

Feature

State of the Squad Tactical Shooter (STS)

by Guest Writer **Chuck "Magnum MGG" Ankenbauer**

Wow, Christmas is just around the corner! What does that mean for the PC gamer? Well, to start with you need to start saving your money and begin deciding what games to get and what to pass up.

I'm not concerned with the thousands of console games to be released in the next few months, or even the hundreds of PC games (OK, I'm bumping those numbers a little!), but I do want to talk about what squad tactical shooters are coming to the PC in the near future.

Before we get started, let's break down what a squad tactical shooter is. We all know that a squad is a group of soldiers, usually 10 to 12. A squad is part of a platoon, which is part of a company. "Tactical" is the way that squad moves, engages, and sometimes retreats in battle. The tactics used by the squad include movement, formations, cover fire, flanking, and bounding over watch. There are many more but these are the most common. "Shooter", well that's an easy one, a shooter is someone who shoots, someone who pulls the trigger of a gun, a weapon, or in our case clicks the left or right mouse button.

There's been a lot of discussion on what makes a squad tactical shooter. Usually it's divided between more realistic games like *Rainbow Six*, *Ghost Recon*, and *Operation Flashpoint* and the other "run and gun" type tactical shooters like *Battlefield 1942*, *Blackhawk Down*, and *Joint Operations*. That discussion will be addressed in a future article, but for now I will include both types of squad tactical shooters and discuss all that are coming soon to a software store near you.

WW2 Themed Based Games

Call of Duty: United Offensive. *Call of Duty* was an incredible single player WW2 shooter, and had a pretty cool multiplayer component, with plenty of maps, weapons, and squad commands. Now the first add-on to the WW2 shooter will contain new campaigns for the three allied nations, and new multiplayer components including ten more maps and three new game modes: base assault, capture the flag, and domination. It has just been released and should be in stores now.



Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault. The next in the *Medal of Honor* series is set in the Pacific Theatre battlefields. There will be the typical linear storyline for the single player campaign. But what about the multiplayer aspect of the game? There hasn't been much multiplayer information released yet, but I did learn there will be a character class system, the first time in the series, complete with a medic, engineer, sniper, rifleman, and gunner. So you can choose the role that you're best at. There will be at least eight multiplayer maps which will be based on the single player campaign locations. It's scheduled for November.

Brothers in Arms. Ubisoft saw all the success that Activision and Electronic Arts were getting with their "run and gun" type WW2 squad tactical shooters, and decided they wanted a piece of the pie. Enter *Brothers in Arms*. This one is also set in the WW2 time frame, but Ubisoft claims that *Brothers in Arms* will be more intense and more tactical than the others. *Brothers in Arms* will have a personal, more direct squad control system, where you can order teams to attack, flank, lay suppressive fire, retreat, and other squad command functions. You will be in total command of your men so be prepared! There will be a multiplayer aspect of this game, but no details as yet. Just expect the same type of multiplayer action here as in the *MoH* series and *CoD*. *Brothers in Arms* is expected in the first part of 2005.

Vietnam Themed Based Games

Men of Valor. *Men of Valor* is a Vietnam squad tactical shooter, wherein you are a Marine dumped into camp in the jungles of Southeast Asia. You play through ten single player campaign missions in different areas of Vietnam. In scripted vehicle levels you'll man the door gunner position on a Huey, and defend a riverboat from the VC hiding in the jungle banks. You'll have scripted squad mates during your single player missions. Multiplayer is included with different styles of uniforms and equipment, and there are tons of multiplayer modes. The only one I didn't see listed is a co-op mode for the missions, which I would hope they add before release. *Men of Valor* should be on shelves at the end-of-October.

Conflict: Vietnam. Yes, another Vietnam game! Notice how these things always come out in groups. Not much information on this one except that it's set in Vietnam and you're one of four trying to survive your tour of duty.

There are 14 levels, and it seems to be scripted with the options to choose your path. No word on multiplayer, and don't forget the first two "conflict" games, maybe they will get this one right. That's all I'm saying. According to **Electronic Boutique**, it should ship first week in October.



