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# E3 coverage

You'd Better Believe it!

By Phineas

Surrender!



## America's Army: Operations



Dynamic lighting and attention to detail add to the ambiance

It sounds like a conspiracy, doesn't it? A game funded by the government, made by the Army, and given away to the public for free. The kicker is that it is totally and completely free. When you think about it, it's not terribly surprising. If you want to reach the youth of America, go where the youth go: video games.

Initially, there was some concern over the government releasing a game in which players can play as terrorists, eliminating American soldiers. Obviously, in today's world of paranoid misconceptions of video games, this would most definitely not be a good thing for the industry. Luckily, these concerns are only rumours (I mean, come on, do you think the government is that dumb...no George Bush jokes, please!). In America's Army: Operations, you always play as the good guys (American soldiers), while the opposing force is always a generic unnamed enemy. True to form, the ``unnamed enemy`` is modeled accurately, and fit the bill of a former soviet nation, complete with all the equipment and op-for weaponry that they would be expected to use. This has proved to be quite an ingenious solution to the problem, and it goes to show how much thought went into the game. Missions are laid out such that you, the American team, always are fighting in a plausible situation against an enemy faction, no matter what your mission objectives on the map are. This goes to show just how well this game has been planned out. Continuity never suffers from gameplay decisions.

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The game is technically astounding. Based off of the Unreal Tournament 2003 code line, the game is one of the public's first opportunities to sample the next generation of computer gaming technology. Visually astounding and boasting astronomical poly counts compared to those of its competition, it's like Counter-Strike on crack. Surfaces are smooth, the shadows and dynamic lighting are brilliant, and the little moths flying around light sources are a stroke of genius that are a huge boon for the atmosphere. But enough praise, let's take a closer look at why this game is so great.



What one immediately notices when playing AA:O is the attention to detail given to every element of the game. As the video on the E3 show floor said, nobody knows the Army like the Army, and it's readily apparent that they're right (I mean, would you disagree with a bunch of troops continually doing air insertions from the top of the convention centre?). There was an incredible amount of effort given to accurately model each of the weapons used in painstaking detail. Actual military weaponry was used to create the models, actual shot to get the sounds, and the animations for reloading and clearing a jam are exactly what you'd expect to see if you were attending West Point instead of living at home with j00r m4m4. The weapons in the game even jam with their actual rates in the field, something that can turn you in to a pile of hamburger quite fast if you aren't careful. And as if that weren't



NightVision system in-game

enough, some guns feature bipod supports, and all give you the ability to use the iron sights for increased accuracy. Another often-overlooked extra feature that you might find interesting is the night vision system, which for the first time actually works like night vision. Not content to just bump the gamma and turn everything a green tint, AA:O had to take it to the next level. By making night vision that works off of objects properties such as luminosity, AA:O achieves a near-perfect NVG system. The effect is rather dramatic on a mission where the objective is to infiltrate an airfield at night. In the surrounding forests, night vision is essential to avoid playing human pinball with the trees, but when you crest the hill overlooking the lit airfield, the goggles become saturated and useless. VERY cool!

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As far as gameplay, it is pretty much what you've grown to love (and sometimes hate) in Counter-Strike. There are three mission modes, including hostage rescue and a defend (or capture) the objective mode. Gameplay is smooth, and the emphasis is on teamwork. One of the games innovations in this area is the use of hand signals. In the field, people can hear you (Yes! Hard to believe, I know), so in true military form, a complete assortment of team hand signals is available. However, just like that box of chocolates that your grandma sends you, there are the valuable gems (like those nifty caramel pieces, yum!) and the ones that you feed to your cat (like the rum balls, blech!). There isn't a large focus on innovating the tried-and-true military gameplay, but rather on making the old gameplay perfect and more refined. Is it a trade-off? I wouldn't say so. One needs look only as far as the Counter-Strike phenomenon to see that the gameplay works, and works well. In AA:O, they've taken everything lacking in CS's gameplay and technology and refined it to a level that will bring even the most adamant CS hater to the table.

From the public's initial reaction to the game, it looks like you might be seeing it at your next LANParty. The killer combination of the Unreal engine, completely accurate and detailed environments and weapons, as well as the little gameplay and technical details that are often overlooked in reviews make for a truly excellent gaming experience. To top it off, it's free. You don't even have to join the Army (but the menu makes it oh so easy to do so!).

You can download America's Army: Operations starting July 1.

Official Website: [America's Army](#)

Note: There are two games in the ``America's Army`` group, Soldiers and Operation. Soldiers is a 2D based game of character development and imparting military values, where you raise a soldier. The game reviewed here is the 3D title, Operations. The above link will take you to the main site for both games.

- Phineas