# Weapons of Mass Distraction— The *America's Army* Game at 20

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*The U.S. Army's recruiting game,* America's Army, *is shutting down after 20 years of operation. In this article, I reminisce about that game's development and its purpose in support of recruiting.*

Recently, the U.S. Army put out this end-of-life headline on the *America's Army* game: "*America's Army*, the Pentagon's Video Game, Shuts Down After 20 Years" (see Figure 1).[1]

My first thought was, "Who would have thought it would last 20 years!" When I directed development of this game back in May 2000, starting in Fall 1999 actually, we thought, we're just going to do this one project, ship the game, and go move on with our life. We had no idea whether we were going to actually ship the game when we started, but we did ship and had great success. And so for two decades, the U.S. Army has used this game to reach new potential recruits, and it's finally shutting it down. What I thought might be helpful for all of you is to go over why we built the game and what the considerations were, what was new and interesting about what was in the game, and then maybe show you some of what the game looked like back in 2003–2004. I dug out some old videos and cleaned them up with a tool from Topaz Labs, and hopefully you will like what you see from 20 years ago. Those videos are on my YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/user/mikezyda/videos?app=desktop.

## SO WHAT IS THE *AMERICA'S ARMY* GAME?

We need to walk through some history on the purpose of the game and why the U.S. Army wanted it made. It wasn't just to build an entertainment game. The purpose was to

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use a game as a medium of communication to young Americans. In this article, we'll talk about some of the innovations we made and reminisce about the project. I think this will be fun; it'll be fun for me.

I served as the principal investigator and development director of the *America's Army* PC game. The project was funded by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Our team at the Naval Postgraduate School's Modeling Virtual Environments and Simulation (MOVES) Institute took *America's Army* from inception to three million-plus registered players and transformed U.S. Army recruiting. I think that's a pretty big deal.

The Army Game Project (AGP) started in September 1999 with a meeting at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) with the project's Program Manager, Col. Casey Wardynski, USA. Political brouhaha delayed the first funding until May 2000. We developed, shipped, and put online a game that, when released was one of the top-five online games of its time. We shipped the 1.0 and 2.0 versions of the game as well as

many intermediate point releases. The project moved out of the NPS's MOVES Institute in May 2004 when the U.S. Army decided it wanted to operate the game development studio itself, without experienced leadership. In 24 h, after the Army made this announcement, the development team of 26 went to six remaining developers.

The goal of the AGP was to build an online, 3D PC game that provided the experience of a potential career in the Army. The idea was to make the game as Army accurate as possible; a game that would educate and engage those young Americans thinking about a potential career in the U.S. Army. The Army was looking for young Americans between the ages of 11 and 14 to play this game. The Army knew that if a young American between those ages played this game, when they turned 18 they would be twice as likely to consider a career in the Army as young Americans who knew nothing about the Army. So we had a pretty important mission with developing this game: we became the point of the spear for recruiting for the U.S. Army once the game was released.
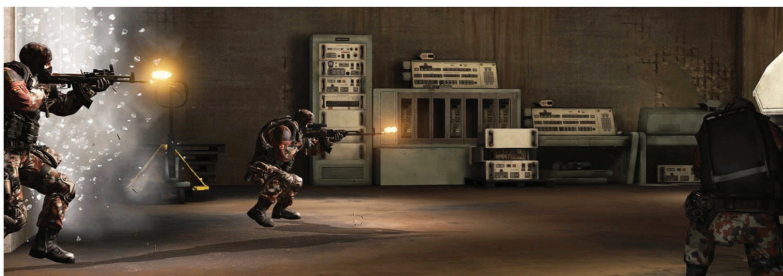
## ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

The origins of the AGP go back to the National Research Council (NRC), Computer Science and Telecommunications Board study "Modeling and Simulation—Linking Entertainment and Defense" (see Figure 2).[3] I chaired this study from 1996 to 1997.

