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## Army Turns to Computer Games to Woo Recruits

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By Franklin Paul

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - The U.S. Army wants to know if you can be all that you can be -- in a simulated combat game aimed at the next generation of recruits.

The army on Wednesday unveiled a pair of give-away video games, "Soldiers," a role-playing adventure, and an action game called "Operations," both aimed at gaming enthusiasts who might someday join the military.

Lt. Colonel Casey Wardynski, the father of the promotional concept, said the five-year project seeks to both inform prospective recruits about the varied jobs the Armed Forces unit offers, and to serve as a kind of "screen test."

"We want to want to provide enough information so the young American can see if this is something they would be interested in doing," he said in an interview at the Electronic Entertainment Expo conference in Los Angeles, the video game industry's annual trade show.

"And we would like them to keep their eyes open so they can know 'Here's what the Army expects and here's what we expect from you,'" he said, noting that the program is expected to reach computer users in high schools and colleges.

The free game will be available in August via Internet download, magazines and Army locations and Web sites. The game was built by Department of Defense experts, in conjunction with privately held developer Epic Games.

The game features 20 single and multiplayer scenarios, including training missions ranging from navigating obstacle courses at Fort Benning, Georgia to parachute drops in preparation for assignment to the 82nd Airborne Division.

The campaign casts the Army in a kind of basic training in the \$20 billion gaming industry, where military shoot-em-ups such as "Real War," from Simon and Schuster Interactive, a unit of Viacom Inc. [VIAb.N](#) , and Electronic Arts Inc.'s [ERTS.O](#) "Medal of Honor," as well as those developed by the likes of best-selling author Tom Clancy, are among the most popular.

NO "GUYS TEARING OFF ARMS"

Violent video games have been a commercial hit recently but have also attracted the scrutiny of regulators in the United States and elsewhere. Wardynski said that while the Army's scenarios are informed by real environments, neither countries nor "hostile forces" are labeled with actual names.

In the "Soldiers" role-playing portion, players undergo Army training and adventures while encountering tactical, technical and physical challenges -- similar to experiences recruits might face in their first tour of duty while on and off duty.

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Unlike similar combat games, the primary goal of "America's Army" is not killing a massive number of enemies, but instead completing tasks and setting career goals.

"Is the violence gratuitous? Will there be guys tearing off arms and using them for clubs? No. Because the Army would never do that," he said.

"The employment of force in the game is as it is in the Army," he added. "There are rules ... and if you break those rules, you can see what trouble is like in the Army -- can sit out a round in Fort Leavenworth (military prison in Kansas) listening to a guy play harmonica."

The Army expects by September to spent about \$7.5 million on the program -- less than 1 percent of its total recruitment budget. Moreover it will break even if it woos a relatively small amount of people to enlist, Wardynski said.

"The game pays for itself if only 300 Americans say that this gaming experience convinced me that this is the right thing to do," he said.

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