

Exhibit 18

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On Maneuvers With the Army's Game Squad

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THE seven-vehicle United States Army convoy set out from grid coordinate EG223785 just after 1:30 p.m. on Feb. 8, bound for an improvised landing zone a few miles southwest. Intelligence reports indicated that enemy forces equipped with small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars were active in the area.

The convoy's hulking five-ton trucks bore nervous civilians in need of evacuation. As the convoy bounced along snow-dusted trails and high plains, Clayton Montgomery, a wiry 24-year-old known to his colleagues as Monkey, swiveled from side to side. "Anyone spot any Opfor?" he said, using shorthand for opposition forces as he scanned the looming ridges.

"I have the feeling they'll see us first," said another passenger, Randy Brown.

He was right. At 2:25 p.m., as the convoy pushed slowly through a wooded ravine, the air erupted with automatic-weapons fire. Green smoke wafted through the truck's open sides. Through the haze, the camouflaged ambush team could be seen behind boulders and brush as the convoy's machine-gunners returned fire.

The fight was over in a minute, and the convoy rushed toward the landing area. Soon two Black Hawk helicopters were swooping through canyons, carrying the evacuees to safety.

There were no casualties. That was probably because the ambushers and the convoy guards were shooting blanks. But the guns were real. The helicopters and the trucks were real. The subzero wind chill was real.

Rather than evacuating a crew of aid workers, the Army detachment was shepherding a few dozen programmers, designers and marketers who have been working on one of the Army's latest recruiting tools: a computer game called, simply enough, America's Army. Rather than the mountain passes of Afghanistan, the convoy was traversing the equally rugged terrain at this remote Army base 100 miles north of Cheyenne, which is sometimes used to train Special Forces units.

America's Army lets users play soldier online, band together with other Internet warriors and battle enemies in detailed 10-minute scenarios that the Army says are more realistic than any other game. It is available free for downloading at americasarmy.com. (A retail version for console systems will be released in the summer.)

Since its introduction on July 4, 2002, America's Army has registered about 4.7 million users, and on a typical day more than 30,000 people log on to the game's official servers, in addition to the thousands who play in unofficial leagues. That makes it one of cyberspace's more popular combat games. Since the game's release, the Army's civilian developers have released updates on the Web every few months. Now, the Army is beginning to use the game's technology to help train its own people.

The Army regularly sends soldiers to advise the project's civilian designers, who are Pentagon contractors. But when it comes to making the game realistic, nothing compares to sending programmers to the Army. So twice a year the Army sends the designers to play war games for a few days in what it calls Green Up events.

"The whole idea is for the designers to get a feel of what it's like to be with soldiers, what they do for a living, what it sounds like, what it feels like, even what it smells like," said Col. Casey Wardynski, who dreamed up America's Army as the director of the Army's Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis, at West Point. "You can't put a lot of that into the game, but the experience helps make the game more realistic."

The Army has no detailed figures on the game's success in encouraging young men and women to enlist, but a 2003 survey indicated that the game, which costs the Pentagon about \$6 million a year, is more effective at delivering the Army's messages to young people than the hundreds of millions of dollars a year the Army spends on advertising, Colonel Wardynski said.

Just about every Army recruiting station stocks copies of the game, and some recruiters are organizing America's Army tournaments. The game's latest update, to be released online shortly, is called Firefight. The focus of the update is adding administrative tools to streamline online tournament play.

The way the Army sees it, the game's appeal is rooted in its realism. And the Green Up events are an important way of instilling it. As James Cowgill, a designer of the project, said as he braced for another potentially tongue-severing pothole in the back of the truck: "It's the new Wyoming dude ranch. You go on a convoy and get ambushed."

The Soldier's Life

Strapped into a bucket seat and wearing earplugs to protect him from the Krakatoan roar, Erich A. Blattner, 34, the game's quality-assurance director, could not make himself heard as the Black Hawk helicopter lifted off from a landing zone.

But it was easy to read his lips and the teeth that showed through his broad smile.

"You can't buy this!" he shouted into the din.

It isn't often you can elicit expressions of pure wonder (tainted by hints of queasiness) from a dozen adults packed in close quarters. Racing them barely 50 feet above the spectacularly coarse Wyoming landscape in a military helicopter at more than 100 miles an hour is a good way to do it.

A couple of the developers indicated that they were attracted to the job largely because the Army probably wouldn't go out of business any time soon (as small game companies do all the time). But for many of the programmers, artists and designers, working on America's Army seemed a way to indulge their yen for things military without the boot camp.

As they took apart assault rifles, shot with simulated and real weapons, peered through night-vision goggles and rode on military vehicles, it seemed that at least some of the developers were feeding an underindulged part of themselves.

"This whole experience kind of makes me wish I had joined," Mr. Blattner said between rifle training sessions. "Essentially I'm very much a cynic, and in my job being cynical comes in handy because as a Q.A. manager I have to question everything. But the people I see in the military genuinely believe and feel that they are doing the work of good." His age and physical condition would be barriers to enlistment now, he said, and besides, "I'm not good at following orders."