This report specified a joint research agenda for defense and entertainment collaboration in modeling and simulation. This study was a pretty big deal when it came out. It was a guide to the R&D suggested to the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) with respect to maybe thinking about using game engines rather than building their own visual simulation engines. Included in this study was an agenda for joint work on immersive technologies, networked virtual environments, computer-generated autonomy, standards for interoperability, and tools for creating simulated environments. After this report was issued, the DOD moved many of its modeling and simulation



FIGURE 1. *America's Army*, the Pentagon's video game, is shutting down after 20 years.
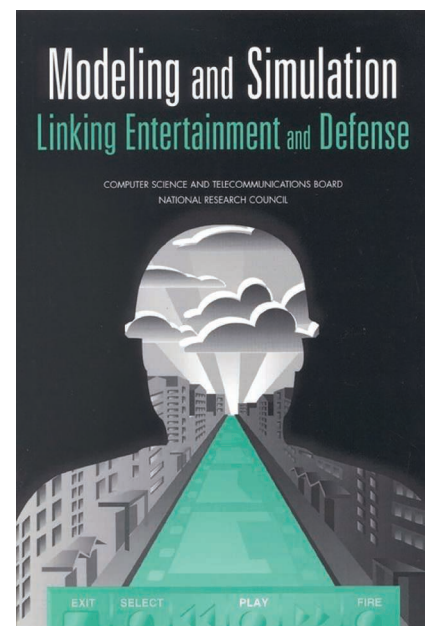


FIGURE 2. The cover of "Modeling and Simulation—Linking Entertainment and Defense."

efforts toward the use of game engines and game technologies. The NRC report states that games and interactive entertainment, not defense research expenditures, had become the main technology drivers for networked virtual environments.

Up until this time, people had thought that DARPA was the driver for computing technology. By 1996–1997, it had become clear that DARPA was no longer the driver for the future of computing technology. The largest driver for new computing technology was pretty much the demand of the

might be a better way to reach young Americans because the Army needed people who could actually play and operate video game consoles and the controllers that came with consoles as future weapons systems were being designed with such interfaces. So Henry turned to Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Military Personnel Management and Equal Opportunity Policy, John P. McLaurin III, and McLaurin turned to Col. Wardynski, director of the West Point Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis and said, "Let's make this game happen."

the Army. Someone my age, from the Vietnam War era, knew many who had served in the military, but by 1999, it was something on the order of 10% of U.S. citizens had served in the military, so family knowledge and encouragement was just not there.

So the goal of *America's Army* operations was to demonstrate life in the infantry. And it took shape as a first-person mission experience. Now let's talk about that term. That's an official Army term. The Army did not want to call it *first-person shooter*, a traditional gaming term. They wanted it as a first-person mission experience. Their goal was to forestall anyone accusing the Army of building a murder simulator. Well, we got accused of building a murder simulator anyway, but it's a first-person mission experience according to the Army.

> The *America's Army* game became the most successful recruiting tool ever built for the U.S. Army.

games industry. The games industry was building larger networked environments than the military, and it was building more accurate 3D characters. The games industry was making interesting strides into artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies for AI characters and games, and DARPA's efforts were just pale shadows of their former selves.

This study turned out to be important. It changed most of the defense modeling and simulation efforts toward game engines and game technologies—it was a big mindset change. In fall 1999, this study engendered founding of the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies—I drafted the research agenda and operating plan to found that institute. The study also convinced Assistant Secretary of the Army, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Patrick T. Henry, that the U.S. Army ought to consider developing a game as the medium for recruiting America's youth.

The initial thought was that maybe a game should be used instead of, you know, NASCAR races and TV commercials and trailers inside of movie theaters. The thought was that a game

In September 1999, John Hiles and I drafted a 10-slide proposal for the Army on how we could build this game and make it a medium for recruiting computer-literate recruits. The Army loved our plan and began raising money for development and operation of the game. The Army had been piggybacking advertisements onto newsreels and movie theaters since the 1930s and 40s and employed trailers in Super Bowl TV ads. The question soon emerged: "Could the Army use PC games for strategic communications to America's youth?" Of course the answer turned out to be "yes" in a very big way. The *America's Army* game became the most successful recruiting tool ever built for the U.S. Army.

