

What is Airsoft?

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Read on after the break to learn more...

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Airsoft

Airsoft is a modern combat sport or recreational hobby in which participants eliminate opponents by hitting each other with spherical pellets, launched from airsoft replicas. Participants typically use varying types of markers designed as replicas of real firearms, tactical gear, and accessories used by military and police organizations. In North America and Europe, there is a growing interest in playing airsoft.

Origin

Airsoft was developed in Japan in the late 1970s to provide an alternative for gun hobbyists because local laws prevented individuals from privately owning firearms. A heavy emphasis was therefore placed on making accurate replicas of real firearms. Many new Chinese replicas are dominating the airsoft market because they are more affordable. They compete against more reliable established companies like Classic Army, I Chih Shivan (ICS), and Tokyo Marui. In contrast, paintball was developed in the United States in 1981 as a variation of hide and seek tag, through the use of utility companies' paint marking guns, which mark power/utility poles, and continues to focus more on their function than their form or aesthetic qualities. Paintball has quickly gained greater popularity than airsoft in the United States. However, in East Asia, airsoft is much more popular and paintball is nearly non-existent. In the interests of a more family-friendly image, paintball as an industry usually avoids direct analogies to the military and war (seen by the movement towards spectator-friendly speedball). Similarly airsoft has taken a dual route, with some modes of play moving away from military simulation and others embracing it.

Methods of play

Airsoft players meet in various places outside of city limits or at dedicated airsoft battlefields. You can play a variety of games: a short skirmish, an organized scenario, a military simulation, or a historical reenactment. Combat situations on the battlefield often involve the use of common military tactics to achieve objectives in each game. Fundamentally, airsoft is a game played in a predetermined area where the objective is to "kill" the adversary. It is generally accepted that when a player is hit, they are out, unlike paintball, which leaves visible marks on clothing. Some common game variations include Team Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, and Close Quarters Battle (that attempts to simulate real life Close Quarters Battle).

MilSim

MilSim (Military Simulation) generally combines airsoft play with some military live action role-playing elements. Several goals or missions are assigned to each team, along with a basic loadout of ammunition (6 millimeter pellets), rations, batteries, and other suitable equipment. The teams will remain in the field for the duration of play, only returning to a staging area or "safe zone" for medical emergencies, or other such circumstances. MILSIM-games often last several days, for example the large BERGET-event in Sweden lasts 6 days in a row, with no breaks. In larger scale MilSims vehicles as simple as painted vans and trucks will be used. But in some cases, such as Operation Irene, real APCs and tanks are used.

Honor system

An "honor system" is employed whereby the players rely on each others' honesty to admit to being hit, because unlike paintball, the plastic pellets do not leave a surface mark distinguishable at a distance. Depending on the muzzle velocity of the gun and distance from which a person is shooting, the person on the receiving end of the shot will usually feel the impact but the pellets will sometimes not be felt by a player at very long ranges or when running strenuously, hence the importance of Marshals.

In certain countries such as the Philippines where large numbers of players often play every weekend in commercial airsoft venues, additional special rules have been adopted to increase safety and avoid unnecessary injury. All "real steel" firearms, explosives, and bladed weapons are banned at any airsoft battlefield to prevent harmful accidents or misunderstandings and confusion between real and simulated weapons. Simulated "knife kills" can be performed when a player touches or taps an unaware opponent instead of shooting him or her at point-blank range. Players are

prohibited from firing blindly when not able to see their target, especially around corners. Harsh language and forceful physical contact between players is strongly discouraged. To avoid unnecessary disputes that disrupt the game, players are discouraged from calling hits on their opponent but are expected to call a marshal to judge how effectively they can hit their opponents. Players are expected to acknowledge being hit even if they are in doubt.

Dishonest players who fail to follow the rules or acknowledge their hits run the risk of being labelled and ostracized as "zombies" by the local airsoft community. Players are also expected to be discrete in transporting or carrying their gear so as not to unduly alarm the general public and force the law enforcement agencies to investigate an incident involving airsoft guns.

