



It's been seven years in the making, but the storyline of Swedish MilSim epic, *Operation: Berget*, has come to a close.

UKAPU's Matt Furey-King reports from the frontlines

Operation Berget is like nothing you will experience in the UK. For 10 years this annual game has been growing in popularity and scope. Hosted in the vicinity of Harnon Island in Sweden, the event hosted 2,000 players this year.

The terrain is rocky, forested mountains and open grassland, studded with farms, hamlets and lakes. The proximity to the North Pole means it never truly gets dark, and when the skies are clear it is near-impossible to keep track of the time. The heat is intense, the mosquitoes rarely quit and it is liable to rain to the point where tents are washed away.

Combine these factors with the size of the game area (around 1,000 acres), and the fact it runs constantly from Wednesday to Saturday, and you can see that Berget presents Average Joe Airsofter with a formidable challenge.

The dedication of the players makes this event though. Our faction, the army of the fictional country of Poldavia, consisted of 900 men separated into Infantry, Mechanised, Mountaineer, HQ, Psi-Ops and Sapper units,

with a full chain of command, vehicular transport and radio net. We knew that we'd defend objectives for hours on end, and walk across the whole area, often literally miles from respawn. We knew that we'd probably not see much action.

But being prepared to work hard and stay focussed, trying to maintain the mindset of a real soldier, meant that when it did kick off it was the most intense airsoft combat you would ever experience.

At this 10th anniversary game, the culmination of a seven-year storyline, Poldavia was set to invade neighbouring Zansia. Zansian forces were represented by 240 real-life Finnish mountaineers, and were supported by the 700-strong Northern Alliance Forces (NAF).

After spending the last few years fighting on our own soil, the advantage had swung towards Poldavia and we were now poised on the Zansian border ready to invade. Key to this was a number of nuclear silos; upholding our reputation as Berget's bad guys, our aim was to rain down nukes on Zansian cities.

Wednesday: Game on

After an introduction and briefing, our division set out to eliminate any resistance and hold Devil's Crossing, a point-scoring bunker not far from the NAF Camp. We were the second Section of 1 Platoon, 15th Sappers. Our section was a band of Portuguese, English, Scottish, German and Norwegian players, mostly veterans of previous Bergets and armed with 450fps support guns, mines, C4 and BAVS grenades.

Despite patrolling forward for four hours without a contact, boredom was far from our minds. Somewhere in the distance was the crackle and boom of artillery fire, rained down on the abandoned village, still shattered from the previous year's engagement.

Our noise and movement discipline was good as we moved to within 300m of the target. Visibility dropped down to a few metres in the foliage, and we were ready to move from column to an offensive formation.

Suddenly the squad in front of us started taking hits; the chatter of AEG fire erupted

“If we display our replicas in such a manner in the UK someone would panic. Over there, they just accepted that we are playing a game and that we have a right to live and enjoy ourselves. So refreshing!”



International effort: Matt's section consisted of English, Portuguese, Scottish, German and Norwegian players

around us. We hit the deck, returned fire and tried to coordinate the counterattack. As squad leader Yams tried to assess the state of the squad and form a perimeter, we heard orders barked in a strange language... Finnish!

We knew from last year that the Zansian Finns were an enemy to be respected; walking into a Zansian ambush was a very bad idea. Monty and Furey crawled to the edge of the track and began to empty support gun fire into the woods beyond. The wounded were pulled into the relative safety of our shrinking perimeter to be attended to by medics.

The radio operator had lost contact with our commanders and was trying to get through to 'Scorpion', a Norwegian in the mechanised QRF that had promised to support us if we got in the shit – but they were tied up. The Finnish shouting was virtually on top of us. They'd outmanoeuvred us in a way only well-drilled, real soldiers can.

Although we'd heard a few hits called the numbers against us were staggering – and we'd not even laid eyes on the enemy!

The incoming fire was growing in intensity and our numbers were being decimated. The desperate remnants attempted a breakout – two were hit from close-range bursts so Yams and Mike just ran, right into the steely-eyed Finns who had cut off all lines of retreat.

We regrouped with the rest of the dead and walked back to the village. We'd had our butts kicked, but there was no shame in getting smashed up by the Zansians!

After this intense firefight we were buzzing, keen to respawn and take the fight back to them. It couldn't have been a better introduction for those new to Berget: long build-up followed by short, brutal firefight. The whole incident had lasted 12 minutes at most.

We later found out that our 70-strong unit faced the entire Zansian Black Guard – 240 Finnish mountain troops, who see Berget as a chance to hone their military training in a realistic and unscripted combat simulation! In the words of one Finnish Paratrooper: "I don't play airsoft... I'm only here to sharpen my combat skills."