This project became an important project for the U.S. Army. Our mission was to recreate the U.S. Army in game form for the benefit of young civilians. Nineteen ninety-nine was a critical year for the U.S. Army; it was failing to meet recruiting numbers and needed a better way to reach America's youth. The biggest issue then for the Army was that the youth who applied to the Army didn't have any parents, uncles, grandfathers, or cousins who had served in

The game starts with required training. A player cannot use a particular weapon without first qualifying on the appropriate range. The game models everything after how it is done in the Army. You don't get to shoot a rifle unless you have taken the training on that rifle. For this project, the Army vision for a fully 3D-accurate gaming environment went beyond anything that was on the market, or at least was competitive with what was on the market at the time of release. And the Army wanted it to be competitive technologically as well. What the Army wanted was to make an entertaining game. It wanted to make a game that kept the player coming back. So this was not just going to be an educational show about the Army, it was also going to be fun. We were going to use "collateral learning," which means you learn about the Army while playing. We weren't teaching you a specific lesson plan, you would just learn as you played the game.

The game was built in secret. It took us 24 months to build *America's Army* 1.0, and we had to get Army approvals before the game's debut at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in May 2002. The Army wanted to look at the game. It had its colonels in the

Pentagon playing it in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army to make sure that everything was Army accurate, that there was not going to be any discrediting of the Army in the game. So that was it.

## BUILDING THE GAME

The first funding for this project arrived in May 2000. There was a lot of political maneuvering to stop it from getting built, but in the end, we got the funding and started building the game. We created a development team by networking with friends and consultants and ended up with veteran artists, designers, and programmers from Maxis, Electronic Arts, Sony, and Kalisto, and between them, their expertise included some 31 commercially shipped games, which we thought was a lot at the time. Now we had a team of 26 developers.

With that group of designers, artists, programmers, and producers, we started to research the Army. We bought everyone battle dress uniforms and boots and sent the development team to 19 different Army posts to videotape, photograph, and record audio of everything that moved and everything that didn't, and sent the team to learn how to shoot M-16s and sniper rifles, throw hand grenades, fire mortars, and perform nighttime parachute drops with the troops. This created a motivated and informed group of level designers, artists, and game programmers eager to attain higher levels of game development, both literally and figuratively. Our development team got to play Army, which was super helpful because they then knew how to make a game about the Army. It was probably the best educated game development team ever!

## HOW THE GAME BEGINS

The game starts in single-player mode, with a new recruit ready to train on basic rifle marksmanship and combat training—it's Army basic combat training (BCT) in game form. The game has an accurate model of the ranges at Fort Benning, Georgia. The player's range score determines his or her ability to go on subsequent missions; if the player scores poorly anywhere in training, then that player has to remain in that range until a passing score is achieved. If the player does well, he or she may be advanced to M-24 rifle qualification at U.S. Army Sniper School where the player learns, among other things, to breathe at the right moment in the firing sequence.

And by the way, it's interesting because we designed this from the real world to the game, one of the things that happened later on once the game was released, is the people at Fort Benning, when they had someone who was having trouble passing the range, they would say, "Okay, we're taking you off the real range and putting you in the *America's Army* game in the BCT level. You have to play that game until you pass virtual BCT." So you play the game until you pass BCT and then they put him or her back up in the real range. And everyone who had that experience passed the real range the next time, first time. So this game ended up being a valuable recruiting and training tool for the Army.

The weaponry is represented as precisely as possible in this game. For example, weapons must be loaded and cleared as in real life, and a load is finite. You don't have infinite bullets. You've got to stop and reload the gun and clear jams occasionally. All of that stuff seems tedious, but it's what the Army wants you to know. We achieved a high level of verisimilitude.

Again, soldiers who know Fort Benning recognize that the BCT obstacle course is timed and sequenced as in real life. Single-player training features the McKenna Military Operations in Urban Terrain course in Fort Benning, including the use of flashbangs as the player clears a dark building of terrorists pop-up targets.

