

Miltarization

Formerly the
ABQ TRIal
Balloon: Issue 8

Militarizing Our Youth US Military Meeting Recruitment Goals with Video Games – but at what cost?

By Jamie Holmes, Jamie Holmesa research
associate at New America Foundation

Washington – For the first time since the establishment of all-volunteer forces in 1973, the US military has met all of its recruiting goals.

This success can be attributed in part to the new video games and graphic novels aimed at America’s youth. It may sound like the US military has solved a major recruitment problem, but there may be a high cost.

In another first, suicides among soldiers have hit a post-Vietnam War high for the fifth year in row. Though the record suicide rate cannot be traced to a causal factor, specialists cite psychological trauma of killing, an American culture financial difficulties, failed relationships, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder as main contributors to the trend.

Despite the five-year span, Army Vice Chief of Staff Peter Chiarelli admitted recently the US Army was still short the 300 substance abuse counselors and 800 behavioral specialists needed to cope with the problem. Though the US military professes concern for the psychological health of its service members, this personnel gap is just one example of the strong evidence to the contrary. The current recruiting tactics aimed at America’s youth are especially concerning. Not only do the very tactics that have been boosting recruitment sanitize war and create false expectations, they prey upon the vulnerable imaginations of



Amid a soaring suicide rate among soldiers, it’s worth looking at how the Army’s aggressive video games distort our impressions of War.

RioGrande Tribune

children.

Throughout 2009 the military has aggressively expanded its marketing campaign targeting teenagers. Efforts include the release of Version 3 of the taxpayer-sponsored video game America's Army, two graphic novels that look and read like comic books, and a unique 14,500-sq.-ft. arcade – or “Army Experience Center” – in a Philadelphia mall that is filled with simulators and shooter video games.

One reason for the armed forces' recruiting success is the economic collapse and the ongoing jobs crisis. But this year's record recruitment can only be fully understood in the context of the remarkable shift in tactics that began a decade ago.

In 1999, the military had its worst recruiting year in 30, and Congress called for “aggressive, innovative” new approaches. Private-sector specialists were brought in, including the top advertising agency Leo Burnett, and the Army Marketing Brand Group was formed. A key aim of the new recruitment strategy was to ensure long-term success by cultivating the allegiance of teenage Americans.

Part of the new campaign, helping the post-9/11 recruiting bump, was the free video game America's Army. Since its release, different versions of the war game have been downloaded more than 40 million times, enough to put it in the Guinness book of world records. According to a 2008 study by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, “the game had more impact on recruits than all other forms of Army advertising combined.” America's Army targets 13-to-21-year-olds. The T for Teen rating was attained because designers were, as one Army spokesman said in 2002, “very careful on the blood thing.” Designers emphasize the game's realism, but the game is only realistic on a superficial level. Their conception of authenticity consists of realistic movement, gun clips that fall away at the right speed, and night vision goggles that make the same exact whir as the actual goggles do.

The Navy's 10-page graphic novel, “Bravo Zulu,” aimed at minority high school students, was released in May. Its plot is as cartoonish as its sound effects: “KLANK,” “FZZZZZZZ,” “KA-KREEK,” “FZAAAAAAT.” The Army's graphic novel, “Knowledge is Power,” was released in tandem with “America's Army 3.” The graphic novel portrays a staff sergeant surviving an explosion unharmed. His exclamation to the rookie soldier who saved him implies that this shows it was wrong to be “worried about bein' here!”

Formerly the ABQ TRIal Balloon That these efforts are unfaithful to war's reality has not gone unnoticed. Protesting the Army Experience Center in Philadelphia, Sgt. Jesse Hamilton, who served two tours in Iraq and nine total in the military, expressed disgust that the Army has “resorted to such a deceiving recruitment strategy.” It's an approach that could have detrimental long-term effects. “The video game generation is worse at distorting the reality” of war, according to one Air Force colonel. Although they may be more talented at operating predator drones, the colonel told the Brookings Institution, “They don't have that sense of what [is] really going on.”

With the war in Iraq and America's surge in Afghanistan, heavy deployment cycles will undoubtedly extend the military's current “stress window.”