The 15th regrouped and attacked again that night with the support of 3rd Mountaineers and 5th Infantry. Sheer weight of numbers and a superior position (attacking down a rocky mountainside) won out this time; we successfully displaced the enemy from Devil's Crossing. The 5th stayed back to hold onto the tactical point but there was no time for us to rest; the march home was about four miles. We tabbed back to camp, harassed by occasional raids from enemy mechanised forces mounted in gun-toting off-road vehicles. We were shattered when we got back to base at 04:00 – but that was only the first evening's mission, we still had another three days to go!

Thursday: 'Hold until relieved'

Our objective for the day was to attack, mine and hold the exit road from the NAF camp. Fortunately we were deployed by truck as the road was on the other side of the game area.

As we were so close to their camp we expected contact, and weren't disappointed. Unfortunately 2 section was hit heavily in the opening salvo and we fell back to a swamp overlooking the objective. Like the Paras at Pegasus Bridge we were ordered to 'hold until relieved'. We made a few daring runs onto the open road to plant mines and placed support guns on overwatch.

It took the NAF some time to bring their forces to bear. Meanwhile, their mechanised forces were halted by our roadblock – they advanced up to our mines and our AT gunner





sprinted out and nailed the first vehicle. The rest withdrew, and from then on didn't try to assault our dense swamp with vehicles.

One of the weird things about Op Berget is that it is held on public land, so we sometimes had to stop shooting as bemused Swedish citizens drove through our battlefield after shopping in town! In Sweden there's an enormous respect for personal liberty. Public access to public land is absolute – so we can play airsoft on regular roads and land so long as we aren't hurting anyone. It was odd, patrolling past houses and not going 'off game'. In the UK someone would panic. Over there, they just accepted we were playing a game and have a right to enjoy ourselves. So refreshing!

On Thursday evening we were moved by bus to a remote location. Once there we had to assault a quarry held by NAF forces. In the centre was one of the much-coveted nuclear missile silos, and we had no problems brushing aside resistance.

Friday: Assault on Zansia

On Friday we were tasked with retrieving a package, which – surprise, surprise – was on the other half of the map. Getting there was eventful; our rearguard was taken out by a suicide bomber, who had a bomb in a pineapple (obviously), and when we passed the village we made contact with a significant mechanised force backed by sniper teams.

Our drills were pretty slick and we smashed the vehicle column aside; the snipers survived, withdrawing before we could pin them down. That would haunt us later as key personnel were dropped by silent, well-placed rounds.

After we took the old mill, a respawn building close to the package, we started up a rocky mountainside, culminating in a brutal exchange around the base of a telecoms mast.

To our surprise the package was under the mast, and behind the mast was the NAF base. The small Zansian perimeter around the NAF had been set up almost on the package, so it

was likely picked up by them before we even set off. We fought right up to the perimeter of the enemy camp anyway, which they didn't appreciate much!

Friday evening saw us march down to a rocky outcrop in the south of the game zone between two lakes. We stayed until 2am and held another nuclear silo there. The rain really came down and the hours in the damp and cold became a little too realistic for some.

Although we claimed another silo and keyed in the arming code to the warhead, the expected attack never came. The NAF requested a ceasefire for the night due to the weather. Our friends from Ireland fared worse – they had a rather dedicated sniper team overwatching the enemy base until 6am, and they didn't hear about the ceasefire!

Saturday: The final dash

On Saturday we had to escort the vehicle which was carrying our, now live, nuclear weapon. If we could get it up to the village we could launch it at Zansia! We pushed hard, but the Zansians came out in force.

Berget events usually end in a draw but this time, on the final game, we had the chance to make a lasting statement and drop a fictional nuke right on their beloved fictional country. After seven years of battling it out we got within 100m of the village before we were overrun and the time limit expired – failure!

Still, we'd safeguarded Poldavia – and had a damned good week. Next year Berget Events will start a fresh storyline and we can't wait to see what's coming.

Our final objective, by far the most important, was to attend the beer party. They had a rather cool cover band in the Nordic rock tradition and gave out some goodies. In true spirit, both allies and foes hit the town afterwards in an effort to snag a Swedish lovely! ■

UKAPU AT BERGET

If you'd like to join UKAPU and go along with Matt and the guys next year, visit the UKAPU website. All members are welcome, and membership is open to all airsoft skirmishers.

Estimated cost of attending – including transport and game fees – was around £400. There's no specialist kit required, so that's not a bad cost for half a week of possibly the best skirmishing of your life!

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