In the multiplayer part of operations, you can do 13-versus-13 play. No one plays a villain fighting the U.S. Army. Each team sees itself as a part of the U.S. Army and the other team is the opposition. At the same time, the enemy perceives itself as the U.S. Army, the other side as villains. The Army wants you to play as the Army in all respects. This has always caused some concern as the game is either U.S. Army versus U.S. Army, or what exactly?

Cooperation is a very important part of this game. The goal is not to blast everyone in sight but to cooperate as a team and have a purpose, which might be to identify a weapons cache, rescue a prisoner of war, or perhaps assault an airfield. The scenarios are designed so that mission goals and objectives make sense to both teams and require one group to assault and the other to defend. All players abide by the rules of warfare. If a player violates the Uniform Code of Military Justice, rules of engagement, or laws of land warfare, justice is swift. The errant player finds himself in a cell at Fort Leavenworth, accompanied by a harmonica playing the blues. Continued violation of the rules may cause the player to be eliminated from the game and their user ID turned off.

The U.S. Army insisted on Army values being used in all cases in the game. The Army has formally defined its values! Army values are things like loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. In fact, during this project, the Army brought us keychains with the Army values on it. They wanted us all to have them on our keychain. These values are important things in real life as well, and the most important is loyalty. Your country falls apart if people are not willing to be loyal to the Constitution. *Duty* means fulfilling your obligations. *Respect* means treating people as they should be treated. *Selfless service* means taking care of the welfare of the nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own self. Honor means living up to all the Army's values. Integrity means always doing what's right—legally, morally, and with personal courage—facing fear, danger, or adversity—physical or moral—and being courageous.

So our orders were to make a game that matched all those values. When we finished parts of the game and shipped a level to the Army, the Army had colonels who would check to make sure we matched those values. If something wasn't right, the Army would come back with a change request.

One of the things we looked at for *America's Army* was instrumentation of the game so that we could learn something about the game player. We had the U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI) perform a study to investigate whether a game player's aptitude for an Army career could be computed from gameplay. The work from ARI showed that the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery score could be computed from gameplay. We did not end up putting that instrumentation into the game as the Army determined, quite rightly, that there were serious privacy issues with respect to that instrumentation. That study, however, has led many people to consider such instrumentation for other educational games.



**FIGURE 3.** A *Los Angeles Times* front-page story on *America's Army*, 22 May 2002.

### E3 2002

The 22nd of May 2002 was a great day. I woke up early, having spent the night until about 3:34 a.m. at the corner of Pico and Figueroa in downtown Los Angeles waiting for missile launchers. When I awoke at 9 a.m., I stumbled into the taxi that would drive me to the Los Angeles Convention Center, and I had the *Los Angeles Times* in a plastic bag, not yet opened. As I rode in the taxi, I pulled the paper out of its plastic sack and there, right on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*, below the fold, sadly, was a fantastic article written by Alex Pham (Figure 3). I knew it was going to be a busy day, and I wished I had had more sleep.

Our booth had a giant display screen high above the convention floor, an oversized American flag, ropes for soldiers to fast-rope down, and every 2 h an Army bugler called in an armed company of men, simulating an air insertion, including soldiers scrubbing down ropes hung from the ceiling.

Long lines to our booth blocked the Sony PlayStation booth next door, but thankfully, their head of security was retired Army, so this was no big deal. We were the only game at E3 in 2002 that was built by a U.S. government agency (see Figure 4). We built a hit game inside of the Naval Postgraduate School, a part of the U.S. Department of the Navy, for the U.S. Army and got it to such a quality level that we could show



**FIGURE 4.** The *America's Army* booth at E3 2002.

it off at E3. It became one of the top-five online games when it was released 4 July 2002. This was a big deal. This had never happened before, and it's not likely to happen ever again, most likely.

