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In Army's new recruiting tool, shooting the wrong guys can send you to a virtual Leavenworth

By [Eric B. Pilgrim](#), Stars and Stripes

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The Army isn't playing when it comes to its new online role-playing game, "America's Army."

Released at midnight July 4, the newest weapon in the Army recruiting arsenal hit cyberspace running and gunning, much faster than anybody expected.

"By the 4th of July, we were swamped," said Lt. Col. Casey Wardynski, head of the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis at West Point, N.Y., and the man who came up with the idea for the game.

The game promises a realistic depiction of Army life. Gamers start out in basic training and must graduate before tackling missions.

The game is designed to encourage teamwork, rather than individual prowess.

"Rambo doesn't work here," Wardynski said. "You actually have to play as a team to win."

Unlike most games, which allow participants to shoot whomever they choose with little or no consequences, "America's Army" is designed with built-in consequences for wrong decisions.

Shoot the bad guys and win points for the team. Shoot the innocent or members of your own team and lose points. Continue this tactic and find yourself sitting in prison. Wardynski said the game locks a player up in a virtual Leavenworth for the rest of the game for violating rules of engagement, just like in the real Army.

"America's Army" is split into two parts, Operations and Soldiers. The version released last week was a sampling of Operations. Game updates will be added — including a shot at U.S. Army Sniper School on July 25 and Airborne and Ranger schools on Aug. 22 — with the complete package available by late August, Wardynski said.

The idea for the game came to Wardynski three years ago when Army

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leaders were looking for new recruiting tools.

Wardynski said he went shopping with his children one day and turned down an aisle full of video games. As they passed, he marveled at the sheer number of games depicting Army life and war.

“Most of the information about the Army these days is coming from Hollywood and other folks,” said Maj. Chris Chambers, who works with Wardynski. “We wanted to tell our story, our way.”

Who better to create a game accurately depicting Army life than the Army itself, Chambers said.

One big problem faced them: how to produce, market and deliver a video game into the hands of teens at a reasonable cost.

“I’m an economist by training,” Wardynski said. “So I thought, ‘Maybe we could put the game online, for free. It would drive the cost way down.’ ”

The cost of developing the game was \$6.3 million, according to The Associated Press, which is similar to other games. What they did not figure in was the overwhelming popularity of the game, according to Wardynski.

From July 4 to Sunday, they witnessed 400,000 downloads of the game. At the peak, Web sites with the game were getting 750,000 hits a second.

Computer techs have spent the better part of the week scrambling to keep up with demand. They are up to 110 servers installed, so far.

“We’re going up to 140 servers here in a couple of days and that’s still not enough,” Wardynski said.

One warning order for players: Your computer must meet minimum system requirements for the game to operate. The requirements can be found on the game’s home page’s frequently asked questions.

Chambers said the next step is providing hosting software so interested gamers can become a server with a home computer. Those unable to wait that long will have to fight their way onto www.americasarmy.com or wait for the CD to come out in popular game magazines or at recruiting stations.

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