Kinetic energy

Kinetic energy transfer is relatively minimal in airsoft compared to that of paintball. A airsoft projectile weighing .2 grams and traveling at 300 feet per second (90 meters per second) transfers about 1 joule of energy. A paintball projectile weighing 2.84 grams and traveling at 300 feet per second transfers 11.8 joules.

Although there is a considerable difference between airsoft and paintball energy levels (1 joule verses 12 joules), the type of collisions that occur (elastic airsoft vs. inelastic paintball) must also be considered (refer to Pellet Ballistics). Most airsoft guns are capable of shooting from 150fps to 400fps, though it is also possible to purchase upgraded springs for some airsoft guns that will enable 400 to 500 fps projectile velocities.

A hop-up unit, if present, puts backspin on the pellet giving a slight upward arc. This gives an airsoft gun more range than an airsoft gun without a hop-up unit. Airsoft playing fields usually have rules specifying what velocity is allowed for each player position.

Cost

To a new player choosing between airsoft and paintball, a beginning package for airsoft is much cheaper in terms of hardware, but for apparel they can be roughly equivalent. Average \$120 USD[citation needed] One major difference, however, can be seen in the cost of ammunition and upkeep of the packages - due to the type of ammunition used, airsoft guns are less prone to "jamming", and airsoft pellets are considerably cheaper to manufacture than paintballs. Guns are usually the most expensive piece of equipment. Low-quality electric guns, commonly called LPEGs (low priced/powered electric guns) can cost from \$10-60 depending on the quality, the MPEGs (Medium priced/powered electric guns) can cost in the range of \$80-180 dollars USD, while a higher-quality AEG can be more than \$200 USD. The overall average for a high quality electric gun such as a Classic Army or Tokyo Marui, is around \$200-\$500 USD, depending on the model. Some custom guns can cost more than \$2,500 USD.

In Mil-Sim games, where the main aspect of the play is realism, equipment is usually much more expensive. Many Mil-Sim players choose to wear real gear (not an airsoft replica) and in some cases, real ballistic protective armor. This can raise the price of the game considerably, with guns and gear sometimes totalling in excess of \$10,000 USD.

Safety

Although airsoft replicas operate on completely different principles from real firearms and are not lethal, basic airsoft safety should be followed to prevent the random chance of injury during play. The four fundamental rules of firearm safety are:

• Treat all firearms as if they are loaded and ready to fire.

• Always point the gun away from anything and everything that is not intended to be shot.

• Keep fingers away from the trigger and outside the trigger guard until ready to play.

• Always be sure of the target and what is behind it.

A close range shot from a BB on bare skin from a gun with a velocity over 400 FPS will usually break the skin and cause bleeding. Shots from over 100 feet will most likely not cause bleeding, but will leave a small bruise and cause pain, depending on the power of the gun. A BB can easily cause serious damage to the eye of a person not wearing eye protection. Therefore, a standard of safety guidelines and equipment has evolved in the airsoft community. Like many competitive sports, airsoft inherently involves a certain risk of injury. With proper use airsoft is a safe sport.

Eye and Face Protection

The minimum safe level of gear required to participate in most games includes a pair of fully-sealing impact-rated goggles to protect the eyes of the participants. Traditional prescription glasses and sunglasses are almost never accepted as they will not prevent serious injury. Goggles not designed specifically for use with airsoft or paintball guns may break or shatter upon being struck, causing eye damage (although rare and easily prevented).

For this reason many organized groups of airsoft players and fields require that eye protection fully seals the area around the eyes, and also meets or exceeds ANSI's Z87.1-2003 goggle standard for eye protection: the ability to resist 3 joules of impact energy without damage. However, it is not uncommon for players in less organized games to use shooting glasses, which do not provide complete protection from projectiles. It is worth noting, however, that Z87.1-2003 rated goggles are specifically intended for use in industry and manufacturing and are not for use in sports. Some players instead opt for paintball goggles, which are held to higher impact rating standards, ASTM's F1776.[3]

According to ANSI publications as of June 2006, The ASTM is currently developing a more specific standard for airsoft - ASTM Z1535Z - Standard Specification for Eye Protective Devices for Airsoft Sports.