Figure 5 shows the missile launchers I had waited for in the dead of the night. They were a part of the Army's publicity campaign bring attention to the just-announced *America's Army* Game. The Army had tasked me with waiting at the corner of Pico and Figueroa for these missile systems and acquiring a video camera I could use to capture their arrival. I got there at 2 a.m. to begin waiting. I wore a long coat as it was cold, and I had my backpack of supplies for the wait. I had the camera in my hand to capture the missile launchers' arrival. At about 3:00 a.m., the Los Angeles Police Department arrived and asked me what I was doing standing out there. I told them I was waiting for my missile launchers, which, in retrospect was perhaps not the right way to start the conversation, but I soon had their full attention. They said, "Missile launchers? What are you going to do with missile launchers?"

Now this is 22 May 2002, well after the 9/11 attacks. And I am standing at the corner of the Los Angeles Convention Center talking about missile launchers not that far away from planes flying overhead on their way to the Los Angeles International Airport. I rapidly explained to them that we had permission to put the missile launchers onto that corner from the appropriate convention center personnel. Well, they wanted to call that person right then to find out, and of course, that person was asleep, and their cell phone was turned off. So it got a bit dicey until, all of a sudden, the Army's giant flatbed truck with the missile launchers arrived at the corner and straightened them all out. So it wasn't the missile launchers that were the problem, but me standing there waiting around without any missile launchers that was the problem.

Figure 6 depicts soldiers fast-roping down using the Australian maneuver, which means coming down head first so that you can actually shoot someone as you do so. If you're coming down feet first, you don't want to shoot through your legs because you might blow off your foot. And you can see that this is very exciting and very noisy. We have a bugler that starts exactly when you want to have people come and run to the booth.

## OUR SOLDIER DEMO TEAM

We had a massive number of people all the time in our booth to see the performance of soldiers in the simulated insertion mission. Figure 7 is my



**FIGURE 5.** Stinger missiles on the Hummer and Bradley Fighting Vehicle at the corner of Pico and Figueroa at E3 2002.



**FIGURE 6.** U.S. Army soldiers fast-roping down from the ceiling of the *America's Army* booth at E3 2002.

favorite photo of those soldiers. Notice how their weapons each have a pink tag on them. During E3 2002, the security team for the event had decided that they needed to check each bag that came into the convention center. As they finished "checking" each bag, they placed a pink tag on it. So, when 65 soldiers came in with weapons, they took a quick look and attached pink tags onto each and every weapon.

Figure 8 illustrates our bugler, and he's awesome. When he plays the bugle you can hear it across the very noisy convention center, and it fills our booth with visitors.

We have our website, Americas Army.com, up and running, but the game won't be there until the 4 July 2002. We're getting 180,000 unique visitors per hour and 18,000 pages served every 5 s—this is just for images from the game.

### AMERICA'S ARMY IN THE NEWS

The Pham article in the *Los Angeles Times* is just the start. Her "Uncle Sim Wants You Message" is cool and just the start of press coverage for the game. We win a bunch of awards and this is pretty awesome. We win "Best Business Model"; "Runner-Up Best PC Action Game"; "Biggest E3 Surprise"; "Best of Show, First-Person Tactical Shooters"; and "Best of E3." We are in a huge number of mainstream and online press stories, including Frictionless Insight, GamesDomain, CNET reviews, IGN, Gamespot, ZenGamer, Adrenaline Vault, Blue's News, *BusinessWeek Online*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, Cable News Network (CNN), CNN Money, CNET, Dolby Press Release, GameSpy, HomeLan Fed, The *Los Angeles Times*, LANparty.com, The *Monterey Herald*, MSNBC, *Newsweek*, Reuters, Salon.com, The *San Francisco Chronicle*, The *San Jose Mercury*, U.S. Army Press Release, *USA Today*, The *Wall Street Journal*, and twice in The *Washington Post*! There were many other interviews that engendered articles, and I believe I did something on the order of 200 interviews over the next three weeks on the game. We were in popular culture—comics, TV, and film.

### BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY 2002

At 2 a.m. on 4 July 2002, the first 10 levels of *America's Army* were posted to the Internet, and by noon the next day, 500,000 downloads of the 211-MB game had occurred. We were getting 750,000 hits per second for 4 and 5 July 2002 on the AmericasArmy.com website. The Army's 140 game servers were swamped, and we had to rush and complete the community server kit. By 15 July 2002, we were seeing 1,900 servers—counting all the community servers—and by 21 August,



**FIGURE 7.** U.S. Army soldiers in our booth at E3 2002.



**FIGURE 8.** The official *America's Army* bugler for E3 2002.

6,500 servers, and again, there's 26 players per server.

