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E3 2002 - PREVIEWS

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America's Army, the Official U.S. Army Game

5/27/02

Publisher: United States Army
Developer: America's Army Development Team
Platform: PC

Official Website: <http://www.americasarmy.com>

America's Army, the Official U.S. Army Game, is the Army's foray into the world of computer gaming. America's Army is the sum of two parts: *Soldiers*, a two-dimensional strategy game which takes a soldier you create through the ranks of the Army, allowing you to shape your character's values and goals to influence play; and *Operations*, a first-person shooter (FPS) styled team game in which you and your squad cooperate to perform goal-oriented missions and eliminate or contain opposition.



Projected Release: July, 2002

Kyle Ackerman

America's Army, the Official U.S. Army Game, as we mentioned in FI's First Annual E3 Awards, has the best business model FI has ever seen for a game. Best. Business. Model. Ever. The Army pays for the development of the game, and the game is distributed for free as an educational and recruitment tool. It doesn't even end there – the army plans to release the first installment of the game in July of this year, and plans continuous updates and content releases every few months thereafter, with no end in sight. Don't get us wrong, FI believes that this game is a win for everyone involved. Gamers have the potential for a great multiplayer game, and the Army gets what could be the most successful and welcome recruitment tool of all time. The cost of game development is not entirely dissimilar to the cost of a few Superbowl commercials and guarantees (at least at this point in time) access to a much more appropriate demographic. Simply put, FI agrees with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Military Manpower and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel that this is a wise use of taxpayers' recruitment dollars.

America's Army, the Official U.S. Army Game has two components:





Soldiers is like a combination of a movie and a sim game where a career is influenced by the values, resources and goals of your computerized soldier alter-ego. Values include loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. Resources include health, strength, knowledge, skills, finances and popularity. Goals include "luxury car," marksmanship, "be cool," "foreign language fluency," "pay bills," and "minimum work." You will be able to choose a real M.O.S

(Military Occupational Specialty) such as infantry, mechanical maintenance, armor, or administration. Your soldier will start at Basic Training and gradually develop and advance through career options and locations. FI did not have a chance to check out *Soldiers* at E3.

Operations, at first glance, is a conventional FPS, created by a development team that loves games such as Counter-Strike and Quake (the developers were dripping with enthusiasm). *Operations* is the portion of the game FI was able to spend time with at E3. *Operations* is an FPS that emphasizes teamwork, realism and accuracy of equipment. Players will be able to choose a team role (such as squad leader, grenadier or automatic rifleman), an M.O.S. (such as infantry) and qualifications (such as paratrooper, sniper or ranger).

Accuracy and realism have been a heavy focus for *Operations*. Servicemen helped to verify the accuracy of the game, and were involved in designing missions and levels for the game. If you doubt the level of realism the designers are shooting for, just look at a partial list of the available weapons: automatic weapons such as the M249 on the U.S. side with opponents wielding the RPK, assault rifles (M16A2 for U.S., AK47 for opponents), assault rifles with grenade launchers (M16A2/M203 for U.S., AK74/GP-30 for opponents), compact rifles (M4 for U.S., AK-74SU for opponents), sniper rifles (M24, M82 for U.S., Dragunov for opponents), and grenades (fragmentation, smoke, and flashbang). If that's not enough, hardware performance will depend on factors such as temperature, humidity, and wind. In the gameplay FI experienced, weapon loading was displayed in exceptional detail. Even more tension was introduced when weapons jammed – the clearing animation was rendered in excruciating detail, paralleling the anticipation and fear that we can only imagine accompanies a jammed weapon in an actual combat situation. Animations of the player's actions are even based on motion capture of real soldiers in action.



The game is primarily comprised of cooperative multiplayer play, .but has a significant single player element designed to guide the character through progressive training and career advancement. Basic training, for example, should introduce the player to the game, while rigorous sniper training must be completed before gamers can take on a sniper role in-game. Training elements currently include marksmanship training,

airborne school, sniper school and Ranger school missions.



We also commend the Army for their emphasis on team play. Missions are designed to require complete teams, and team kills (TKs) risk sending the player to Leavenworth Prison (complete with sullen harmonica music). The challenge to the America's Army Development Team is to create a game that finds a balance between the challenges of real-life training, the pace of modern warfare and a fun gaming experience. To their credit, the game was easy to jump into, and the time FI spent in-game

was tense and action-packed. The whole experience was a great deal of fun, at least until a terrorist ended our lives with a well placed grenade. Perhaps the best part is that unlike real-life, when you die you can respawn to fight another day. In the immortal words attributed to Nathan Hale, I regret that I have but a limited number of respawns to give to my country.

As a closing thought, FI is curious if legislation such as Rep. Joe Baca has introduced to congress would forbid the Army from engaging in the best recruitment scheme since the Nazi threat in World War II. We can only hope that Rep. Baca and Sen. Lieberman will take the time to understand computer games, and how they can help support the future of America's military. America's Army Development Team has put together an exciting looking game, and FI is looking forward to the ways in which the military can contribute to the average gamer's computer experience.

