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Posted on Thu, May, 23, 2002



U.S. Army invades video game territory

By Anthony Breznican
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES - Uncle Sam is going digital to attract new military recruits as the U.S. Army unveiled two new computer games Wednesday that simulate life as a soldier in combat and basic training.

The military has supplied advice to video-game makers for other titles over the years, but "America's Army, the Official U.S. Army Game" is the military division's first foray into creating games itself.

The PC software consists of two separate titles, "Soldiers," a role-playing character-builder akin to the popular "real life" simulator "The Sims," and "Operations," a first-person shooter game that takes the player on missions to attack enemies.

"The Army's not a game, but we use war games in our training and this is kind of an extension of that. It's just a new way of connecting with young Americans," said Lt. Col. Casey Wardynski, director of the office of Economic and Manpower Analysis.

Recognizing that movies like "Top Gun" and "Black Hawk Down" can help attract new recruits, the military often cooperates with entertainment producers on projects the Pentagon believes presents the organizations fairly.

But it's rare for the military to initiate its own projects.

Wardynski proposed the idea for an Army video game in 1999, arguing that military vehicles and equipment will require greater computer familiarity in the future.

The games are expected to be released in July or August, and all the software will be free, Wardynski said. Most of the 1.2 million discs released will be attached to popular video-game magazines.

By September, the Army expects to have paid about \$7.5 million to create and distribute the games, he added.



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The announcement came at the start of the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the interactive gaming industry's annual worldwide convention. Visitors were greeted by a camouflaged Humvee and small tank parked near the entrance while real soldiers distributed fliers about the games.

John Hiles, one of the creators of the ``Soldiers" title, said it was set on an Army base to show players that even the less glamorous side of military life can be rewarding.

There are no terrorists to hunt in that game, no borders to protect -- but it does feature barking drill instructors, target shooting and other training exercises that offer character-building points.

Characters who pay attention, follow orders and work hard advance on scales that measure loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service and honor. That gives them greater skills and options later in the game.

``If your guy has values, he continues in his career," Hiles said. ``If he's there to party and minimize his work, then maybe he gets stuck and doesn't make it."

The ``Operations" game is a more traditional shooting adventure, featuring battles to defend U.S. interests like the Alaskan oil pipeline or eliminate enemy forces such as a terrorist training camps.

``The game does include violence, but only in the same way the real Army uses force in defense of our country," said Michael Capps, a designer of ``Operations." ``We wanted to portray it as a value-laden organization."

``Operations" is played online with a squad of other remote gamers and, just like ``Soldiers," it rewards positive military behavior.

Any gamer who logs in to cause havoc by shooting at fellow members of the special operations team gets kicked out of the game. The joke is they can still log in -- but their point-of-view is locked behind bars in the Fort Leavenworth military prison.



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