## GAMES ON A CD-ROM

We also put this out in CD-ROMs that were available at every Army post and recruitment center. The game is on a CD-ROM for PC installation, with U.S. Army logos on there as well as the MOVES Institute logo. That was so awesome. We sent 100 copies to every recruiting station in America and overseas. What was really interesting was when the Army bought laptops for every single recruiting station, their biggest concern was whether the recruiter was going to sit there and play video games and watch movies all day long. So they ordered a special batch of laptops that had the CD-ROM/DVD player removed. All of a sudden, we sent them all 100 copies of a CD-ROM with our game on it, and they weren't able to play it. The Army then hurriedly purchased external drives for all the driveless laptops. You know, sometimes people cannot predict the future accurately, and they make decisions that are somewhat petty and miss things/

Prima Games put out a guide that basically told you how to play the game, win the game, and also had the CD-ROM inside. It was everywhere. For a long time, I had piles of these. I remember going through the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at the Monterey airport, and they saw this big lump of CD-ROMs on the top of my suitcase and asked, "What the heck was that?" I showed them a game disk and they all wanted to play! And every single TSA guy at the Monterey airport ended up with a copy, and they loved the game. And the next week when I went back through security, they were like, "Oh, it's so cool!" Our heads and hearts swelled.

## MORE PRESS ...

In October 2002 they announce the IGN awards, and one of the top-five games is *America's Army*. We received an 8.8 rating. The highest rating is 9. This award is a sign of excellence normally reserved only for the most successful shipped games. We ended up being a finalist for the 2003 Best PC, First Person Action Game of the Year at the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences DICE Award Event. And the few other games that we competed against were Medal of Honor Allied Assault, published by Electronic Arts, and No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy in HARMS Way, published by Sierra Entertainment.

## E3 2003

E3 2003 became a much larger production (see Figure 9), with a booth built to look like an Afghan village, missile launchers and machine guns in front of the convention center, and a helicopter that flew around the Transamerica Building east of the convention center, followed by a group of soldiers that fast-roped from the helicopter to the parking lot at the corner of Pico and Figueroa every 2 h (see Figure 10). I stood under the helicopter to get some pictures of the drop, and my backpack with my laptop in it started blowing across the parking lot, and my shoes filled with blown-in sand. The metal parking sign that advertised "Parking US$40 Per Day" almost became a flying guillotine.

Our booth, a reproduction of an Afghan village, cost US$965,000 to build, and it was absolutely worth it in terms of getting visitors to listen to the Army's message. We had a crashed helicopter simulator and downed bleeding pilot. And we had our bugler once again to call in the crowd (see Figure 11). We had soldiers coming to the crashed helicopter to rescue the downed pilot when the bugler called (see Figures 12–14).

The development team was awesome. The game development was always on time and under budget. All of our team members were great; I point out two members that led this project to extreme success: Alex Mayberry, executive producer for the *America's Army*, and Lt. Col. George Juntiff, USA. Lt. Col. Juntiff is one of the best people you can ever know or work with. He provided us with on-site, Army-accurate design improvements and made all the right introductions we needed to access information about the U.S. Army. After this project concluded at the MOVES Institute, Mayberry went on to Blizzard to be the lead game producer for World of Warcraft and Diablo 3. Lt. Col. Juntiff went on a career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and did great things there.



**FIGURE 9.** *America's Army* at E3 2003.

## *AMERICA'S ARMY* BECOMES A CULTURAL PHENOMENA

With the 2003 release of *America's Army*, it becomes a cultural phenomenon. At that time, there were more than 100 fan sites, and there were people doing their thesis on the game! At one talk I gave, there were three people in the room who were doing their master's and Ph.D theses on soldiers playing as a community. We had a whole host of soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War playing as a community as well as many religious groups. Some of these soldiers were getting their team back together to play this game!