Mr. Montgomery, aka Monkey, a 3-D level designer, often appeared more military than the soldiers. Walking out of the

mess hall about 7:15 a.m. swathed in camouflage and a black balaclava and face mask, and draped with numerous pouches and straps, he looked ready to infiltrate enemy lines.

Maj. Randy Zeegers, a Special Forces commander who has been the main liaison between the project and the operational Army (he is scheduled to return to Afghanistan at the end of the month), called Mr. Montgomery the Ninja.

"These guys are passionate about their work, and you can see that in how seriously they take it," Major Zeegers said. "It's their way of contributing to the war effort."

Rea M.K. Giner-Sorolla, 42, a quality-assurance manager and the only woman on the game development team, had a different perspective.

"I never considered joining the military," she said in the back of a five-ton truck on the way to observing an airdrop from a C-130 cargo plane. "For me, this is a look into a different way of life, and I think this is where I differ from some of the boys on the team. I've enjoyed firing the weapons, but I'm more interested in seeing how these Army men relate to one another, how they behave and work together."

Aside from the atmospherics and surrogate soldiering, the developers came away with a lot of concrete information. Toward the end of the summer they hope to release a module called Special Forces: Overmatch, which will allow gameplay as a member of the Green Berets. Many of the vehicles they rode and weapons they fired will appear in the game.

The elements they took from the mountains were more subtle. One developer said he wanted to add a jostling video effect when the players were in the back of a truck. After spending a few minutes under the targets at a 100-meter firing range, another developer said he would change the "whizzing" sound effect when a bullet passed by to a more realistic "crack" that emulates the miniature sonic boom that a military round really creates.

"The players may not notice each thing, but this trip will find its expression in the game's overall realism," said Michael J. Aubuchon, known as Ace and the game's 29-year-old associate producer.

But even realism has its bounds. For all of the olive drab trappings, there was no pretense in Wyoming that the game experts were actually experiencing combat conditions. The designers (and accompanying journalists) had to get up early, but at least they had beds. The weather was cold, but a morning session planned for the obstacle course was canceled because of icy conditions.

Likewise, while the equipment and uniforms in the game are designed with maximum realism in mind, the same approach does not apply to other aspects of the military experience, like death and injury. In contrast to other popular computer games, in America's Army limbs are never blown off. Instead, wounds are marked by a puff of red smoke. Maimed foes never writhe or scream in agony.

"We have a Teen rating that allows 13-year-olds to play, and in order to maintain that rating we have to adhere to certain standards," said Chris Chambers, a retired Army major who is now the project's deputy director. "We don't use blood and gore and violence to entertain. That's not the purpose of our game. But there is a death animation, there is a consequence to pulling the trigger, and we're not sugarcoating that aspect in any way.

"We want to reach young people to show them what the Army does, and we're obviously proud of that. We can't reach them if we are over the top with violence and other aspects of war that might not be appropriate. It's a choice we made to be able to reach the audience we want."

The Work Is in the Details

The search for that audience begins on the bluffs of the Monterey Peninsula in California, where the America's Army development team is based. Except for its location in a former military hospital protected by guards, the office may resemble that of any other game company. The shades are usually drawn, so as to block out any possible glimpses of the Pacific Ocean and so the designers can better view the gargantuan computer monitors before them.

The week before the Wyoming event, Major Zeegers and Sgt. First Class Doug Davidson, another Special Forces soldier, spent a few days reviewing the game team's latest efforts. When they weren't encased in motion capture suits to record the latest urban assault techniques, they reviewed the game's latest mission assignment documents to ensure that they conformed with Army argot. When they were not recording video clips that will be used to explain various Special Forces roles to the game's players, they were engaging in arcane exchanges with the developers about the latest Army hardware.

"In the next-generation version of the game we're going to have the new 249," Mr. Aubuchon said to Sergeant Davidson, referring to a type of machine gun. "And it will have the new Picatinny Rail on top, but do you know if that uses the ACOG?"

ACOG is the Advanced Combat Optical Gunsight, but it is apparently not best suited for the 249.

"Well, the ACOG is used mostly on the M4, not on the 249," Sergeant Davidson replied. "On the 249 you would normally use an M145," another kind of gun sight.

In a few minutes, the sergeant moved on to comparing an informal Army training video on demolition techniques, set to Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Chile" and AC/DC's "Back in Black," with the explosives-charging animations in a recent version of the game. "Ah, so it's more of a pulling motion than a twisting motion, is that right?" Mr. Aubuchon asked the sergeant.

The emphasis on technical minutiae is all part of what Mr. Chambers called the game's mandate to "strategically communicate the Army's values to the American public."

In the game, if players try to run off on their own rather than work with their team, they will almost surely lose. If players consistently kill civilians or their own teammates, they end up in Leavenworth.

"We don't expect that a young person is going to play the game and run out and join the Army," Mr. Chambers said. "That was never the point. We want the game to help us form a more long-term connection with the young person."