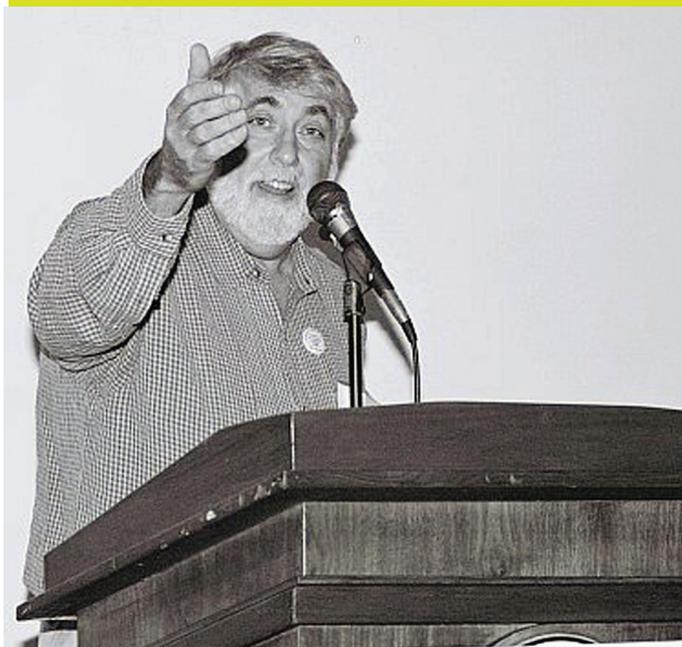
“This is not business as usual,” said Mr. Chiarelli of the “devastating” suicide rate.

To be sure, Vets from World War II and Vietnam had shell shock and PTSD without video game recruitment, but targeting teens with video games and graphic novels that ignore the psychological realities of war is not the way to solve the recruitment problem at a time when the psychological health of those who are sent to Afghanistan and Iraq should be a top priority. If recruiting goals can't be met without employing these deceptive tactics, the military must do better at explaining just how current engagements protect American interests.

Article published by the Christian Science Monitor



Screenshot from the map Special Forces Snakeplain. The game also allows players to train to drive the HMMWV and qualify to use the CROWS system allowing in game use of the Mk 19 grenade launcher and Browning M2. Training is also available for the Javelin missile as well as specialist training such as parachute training, which allows access to the Airborne missions, and Special Forces training which allows access to the Special Forces missions.



What it Takes to Build a Movement

By Mark Rudd

Since the summer of 2003, I've crisscrossed the country speaking at colleges and theaters and bookstores, first with The Weather Underground documentary and, starting in March of this year, with my book: *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen* (William Morrow, 2009). In discussions with young people, they often tell me, "Nothing anyone does can ever make a difference."

The words still sound strange: it's a phrase I never once heard forty years ago, a sentiment obviously false on its surface. Growing up in the Fifties and Sixties, I and the rest of the country knew about the civil rights movement in the South, and what was most evident was that individuals, joining with others, actually were making a difference. The labor movement of the Thirties to the Sixties had improved the lives of millions; the anti-war movement had brought down a sitting president, LBJ, March 1968 and was actively engaged in stopping the Vietnam War. In the forty years since, the women's movement, gay rights, disability rights, animal rights, and environmental movements have all registered enormous social and political gains. To old new lefties, such as myself, this is all self-evident.

So, why the defeatism? In the absence of knowledge of how these historical movements were built, young people assume that they arose spontaneously, or, perhaps, charismatic leaders suddenly called them into existence. On the third Monday of every January we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. having had a dream— knowledge of the movement itself is lost.

The current anti-war movement's weakness, however, is very much alive in young people's experience. They cite the fact that millions turned out in the streets in the early spring of 2003 to oppose the pending U.S. attack on Iraq, but that these demonstrations had no effect. "We demon-

strated, and they didn't listen to us." Even the activists among them became demoralized as numbers at demonstrations dropped off very quickly, street demonstrations becoming cliches, and, despite a big shift in public opinion in 2006, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan droned on to today. The very success of the spontaneous early mobilization seems to have contributed to the anti-war movement's long-term weakness.