**FIGURE 10.** The U.S. Army fast-roping down at the corner of Pico and Figueroa in downtown Los Angeles.



**FIGURE 11.** The official *America's Army* bugler.

As a community, international play of *America's Army* was 35% people from other countries. Croatia was huge. The only Croatian PC magazine released their last issue with an *America's Army* DVD in the wrapper so that every subscriber would have a copy.

By November 2003, we had 2.2 million registered players with 1.4 million having completed basic training and a total of more than 290 million missions played, at an average time of 7 min per mission. This is something like 33.8 million h, 1.4 million days, or 3,862 years of game play in *America's Army*. At the minimum wage rate of 2003, we computed that US$263 million was lost due to *America's Army* play.

On 28 February 2004, we hit 3 million registered players. That's a big deal. We started this project in May 2000 and our biggest worry was would we ever even ship a working game? We not only shipped it, we shipped the 1.01 version. We shipped a lot of point versions: 1.1 and 1.2; every 90 days we were putting out new levels. The same is true for the 2.0 Special Forces version (see Figure 15), and we shipped the 2.2, 2.4, and 2.6 versions. This game did a lot of good for the U.S. Army and our country.

## GAME FINANCES AND PURPOSE

Many people asked about the development and operations cost of the game. Most of them were looking to see some sort of waste of the U.S. Army's money with this game's development. We had US$4.5 million per year from May 2000 to March 2004 to develop and operate the game. With that funding, we shipped and operated an AAA-title competitive game that was in the top five of online games played. With respect to the game's impact on recruiting, we know that we built the most successful recruiting tool ever developed for the U.S. Army.

In the years 2000–2004, the Army spent US$2 billion per year on recruiting 120,000 soldiers—80,000 for the Army and 40,000 for the National

Guard. The Army spent US$16,000 to recruit each new soldier. The experience the Army was having in those years was that 20% of those recruited, 24,000 recruits, would drop out of BCT. Most of the dropouts indicated that BCT was not what they expected, hence their reason for leaving. This is 24,000 × US$16,000, or US$400 million lost recruiting expenditures. BCT training losses were 24,000 × US$75,000, or US$1.8 billion. So in total, US$2.2 billion lost per year!

The Army's initial evaluation was that the *America's Army* game had the potential to save them between US$700 million to US$4 billion per year by operation of the game. Our development and operations costs completely paid off if we changed the mind of 120 soldiers to decide to stay in the Army after BCT because of their familiarity with BCT from the game.

This is a small amount of money. I have no idea why the Army wants to turn this game off. They must not want to recruit anyone anymore.

## THE GAME SHUTS DOWN …

The *America's Army* game shuts down after 20 years in May 2022, and it makes no sense to shut down this recruiting tool. For two decades, the Army has used a video game to reach to new recruits, and it has been a huge success. Instead, what the Army is



**FIGURE 12.** A downed helicopter rescue simulation.



**FIGURE 13.** The U.S. Army soldiers who participated in the *America's Army* booth at E3 2003.

**FIGURE 14.** The *America's Army* development team at E3 2003.



**FIGURE 15.** *America's Army 2.0.*

doing now is they have decided to just tag along with eSports events, playing *Call of Duty* or some such similar game, none of which are close to how it is done in the real Army.

In that eSports event, the Army will just put a logo on there that says, "America's Army" and call it a day, which is sad because you don't learn about the Army. You don't learn about the history. You don't get to see what the barracks look like. You don't get to customize your weapon. You don't get to learn Army values. You just get to watch people play an entertainment game. ◼

## COMMENTS?

If you have comments about this article, or topics or references I should have cited or you want to rant back to me on why what I say is nonsense, I want to hear. Every time we finish one of these columns, and it goes to print, what I'm going to do is get it up online and maybe point to it at my Facebook (mikezyda) and my LinkedIn (mikezyda) pages so that I can receive comments from you. Maybe we'll react to some of those comments in future columns or online to enlighten you in real time! This is the "Games" column. You have a wonderful day!

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