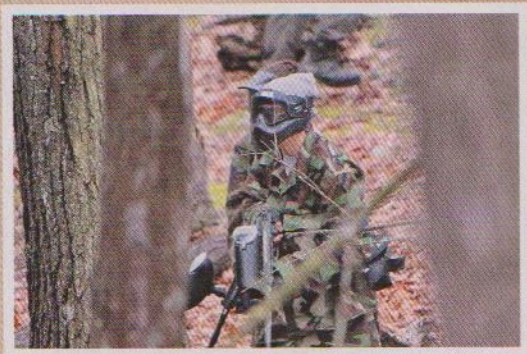
Each team started holding two positions, and earned points for holding a position for 30 minutes. This encouraged teams to be aggressive, as the only way to win was to hold three of the four available positions for an extended period of time. Additional points could be earned for completing missions such as destroying Noriega's private boat for the Americans, or escorting Noriega to his escape plane at the airfield for the Panamanians.

Scattered throughout the map were several PVC-pipe artillery positions. By capturing one of these positions, teams could use



This player really blends!

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Player makes use of a Tippmann sidearm.

them to call in artillery fire on any location on the playing field.

Combined with real army artillery and machine gun simulators, paintball tanks and Nerf-powered "anti-tank" squads, it made for a wild few days.

In the end, it was the Americans who won the weekend – their first uphill victory in more than 10 years. By rallying to destroy Noriega's plane with a well-timed artillery strike from Sabot Ranger and a coordinated defense of Noriega's escape route on day two, the American's secured all mission points in addition to aggressively seeking Noriega in his "hacienda" at the top of the hill.

Though a fun day for all, these key victories gave the Americans the boost to their points and morale necessary for a stunning 4,000 to 1,350 point victory. An American victory – as it should be!

However, this event has a meaning far more important for the cadets, who organized it, than just fun and games – it's helping to prepare them to be the next generation of Army officers.

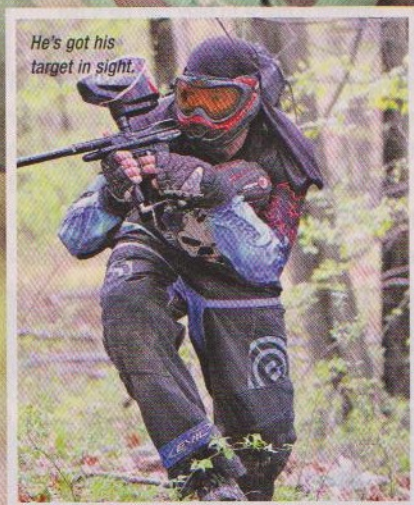
"As much fun as the event is," says Army Master Sergeant Chris Dubois, the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the West Point Paintball team and a faculty advisor,

Players were limited in the amount of paintball they could take on the field at any one time, encouraging them not to spray and pray.

"this event is about the cadets as much as the players. They are having so much fun that they don't even notice, but not only does it fund the paintball team, it is an invaluable learning experience in organization and logistics for these future leaders of America's Army."

Cadet Alex Kearns, a senior destined for the infantry, and team captain of the West Point Tournament team, agrees.

"We're so grateful to all the players who came out, and made both this event and the paintball team possible." ⊕



He's got his target in sight.

For more information about the West Point paintball team, or how to attend the next West Point paintball event, visit: www.army-paintball.com.