Something's missing. I first got an insight into articulating what it is when I picked up *Letters from Young Activists: Today's Rebels Speak Out*, edited by Dan Berger, Chesa Boudin and Kenyon Farrow (Nation Books, 2005). Andy Cornell, in a letter to the movement that first radicalized him, "Dear Punk Rock Activism," criticizes the conflation of the terms "activism" and "organizing." He writes, "Activists are individuals who dedicate their time and energy to various efforts they hope will contribute to social, political, or economic change. Organizers are activists who, in addition to their own participation, work to move other people to take action and help them develop skills, political analysis and confidence within the context of organizations. Organizing is a process creating long-term campaigns that mobilize a certain constituency to press for specific demands from a particular target, using a defined strategy and escalating tactics." In other words, it's not enough for punks to continually express their contempt for mainstream values through their alternate identity; they've got to move toward "organizing masses of people."

Aha! Activism = self-expression; organizing = movement-building.

Until recently, I'd rarely heard young people call themselves "organizers." The common term for years has been "activists." Organizing was reduced to the behind the

scenes nuts-and-bolts work needed to pull off a specific event, such as a concert or demonstration. But forty years ago, we only used the word “activist” to mock our enemies’ view of us, as when a university administrator or newspaper editorial writer would call us “mindless activists.” We were organizers, our work was building a mass movement, and that took constant discussion of goals, strategy and tactics (and, later, contributing to our downfall ideology).

Thinking back over my own experience, I realized that I had inherited this organizer’s identity from the red diaper babies I fell in with at the Columbia chapter of Students for a Democratic Society, SDS. Raised by parents in the labor and civil rights and communist or socialist movements, they had naturally learned the organizing method as other kids learned how to throw footballs or bake pineapple upside-down cakes. “Build the base!” was the constant strategy of Columbia SDS for years.

Yet, young activists I met were surprised to learn that major events, such as the Columbia rebellion of April 1968, did not happen spontaneously, that they took years of prior education, relationship building, reconsideration on the part of individuals of their role in the institution. I.e., organizing. It seemed to me that they believed that movements happen as a sort of dramatic or spectator sport: after a small group of people express themselves, large numbers of bystanders see the truth in what they’re saying and join in. The mass anti-war mobilization of the Spring 2003, which failed to stop the war, was the only model they knew.

I began looking for a literature that would show how successful historical movements were built. Not the outcomes or triumphs, such as the great civil rights March on Washington in 1963, but the many streams that eventually created the floods. I wanted to know who said what to whom and how did they respond. One book was recommended to me repeatedly by friends: *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: the Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* by Charles M. Payne (University of California Press, 1995). Payne, an African-American sociologist, now at the University of Chicago, asked the question how young student organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, had successfully organized voter registration and related campaigns in one town, Greenwood, Mississippi, in the years 1961-1964. The Mississippi Delta region was one of the most benighted areas of the South, with conditions for black cotton sharecroppers and plantation workers not much above the level of slavery. Despite the fact that illiteracy and economic dependency were the norm among black people in the Delta, and that they were the target of years of violent terror tactics, including murder, SNCC miraculously organized these same people to take

the steps toward their own freedom, through attaining voting rights and education. How did they do it?

What Payne uncovers through his investigation into SNCC in Greenwood is an organizing method that has no name but is solidly rooted in the traditions of church women of the rural South. Black churches usually had charismatic male ministers, who, as a consequence of their positions, led in an authoritarian manner. The work of the congregations themselves, however, the social events and education and mutual aid were organized at the base level by women, who were democratic and relational in style. Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Council, SCLC, used the ministerial model in their mobilizing for events, while the young people of SNCC, informed by the teaching and examples of freedom movement veterans Ella Baker and Septima Clark, concentrated on building relationships with local people and helping them develop into leaders within democratic structures. SNCC’s central organizing principle, “participatory democracy,” was a direct inheritance from Ella Baker.

Payne writes, “SNCC preached a gospel of individual efficacy. What you do matters. In order to move politically, people had to believe that. In Greenwood, the movement was able to exploit communal and familial traditions that encouraged people to believe in their own light.”

