

1C adds Russian intrigue to action videogames

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Videogame powerhouse 1C Company is tapping into history with action titles that show who the good guys are in a battle can depend on which army is being asked.

Russian spies, prisoners, and Vietcong military advisers are among the heroes in videogames 1C will be releasing in a market accustomed to seeing conflicts through the eyes of US forces.

"It is not about the good guys and the bad guys," Anatoly Subbotin of Moscow-based 1C told AFP while providing a glimpse at coming games in the Russian Consulate in San Francisco.

"Each side had their own ideas and things to fight for," he continued. "Things that appear to be black and white can be somewhere in the gray."

New installments to the company's popular "Men of War" franchise include a title based on the Vietnam conflict that lets people play as Russian advisors to North Vietnamese troops fighting US forces.

While films or books about the [Vietnam War](#) are typically told from the US perspective, the 1C [videogame](#) includes a mission in which a pair of Russian military advisors is helping Vietcong soldiers get through US lines.

"We are not doing any political stuff in the game," Subbotin said. "We

are just telling a story of a small group of guys fighting for their lives and making their way back to camp."

"Ghost of Moscow" is set in the Cold War years and pits a team of then-Soviet spies against their US counterparts. In keeping with 1C's devotion to realism, spies in the game rely on wits and stealth not guns and bombs.

Virtual missions are carried out in Europe, Cuba, and the United States.

"When you are a real spy, you are not James Bond," Subbotin said referring to renowned fictitious British agent 007.

"A real spy has to do everything quietly," he continued. "Yes, you are still going to kill your target, but it is also about blackmailing, stealing, planting bugs and more."

The Russian [ministry of defense](#) gave 1C access to World War II archives for a "Condemned Heroes" videogame based on penal battalions comprised of disgraced soldiers offered redemption through suicide missions.

The battalions were formed under orders from Premier Joseph Stalin.

Court-martialed officers could atone for crimes, or incompetence, by serving in battalions fighting in the most perilous positions.

People bold enough to criticize the regime were also sent to penal battalions, according to game developers.

Military consultants are working with 1C on the game, which was said to include real names and missions from records.

"It is opening another page of the history of the USSR in World War II,"

Subbotin said.

In-game battles include operation "Bagration" in the Brest area and attacks on the German Altdam and Stettin near the end of the war.

Tripwire Interactive is making for 1C a "Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad" videogame centered on "one of the most brutal battles in human history," according to studio president John Gibson.

Tripwire developers practiced with automatic weapons to hone handling and response of virtual guns in the game.

"Tripwire has been described by some people as gun porn; and 'Red Orchestra 2' takes that to the next level -- Triple X," Gibson said at the consulate.

Players will also get to command in-game Russian tanks with lifelike crews.

"We are giving you the experience of what it is like to be inside one of these metal beasts," Gibson said.

"If a shell smashes into your tank, you see your crew member die; your guys are screaming that their comrade has just bought the farm, there is blood all over the tank... It is cool stuff."

1C has grown into a leading videogame publisher in Eastern and Central Europe since being founded 20 years ago. Acquisitions in the past two years have led to the formation of parent firm 1C-Softclub Corporation.

The company, which focuses on games for play on personal computers but also makes titles for consoles, reported revenue of more than \$300 million (US) last year.

"The Russian government puts a lot of money and effort into developing high tech industries," said consul general Vladimir Vinokurov, noting a visit to Silicon Valley last year by Russian president Dmitry Medvedev.

"1C's videogames are popular in Russia and we hope they will be popular in the United States too."

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