

### Group opposes war game at upcoming Cleveland Air Show

Posted by [kspector](#)

August 12, 2008 18:42PM

CLEVELAND -- A group called Veterans for Peace is on the warpath against a multimedia simulated killing game the U.S. Army plans for an exhibit at the upcoming [Cleveland Air Show](#).

Show-goers age 13 and older can sit in a replica of a Humvee, virtually speed through desert terrain and shoot fake machine guns at life-size pictures of people projected on a wraparound screen.

The exhibit is called the [Virtual Army Experience](#). It travels to festivals and air shows across the country. The Army removed it from Summerfest in Milwaukee last month after festival officials complained.

Veterans for Peace is urging people to call organizers of the air show, its commercial sponsors and public officials to ask the Army not to bring the simulators to the Labor Day weekend show at Burke Lakefront Airport.

"Technology that simulates killing human beings has no place at an event that purports to be a celebration of aviation," said Mary Reynolds Powell, a Army veteran of Vietnam and president of the peace group's Cleveland-area chapter.

"It desensitizes kids to killing," she said. "It trivializes what soldiers in combat go through. It makes it a game. And nobody knows better than the veterans that war is not a game."

One air show sponsor, [Discount Drug Mart](#), has received more than 100 phone calls and e-mails protesting the simulators. Anita Fontana, the company's director of marketing and advertising, said she was forwarding the messages to the Army.

Mayor Frank Jackson's office has received about 30 complaints, a spokeswoman said. Air show organizers have received about a dozen.

A statement from the Army, submitted to The Plain Dealer by a private company handling the exhibit, said, "The Virtual Army Experience is a messaging tool. The VAE's main goal is to educate the public on the U.S. Army and provide them with a greater appreciation of the sacrifices our soldiers make in order to protect our nation."

Air show spokeswoman Ann Gynn said the simulators were at last year's show and there were no complaints.

"That's why this is so surprising to us this year," she said. "We have a long history of supporting the armed forces, which all of our sponsors are aware of."

Joe Meissner, a [Cleveland Legal Aid Society](#) lawyer, Vietnam veteran and a lieutenant colonel in the Army reserves, said if the Army is trying to recruit young people by exposing them to the military experience, merely showing them how to kill is not going to work.

He said he had no problem with the simulators, but stressed that the Army should exhibit the many peaceful skills and technologies it employs as well.

"The Iraq experience is far more than having weapons to shoot," he said. "It's about being out there with the people to find out what their needs are and working with them."

"Massacring people on a screen I don't think is good for young people. It gives a distorted message about what the Army is doing today."

World War II veteran Walter Nicholes, 84, a member of Veterans for Peace, said, "We don't want to come across as criticizing the Army. Many of us have seen combat and have been decorated. But this thing uses violence to seduce young people into enjoying a very false depiction of war."

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## Articles from Cleveland Plain Dealer

### US Army agrees to raise age limit on video game at air show

Posted by [jkuehner](#)

August 29, 2008 22:07PM

The local chapter of Veterans for Peace has agreed to suspend its public protest against the Virtual Army Experience game at the Cleveland Air Show now that the U.S. Army is limiting the game to people 17 and older.

The Army recruiting video game originally targeted teens as young as 13 to use simulated machine guns to kill virtual enemies in a projected Middle East war setting. Show-goers sit in a replica of a Humvee, virtually speed through desert terrain and shoot fake machine guns at life-size pictures of people projected on a wraparound screen.

The game will be on exhibit during the Labor Day weekend show at Burke Lakefront Airport today through Monday. It travels to festivals and air shows across the country. The Army removed it from Summerfest in Milwaukee last month after festival officials complained.

Earlier this month Veterans for Peace urged supporters to call organizers of the air show, its commercial sponsors and public officials to ask the Army not to bring the simulators.