The features of the method, sometimes called “developmental” or “transformational organizing,” involve long-term strategy, patient base-building, personal engagement between people, full democratic participation, education and the development of people’s leadership capabilities, and coalition-building. The developmental method is often juxtaposed to Alinsky-style organizing, which is usually characterized as top-down and manipulative. For a first-hand view of Alinsky organizing, though it’s never named as such by a trained and seasoned practitioner, see Barack Obama’s book, *Dreams from My Father* (Three Rivers Press, 1995 and 2004). In the middle section of the book, “Chicago,” Obama describes his three years organizing on the streets and housing projects of South Chicago. He beautifully invokes his motives, improving young people’s lives, but at the same time he draws a murky picture of organizing. Questions abound: Who trained him? What was his training? Who paid him? What is the guiding ideology? What is his relationship to the people he calls “my leaders?” Are they above him or are they manipulated by him? Who are calling whose shots? What are the long-term consequences? It’s a great piece to start a discussion with young organizers.

While reading *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, I realized

from SNCC and this developmental organizing tradition, up to and including the vision of “participatory democracy,” which was incorporated in the 1962 SDS founding document, “The Port Huron Statement.” Columbia SDS’s work was patient, strategic, base-building, using both confrontation and education. I myself had been nurtured and developed into a leadership position through years of close friendship with older organizers.

However, my clique’s downfall came post-1968, when, under the spell of the illusion of revolution, we abandoned organizing, first for militant confrontation (Weatherman and the Days of Rage, Oct. 1969) and then armed urban guerilla warfare (the Weather Underground, 1970-1976). We had, in effect, moved backward from organizing to self-expression, believing, ridiculously, that that would build the movement. At the moment when more organizing was needed to build a permanent anti-imperialist mass movement, we abandoned organizing.

This is the story I tell in my book, *Underground*. It’s about good organizing (Columbia), leading to worse (Weatherman), leading to horrible (the Weather Underground). I hope it’s useful to contemporary organizers, as they contemplate how to build the coming mass movement(s).

Mark Rudd lives and teaches in Albuquerque, N.M. He can be reached at www.markrudd.com.

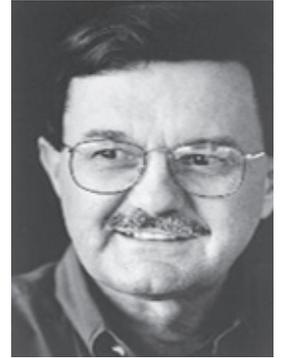


Forty-four US companies accounted for 61 per cent of the Top 100’s arms sales in 2007, while 32 West European companies accounted for 31 per cent of the sales.-- Humanity Campaign.org

<http://www.humanitycampaign.org/policy-research/global-conflict-arms-trade-facts/>

Embracing the World with Our Arms

by Jim Hightower



The good news is that America is No. 1. Once again, the US of A is at the top of the heap, not only besting every other nation on the globe, but beating out all other nations combined. Go USA!

The bad news is that this spectacular achievement is in the sales of military weaponry. Yes, your country and mine is the top arms supplier to the world. In 2008, America’s corporate weapons-makers peddled nearly \$38-billion-worth of everything from attack helicopters to small arms. This was \$13 billion more than the previous year, and it totaled more than two-thirds of all sales in last year’s global arms bazaar. Our closest “competitor” was not Russia, not China, not Iran, but—of all places—Italy. It tallied \$3.7 billion in sales.

In its annual report on the arms market, the non-partisan Congressional Research Service noted that last year’s surge in U.S. sales was “extraordinary,” given the fact that a global recession restricted the ability of many countries to lavish such funds on war toys. Apparently, however, our arms dealers did a bang-up job of rustling up buyers. Especially fruitful were sales efforts in developing nations, which the report calls “the primary focus of foreign arms sales activity by weapons suppliers.”

Indeed, such developing countries as Morocco, India, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates accounted for almost \$30 billion of our overall sales, giving U.S. suppliers 70 percent of this lucrative market. Russia was second, earning \$3.3 billion for helping arm the developing world.

What a fine example of a national achievement this sets for all the boys and girls of our land. No doubt they’ll bust with pride—unless, of course, they end up having to battle some of the governments we’re now arming.

*Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, public speaker, and winner of the 2009 winner of the Nation/Puffin Prize. He’s also editor of the populist newsletter, *The Hightower Lowdown*.*