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A recent installation in a shopping mall on the outskirts of Philadelphia may well provide the US Army with a new angle for which to recruit new personnel. Opened in August, and costing \$13 million, The Army Experience Centre is 14,500 square feet of predominantly shot-em-up video games, with three full scale simulators, including an AH-64 Apache Longbow helicopter, an armoured Humvee and a Black Hawk helicopter.

The centre itself replaces five smaller recruitment stations within the Philadelphia area, at roughly the same annual operating cost. In addition, apart from being a straight up recruitment hub, the centre is also designed to dispel and misconceptions

about army life and educate potential recruits that being in the army is not just about fighting in foreign conflicts (about 80% of soldiers are not involved in direct combat roles). Additionally, the centre is aiming to play a role in increasing the number of recruits from inner cities, where recruitment has traditionally been weak.

In the fiscal year that ended in October 2008, the Army had recruited 80,517 active personnel, slightly above its goal of 80,000, although to date, the new centre had managed only to recruit 35 visitors, a number slightly below the recruitment rate of the 5 smaller stations. When compared with recent successful recruitment ideas, such as the video games like America's Army, it would seem that the new centre is failing to have the impact one might have expected. However, the supervising officer for the centre stated "we won't be measured by the number of people we put into the Army, we're basically a learning lab for the military, a way for us to interact with kids and find out what they're interested in."

As with a number of military recruitment techniques over recent years, the centre has drawn the attention of critics, who question the level of realism within the games and simulations. Jesse Hamilton, a former Army staff sergeant who served in Iraq, said the use of video games glamorised war and misled potential recruits, calling it "very deceiving and very far from realistic." - Sentiments echoed some visitors to the centre.

Advances in technology have certainly allowed the army to branch into new recruitment techniques, but at the end of the centre's 2 year trial, the Army may well need to take a serious look at providing potential recruits with accurate and realistic simulations, so as not to mislead anyone with glamorised idea of combat and army life.

Note: quotations taken from NY Times article found [here](#)

Want to fly an F-16? watch this video to see a fully home made simulator. All its parts are easy to find in the market and can be assembled at home.