#### Washington, Mar 12 -

***Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) today sent a letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Armed Services, Mr. Ike Skelton and Mr. John McHugh respectively, requesting that the committee eliminate the budget authority for the Virtual Army Experience (VAE) in the defense authorization bill for the 2010 fiscal year.***

***“The VAE is a state-of-the-art, interactive recruiting tool used by the Army to give participants as young as 13 years old a naïve and unrealistic glimpse into the world of Soldiering... The VAE shields participants from the realities of killing while glorifying the taking of human life in a thinly veiled attempt to recruit new soldiers,” Kucinich wrote in the letter.***

***The full text of the letter follows:***

## Articles from Cleveland Plain Dealer



Congressman  
**Dennis J. Kucinich**  
*Ohio's 10th Congressional District*

<http://www.kucinich.house.gov>

March 12, 2009

The Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 2051

The Honorable John McHugh  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Skelton and Ranking Member McHugh:

I urge you to eliminate budget authority for the Virtual Army Experience (VAE) in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010. The VAE is a state-of-the-art, interactive recruiting tool used by the Army to give participants as young as 13 years old a naive and unrealistic glimpse into the world of Soldiering.

The VAE allows participants to perform missions using adapted combat training technology meant to imitate the feel of real Army equipment through the use of air-pressured guns that mimic recoil and kickback, and Humvees that shake slightly from simulated IED explosions. Although participants score points for shooting people in uniform and lose points for firing on noncombatants, no blood or carnage is ever seen in the simulation. The VAE shields participants from the realities of killing while glorifying the taking of human life in a thinly veiled attempt to recruit new soldiers. Making matters worse, if a child wants to take part in the simulation, the Army collects his or her contact information, as well as an assessment of the child's performance in the simulator.

The VAE travels around the country to family oriented venues such as amusement parks, air shows and county fairs. When the VAE came to the Cleveland Air Show in 2008, I raised concerns and objections with the Army. Allowing children as young as thirteen years of age to participate in a simulation endorsed by the United States Government that glorifies and sanitizes extreme violence is unacceptable. Like many towns across the U.S., Cleveland is trying to do the opposite because of its very real struggles with violence. Exposing children to America's heroes is beneficial to both the children and members of the armed service. However, this exposure must be honest and complete, rather than portraying an unrealistic or incomplete picture of what choosing future service to our country might entail.

I appreciate the difficult job the Committee faces when setting the priorities for fiscal year 2010. I hope you will agree that it is irresponsible to continue the touring of the VAE exhibits. In 2007 the reported estimated cost to operate the VAE was \$9.8 million. This money can be better spent. I urge you to eliminate from the budget the Virtual Army Experience in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2010. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dennis J. Kucinich  
Member of Congress

## Articles from Cleveland Plain Dealer

### Kucinich targets Army's video war game exhibit used for recruiting

**Kucinich opposes war game recruiting tool**

**Friday, March 13, 2009**

Sabrina Eaton

**Plain Dealer Bureau**

Washington -- Rep. Dennis Kucinich wants to kill federal funding for an immense traveling video game exhibit that acts as an Army recruiting tool by letting kids as young as 13 play soldier in modified Humvees armed with realistic weapons.

The 19,500-square-foot game called "Virtual Army Experience" is recognized as the world's "Largest Traveling Game Simulator" in the upcoming "Guinness World Records 2009: Gamer's Edition."

It includes six life-size vehicles fitted with modified laser guns and surrounded by more than 70 flat screens. Teams inside each vehicle are assigned a fictional mission of delivering supplies to endangered aid workers in the fake city of Nradreg. Up to 50 people play at once.

The exhibit visits community festivals around the country like the Cleveland National Air Show, where Cleveland Democrat Kucinich encountered it. Kucinich, who opposes the Iraq war and wants to create a federal Department of Peace, says the exhibit "shields participants from the realities of killing while glorifying the taking of human life in a thinly veiled attempt to recruit new soldiers."

In a letter sent Thursday to the House Committee on Armed Services, Kucinich said the exhibit's estimated \$9.8 million yearly operating budget "could be better spent." The committee's chairman, Rep. Ike Skelton, Democrat of Missouri, will review Kucinich's letter as the committee moves forward with writing this year's defense authorization bill, a committee spokeswoman said.

"Exposing children to America's heroes is beneficial to both the children and members of the armed service," Kucinich's letter said.

