

The Military, Simulation and Games

The military is undergoing a major cultural shift in its approach to simulation. The use of entertainment technology is not a new phenomenon in the military. Ironically, computer games owe much to the military and the developer of the first pilot training simulator, Edwin Link. Link initially sold the trainer to amusement parks while he awaited contracts with the Navy. During World War II, the Link Trainer proved the training value of flight simulation and convinced the U.S. Navy to ask the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to develop a computer that eventually would drive the development of the first computer graphics technology.

What is different today is the emergence of a culture that accepts computer games as powerful tools for learning, socialization, and training. For over two decades, the military has demonstrated interest in commercial games, beginning with the introduction of Mech War by Jim Dunnigan in the late 1970s to the Army War College.

However, several factors have raised the importance and visibility of game technology and content to the Department of Defense (DOD) community. First, simulation technology is now a major strategic capability for the United States, and no other country has invested in this capability as much as we have. For example, wargaming and simulation are part of the curriculum of every U.S. war college and the operations of every command headquarters. Moreover, modeling and simulation are considered essential to transformation, the remaking of the Armed Forces for the new realities of the 21st century. These tools present a powerful way for military leadership to visualize the future and assess the needs for the new forces. The U.S. military is also exploiting commercial simulation to revolutionize training and education—with dramatic effect.