

War games — So real they're fun

"Die Commie pig-dog" I screamed in triumph as I squeezed off my shot ...

By Chris Wattie

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I could hear the enemy moving through the bush somewhere ahead of us. I signalled "Mad Dog" Hammond, my photographer and the best point man alive in the Eastern Theatre, but he's heard it too. Narrowing my steely eyes with cruel determination, I huddled lower in the dense undergrowth to await my quarry. Mad Dog's face showed that he was thinking the same think I was: let the Commie bastard make the first move. We professional always think alike.

The cool barrel of my trusty pistol lay motionless against the line of my iron jaw, ready to strike another blow for democracy and the American Way. With silent cat-like movements I rechecked my cartridge and took off the safety. Now all we had to do was wait.

Suddenly he was in sight. Slinking like the pinko subversive that he was, our target crept out from behind a tree not twenty feet away from where we waited in ambush.

He turned his beady little eyes left, then right, seeming to stare right at me. I remained as motionless as a rock, though my trigger finger itched with anticipation. Any second now I'd have one more enemy of free enterprise to add to my tally.

His suspicious KGB-inspired mind satisfied, the enemy began to scurry across the open ground to my right, never suspecting the torrent of righteous death I was about to unleash. My pistol leapt into action with a life all its own. I lined up the swine in my sights, drooling at the thought of his socialist head exploding into a red mist.

"Die Commie pig-dog" I screamed in triumph as I squeezed off my shot: For a split second he turned in disbelieving horror as my round sped toward its target.

Splat! My bullet had homed in on its mark, thanks to my expert marksmanship. The enemy sank slowly to the ground as a wet sticky substance began to spread from a point directly between his eyes.

Another agent of the Kremlin bites the dust, I thought with satisfaction. I felt no more remorse than if I had squashed a fly. He was just another enemy of the American Way, and besides the paint I'd shot him with would wear off in a day or two. That's right. It wasn't Vietnam in the '60s, or Angola in the '70s, it was somewhere near Perth, Ontario on September 18, 1983 and Strike Force Charlatan was here to play

the National Survival Game.

The National Survival Game was devised a few years ago in (where else?) the United States by someone with a sense of fun even more warped than my own. The idea is to give jaded North American thrill-seekers the feel of combat without messy blood and bodies cluttering up the landscape.

There are four game sites in Ontario, and a few others across Canada. Through some advertising but mostly by word of mouth, the game's popularity has mushroomed in its two-year existence here. Games happened every day this summer in Perth, and we waited two weeks before getting our chance to don fatigues, grab our gear, and test our skills. Most of the men (there were three women), were in their late twenties, early thirties, and many have been here before.

The game site is about one square mile of bush and swamp just outside Perth with boundaries marked off with bright orange tape. Each of the two 18-man teams has a flag set on opposite ends of the playing area, and the object of the game is to capture your opponents' flag and bring it back to your own flag area first.

To achieve this goal each of the combatants is given a carbon dioxide pistol and 30 bullets full of paint. What makes the whole thing worthwhile is the prospect of nailing a member of the other team with a large dollop of

paint. If you're hit by one of these little wonders you are 'dead' and get to sit out the rest of the war in the comfort of your command post along with a commemorative welt on the spot where you were hit.

As I stood over my somewhat bedazzled victim, Mad Dog Hammond moved up to me with his usual cat-like swiftness. "Christ, Wattie, calm down," he muttered, uneasily scanning nearby trees for snipers, "It's only a game."

"Only a game!?" I screamed, wiping the froth from the corners of my mouth, "Don't you realize what we're doing here? Don't you see the crucial point of this entire bizarre excursion?"

"Uh, have fun?" he asked, nervously backing away from the sight of khaki-clad, war-painted, screaming and heavily armed reporter. Mad Dog was obviously losing his grip, something that happens to the best of us under combat conditions. How could I make his alcohol befuddled brain understand that this was no game, this was war.

Mad Dog and I had been drinking heavily since the beginning of the game, a medical necessity considering the warped atmosphere surrounding this entire venture. What had begun as an innocent search for adventure on a boring Sunday afternoon had become something much more ominous.

"Look," I said, speaking

Continued on the next page ...