Shellshock: Nam '67. Yet another Vietnam game. This one seems to be a little different from the other two mentioned. For one, you don't have a first person character in this game; instead your character is seen in third person view. Also, this one strives to show you the horrors of war. It seems a lot grittier and more detailed in death and combat. Booby traps, dead bodies, including civilians, piled up in burnt out villages, it's all in this game. This appears not to be for your ten year old son, the mature rating probably should be followed. Available now.

Modern Themed Based Games

Ghost Recon 2. I won't go into my personal opinion on Ubisoft's and Red Storm Entertainment's philosophy concerning us PC gamers, but I will say that they should at least consider what made *Ghost Recon* and it's two add-ons so popular and fantastic. It's been reported that there will be two versions of *Ghost Recon 2* made: one for the Playstation2 and Gamecube systems and another made for the Xbox and PC. What I understand is that GR2 will be quite different from the original. You'll only be able to have control of one character (unable to jump to other operatives) and that the game is meant to be played from a third person view, with the option to go first person. The missions, weapons, and action should be more intense and more fun than the original. In *Ghost Recon*, I personally play the single player campaigns once or twice then spend the rest of my time in multiplayer with my squad of gamers. There will be a number of multiplayer maps, weapons, and uniforms, but most of the multiplayer information is being kept secret until release. Due in 2005.

America's Army. This is truly the best deal in squad tactical shooters. Why? Because it's free and everything is better when it's free! But even if I had to pay for this game, I would, in a heartbeat. The developers of this game have huge resources of every variety. *America's Army* continues to get updates and fixes every six months or so. And it has been reported that the next installment, *America's Army Special Forces: Vanguard* is in final development and will contain new maps, vehicles, and weapons. There is no set date for release but I'm betting on

July 4th of 2005.



Full Spectrum Warrior. *Full Spectrum Warrior* is based on a game commissioned by the U.S. Army to train light Infantry troops in urban combat situations. The design combines squad-based combat with real-time tactical strategy allowing you to experience the intensity and gritty realism of urban warfare. Instead of being one character, you control a squad of soldiers and use your training and experience to issue the proper orders and watch the action from a top down angled view. As Squad Leader, you take command and coordinate the actions of two infantry teams, leading them through a hostile urban war zone. An intuitive control scheme allows you to control up to eight soldiers in real-time as you out-think, out-maneuver and out-gun enemies through 13 levels of combat. Learn and implement authentic combat tactics, battling enemies with an explosive arsenal of authentic weaponry and equipment. It will also contain two extra missions that didn't make it in the Xbox version. Available now.

Close Combat: First to Fight. Not to be outdone by the US Army, the US Marines have gotten into the PC gaming gig with First to Fight. In F2F you'll be in charge of a four man Marine unit, deployed in hot spots like Beirut. This is a squad tactical shooter but you'll have off-map access to combined arms assets like calling down for mortar fire to assist in your objective, or calling for a cobra attack helicopter for some aerial assistance. This game is said to be highly realistic and gritty looking. I'm not sure, but there was no hint whatsoever if multiplayer will be part of this game. This game was first developed for the Marines and they currently use it for squad tactics training. Scheduled for January 2005.

SWAT 4. As a police officer, I really enjoyed *SWAT 3* and the tactics used in that game. I was very disappointed when *SWAT 4: Urban Justice* was announced and said to be made more unrealistic to attract more players/buyers. Well thankfully I wasn't the only unhappy camper on that topic, and Vivendi eventually saw the light, cancelled *Urban Justice* and is back to developing *SWAT 4* the way it should be. *SWAT 4* moves away from Los Angeles to the Northeastern area of the US. There should be about 16 authentic environments. You'll have the typical team controls for the AI officers, and the goal is to arrest the bad guys, not to kill at your leisure. Multiplayer will contain at least three competitive modes and a campaign co-op mode. There will be new weapons and gadgets, and *SWAT 4* will be darker, and contain more of a mature tone. Release is sometime next year.



Operation Flashpoint 2. There is no new information on this title, at Codemasters web site or the one page intro site to OFP2. I loved the original and its add-ons. Last date heard for release is Spring 2006.

NOTE: this information was compiled from various web sites, magazine articles, and press releases from certain companies. This information is subject to change and unable to be confirmed. Check the latest information available on the SimHQ New Releases page.