

Close to the frontlines

THERE'S A NEW GAME IN TOWN — an extremely realistic one, at that.

Airsoft Combat Operations, located on 35 acres in Lowell, is an adventure company focused on military and law enforcement simulations. The sport uses

1:1 firearm replicas that shoot 6mm to 8mm plastic BBs at a velocity of 225 feet to 550 feet per second.

The "battle ground" consists of varied terrain and elevations, along with many different kinds of foliage perfect for setting up an ambush.

"A lot of our scenarios come from former or current special forces soldiers and law enforcement people," said ACO owner Ryan Sytsma. "The main one is a woodland environment with log shelters, foxholes, bunkers, camouflage sniper look-outs and mobile tent shelters. We can really make it as realistic as somebody wants it to be."

There are two types of replica weapons to choose from: a Tokyo Marui AK-47 or Classic Army M15-A4 Tactical Carbine. Participants — who must be at least 14 years old — are also outfitted with tactical vests, unlimited ammo and screen goggles. The customized adventure, which costs \$75 per player, is marketed for corporate outings, birthday parties, church group outings, team-building events or just extreme fun.

"We've done an event as large as 70 people and as small as 10," said Sytsma, who is also a commercial real estate agent. "We're also trying to break into professional services, as well: police departments, SWAT training, military. I'd like to make it a good mix (between casual and professional usage)."

How much it hurts to get hit depends on how close you are. Because participants wear tactical gear, they will most likely feel the hit but it will not bruise or welt, according to the Airsoft Web site.

"It's pretty fun stuff. It's more true military simulation — more accurate and more realistic than paintball," said ACO enthusiast Marc Wolfe of Lansing. "You can actually do a patrol and go out on trails. Anybody can just go out there with a paintball gun, but with Airsoft, it's just like the real gun. You really have to watch your shots and place them properly."

For more information on a customized Airsoft combat adventure, call (616) 292-9404 or go to www.acoclub.com.

— CRIS GREER



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Hit RULES:

ACO USES MICHIGAN AIRSOFT PLAYER guidelines. (For more rules of engagement, visit www.acoclub.com.)

Hits to any part of the body count — only gun hits do not count. Call "hit" and/or "medic" when hit — no arguing calls or use of profanity in anger is allowed. When hit:

- Act out your death in realistic fashion and expose a red kill-rag.
- Remain prone at location and wait for medic's assessment.
- No camping or following of "dead" players.
- Dead men do not talk, on the radio or otherwise.
- No "playing dead" allowed. If you act dead, you're dead.