

Dead-in-iraq

Joseph DeLappe

There are many inherent ironies in our culture, but few are as perplexing as the video game *America's Army*. Created and launched by the United States Department of Defense in 2002 as a recruiting tool, this game aims to provide teenagers of ages 13 and older a sense of what it is like to be a soldier in the US military. Troubled by the existence of this detached and addictive enlisting device while a war rages far away from home, new media artist Joseph DeLappe resolved to take a stance within the very core of this arena.

Since 2006, he has been logging onto the online game with the username *dead-in-iraq*, and rather than engaging in the virtual battles with the other gamers, he remains passive and stationary. Prior to getting voted out of the game by fellow players, he utilizes the game's instant messaging feature to enter in the name, age, service branch, and date upon which a US soldier was killed while on duty in Iraq. As of February 2008, DeLappe has logged 3,745 names of the 3,959 US casualties to date.

This project first came into fruition when DeLappe noticed a bumper sticker that called to "Remember our troops," rather than "Support our troops." At the time, he was also following the open call



for a September 11th memorial, and felt that the proposed monuments did not address the aftermath of the attacks—the high human cost that has been accumulating almost silently since the start of the war. He therefore devised *dead-in-iraq* as a dynamic, living memorial for the fallen US soldiers. DeLappe strongly believes that it is wrong to leave the burden of war and its repercussions solely to the families of the fallen soldiers. In creating this project, he is thus taking personal responsibility for mourning the dead, and in so doing hopes to raise awareness in others.

This action effectively interferes with the military's objective to champion the

life of an American soldier as fun and playful, and military service as such that bears no consequences.

The reactions of other players vary from pure puzzlement to blunt outrage, ultimately culminating in DeLappe's expulsion from the game. Often times, a debate regarding the nature and validity of his initiative will arise either during the game or on the *America's Army* chat rooms. The strong responses reflect the impact of his action within this habitually removed realm. By performing an intervention in an environment that is the embodiment of escapist culture, DeLappe interrupts its status quo and forces others to reconnect with reality and consider their own responsibility to remember and mourn the fallen. †

Yaelle Amir

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• www.delappe.net

• Group exhibition, *Eyebeam*, New York
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www.eyebcam.org



Page 30 left
Where'd you come from soldier, 2008
Screen capture from online gaming
performative intervention
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Page 30 right
Are you memorializing, 2008
Screen capture from online gaming
performative intervention
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