

UNCLE SAM WANTS YOU!

MILITARY USE OF PAINTBALL MAY HAVE WIDE RANGE OF IMPLICATIONS FOR PLAYERS

BY ANDREW LUTHER

The recruiters from the Army National Guard showed up well ahead of schedule. The security personnel who were supposed to let them in were nowhere to be seen; but that didn't matter. They could use the extra time to prepare. After all, this wasn't going to be an easy morning. Signing teenagers up to go to war is a tough sell – even with loads of free stuff on offer.

As they set up their table, several teenagers approached quietly, hoping to snag a free water bottle before slipping away unnoticed. But soldiers are trained to notice everything.

"Hey man! How's it going? Looking at making some money and serving your country?"

The teens mumbled incoherent responses about being late and looked for an escape – but the free t-shirts and paintballs piqued

their interest. "Don't worry man just take a look around, no need to sign up today! Let me tell you what we can do for you." And, so the boys were hooked.

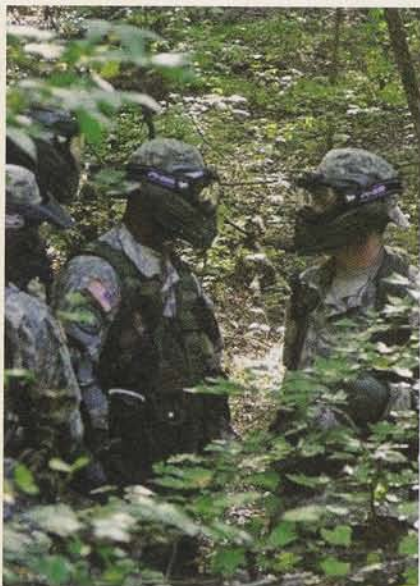
That's how the journey begins for many of the 180,000 men and women recruited to the military each year. With a war now entering its eighth year, even in the current economic recession, talking young men and women into signing the dotted line remains the toughest peacetime assignment. And, with paintball now more popular than ever, players are becoming attractive targets for recruiters looking for active young men and women to commit to the uniform.

YOUNG ATHLETES ARE PERFECT TARGETS

Paintball tournaments and conventions today often include enthusi-

Player engaged in an Army scenario.





Army officer recruits receive a mission.



Even the US Army team can't always win!



Member of the Fort Meade "Sabot Rangers" in action.



Stephen Barger of Old Man Militia Paintball Team delivering army promotional material.



The Sabot Rangers set up shop at a competition in Maryland.



Army Paintball players patrol a path in a large scenario.

astic recruiters manning displays ranging from a small table offering brochures to 18-wheelers disgorging HUMVEEs, video games and even Apache Helicopters to entice young athletes into a conversation about their future.

"It's really our target audience," said one Virginia Army National Guard recruiter. "They're usually young, healthy, and looking for adventure."

However, what began at recruitment booths at paintball events has turned into much more. While the military has long used organized paintball tournaments as training tools, today it turns to them as a recruitment tool as well.

RECRUITMENT SUSTAINMENT PROGRAMS

RSP – or "Recruit Sustainment Programs" – are offering potential recruits the opportunity to come out and play in Army-sponsored events with no further obligations (other than receiving a barrage of phone calls and mail). All major branches – Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force – now sponsor competitive professional and semi-professional teams and leagues that compete with other military and civilian teams.

Increasing military involvement in the paintball community is having industry-wide effects. As part of the Army's recent "Army Strong" advertising campaign, the Army has signed a deal with Tippmann Sports, a leading manufacturer of high-performance paintball products. The Fort Wayne, Ind.-based company recently signed a deal with the U.S. Military Academy to become the exclu-

sive provider of equipment for the West Point Mil-Sim team (unsurprisingly, the oldest college-sponsored paintball team in the country). With college paintball teams becoming increasingly popular, this is an important step in paintball's move toward being recognized as a sport.

COOPERATIVE FIELD GUIDE PROVIDES MISSION INSTRUCTION

Tippmann's relationship with the Army is having other more immediate effects as well. Many events sponsored by the company have been based around the U.S. Army Paintball Field Guide, available from Tippmann's Army website, www.usarmypaintball.com. The guide, designed as a cooperative effort between the Army and Tippmann, "provides instructions on how to build a mission the same way as the U.S. Army." It's encouraging a return to large scenarios in the woods that have decreased in the past decade in favor of fast paced speedball events.

MILITARY DOES NOT WISH TO CHANGE SPORT'S IMAGE

There are some that worry about the military's involvement in paintball. Some fear that further militarizing paintball will have a negative impact on the sport's image. "We're not a bunch of violent kids running around in the woods," says Will Saunders, a professional paintball referee and player. "I work out hard to prepare for competitions, and this ranges from playing paintball to diet and conditioning. We're athletes competing in a tough but fair sport, and should be recognized as such." 