"However, this exposure must be honest and complete, rather than portraying an unrealistic or incomplete picture of what choosing future service to our country might entail."

Virtual Army Experience Public Affairs Manager Amy Lindstrom said the exhibit should continue to get federal money because it has "proven to be an exceptionally valuable asset in support of Army outreach and the all-volunteer Army."

She said the Army created it to give Americans a "high-tech means to explore the Army." Visitors register and are briefed on a simulated mission by veterans from operations in Iraq or Afghanistan. Later, the Army provides career opportunity information to those over age 17. She said that more than 150,000 people have passed through the exhibit since it opened in February 2007 and that reaction has been "overwhelmingly positive."

However, the exhibit's 2008 Cleveland appearance drew protests from the Northeast Ohio chapter of Veterans for Peace, which got the event's organizers to limit admission to the exhibit only to those age 17 or older. This year, the veterans group will lobby to eliminate it from the air show, says chapter

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President Mary Reynolds Powell of Cleveland, who served as a nurse in Vietnam.

"We feel the exhibit desensitizes people to violence and it trivializes what soldiers experience in combat," said Powell, who applauds Kucinich's effort. "War is not a game and this is not the way to recruit members of the armed forces."

### Virtual Army Experience display off Cleveland National Air Show schedule

Posted by [Sabrina Eaton/Plain Dealer Washington Bureau Reporter](#)

March 23, 2009 20:30PM

Categories: [Real Time News](#)



*Joshua Gunter/The Plain Dealer*

Visitors to last year's Cleveland National Air Show participate in the Virtual Army Experience, a game that simulates a battle scene. The exhibit will not be at the air show this year.

WASHINGTON — A giant traveling video game exhibit that serves as an Army recruiting tool will bypass this year's [Cleveland National Air Show](#) after it was targeted for protests in 2008.

The 19,500-square-foot attraction called Virtual Army Experience allows kids as young as 13 to play soldier in modified Humvees armed with realistic weapons.

The Northeast Ohio chapter of Veterans for Peace objected to its presence at last years air show, claiming it trivializes combat and desensitizes participants to violence. Earlier this month, Cleveland Democratic Rep. Dennis Kucinich asked Congress to eliminate money for the project.

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Although the exhibit was at Cleveland's air show in 2007 and 2008, it's not scheduled to attend this year's Labor Day weekend event, said Cleveland Air Show Executive Director Chuck Newcomb.

The Army has not indicated it has any intention of sending it, said Newcomb, who said he would have been notified if it was coming. Newcomb said that 60,000 to 80,000 people attend the air show each year, and the only complaints were from the veterans group.

He said this year's show will include airborne acrobatics from the Air Forces Thunderbirds stunt flying team and appearances by the Marine Corps Harrier plane, which is known for its ability to take off and land vertically. He said every armed services branch recruits at the air show, and the military planes are sent to Cleveland as a recruiting tool.

Newcomb said he visited the Virtual Army Experience and did not find it objectionable.

"We're about airplanes," he said. "The display was just that: a display."

Virtual Army Experience Public Affairs Manager Amy Lindstrom confirmed the exhibit isn't scheduled to visit Cleveland this year, but said last year's protests had nothing to do with its itinerary. She said the attraction can visit roughly 40 events around the country each year, that it has been requested by more than 80 air shows alone in 2009, and its schedule is dictated by the logistical challenges of transporting it between venues.

It is not on the schedule at this time, Lindstrom said.

Mary Reynolds Powell of Cleveland, a former Army nurse in Vietnam who heads the local chapter of Veterans for Peace, said the Army exhibit offended her group because putting people in a Humvee and giving them a rifle to shoot at human-sized figures on a wraparound video screen glorifies violence.

"I am pleased the exhibit is not coming this year and I attribute that to the wide-scale community response to it a year ago," Powell said.

"War," said Kucinich, "is not a game. The Virtual Army Experience is an unfortunate recruiting tool. Our community suffers enough violence, without having it minimized. I am glad that the proponents of the VAE have acknowledged the public opposition to their exhibit and have decided to bypass Cleveland, but simulating war for recruitment purposes is controversial in all communities."