The best overall protection is currently offered by paintball masks. These masks provide an additional level of protection by covering the face, teeth, and ears, reducing the risk of injury to these body parts and the chipping or complete loss of teeth. The lens is a solid piece of impact resistant plastic. Some airsoft masks are made with mesh screens, though these screens do not offer protection from cheaper or bio-degradable BBs that sometimes fragment upon impact of hard objects.[5]

Other Safety Precautions

Some other rules such as a maximum BB velocity and distance guidelines are used in different ways by groups depending on their location. Various locations often offer similar safety rules with slight variations. In order to encourage the mixing of segmented communities into a larger community that can more easily engage each other, certain organizations have created safety rules and guidelines for players to share the field under common understanding and to band together in safe environments. [6]

Safety zone for airsoft guns is 1fps-399fps, that zone is probably the safest zone to play in, whereas the closest strike from a gun with 399fps would only make a welt, while anything below 200fps probably would feel like nothing at all. Any gun over 400fps can injure someone. For more information regarding velocity limits and BB ballistics refer to airsoft pellet ballistics.

When not actively playing, many fields require "barrel bags," which were first introduced in paintball. Many airsoft guns, especially AEGs, come with small red plastic barrel blockers that fit over the muzzle, but these can be shot off the gun, and don't provide the quick visual check that a barrel bag does. The magazine is usually removed as well, and the gun fired to clear the chamber. Many fields also require players to leave their guns set to the safety position when they are not shooting, even during active gameplay. This is a practice taken from real firearms training, in which one never puts a finger on the trigger or takes the weapon off safe until ready to fire.

Clothing

Most players typically wear military battle-dress uniforms known as BDUs consisting of separate pants and shirts or jackets when playing, because it "just as with real soldiers" aids concealment from adversaries. Aside from the advantage of camouflage, some participants aim to faithfully replicate a specific force (particularly in games such as MilSim). Also common, especially among the newbie and non-regular players, are the so-called "contractor style" and "terrorist look" which combine civilian or tribal attire with isolated or mismatched military gear and attire.

The choice of camouflage pattern of the BDUs is normally determined by suitability to the playing area, but sometimes simply local availability. Typically military surplus stores are a good source for such items. In the U.S. the most common pattern is "Woodland" camouflage pattern, but recently MARPAT (recently adopted by the United States Marine Corps) and ACU (adopted in 2006 by the United States Army) have also become popular choices in North America, but most European camouflage patterns are suitable with Flecktarn (Germany) being a popular alternative or even strictly commercial patterns such as Multicam.

Similarly in Europe, local military uniforms are more readily available and probably more suitable to local conditions. Popular patterns include the German Flecktarn, British DPM or Swiss alpenflage.

Tactical gear

Players wear tactical clothing and accessories not only for the added realism, but to fulfill the practical needs similar to that of a real soldier. Such as being able to carry spare magazines, water, food or other equipment in specified vests. The most common are holsters, load bearing vests, and modular rigs such as MOLLE, ALICE, and the British PLCE systems. Some players even wear military-style helmets, such as the kevlar MICH helmet, or hydration systems, such as those manufactured by Camelbak.

Other equipment

A large amount of equipment exists for real world soldiers which is also usable in airsoft games. Military surplus stores can provide many items currently issued to the player's country but many airsofters go further and purchase other equipment that may have been used by a soldier or private military contractor. Some common examples are scopes, flashlights, picatinny rails, holsters, and silencers. Equipment is generally for increasing combat efficiency, but can be used to provide enhanced realism.

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Â Information Source:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airsoft>