



● **Clayfighter:** Now and then, Kraut noggins stick to ceilings and walls. Bash 'em with your rifle butt, and they'll stretch and swing on their taffy necks.

# MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

Sgt. Rock in silk

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EALA GENRE: First-Person Shooter AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Teen MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2.8GHz CPU (3GHz in Windows Vista), 1GB RAM, 9GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: 2-32 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

## REVIEW

Everyone would want to play *Saving Private Ryan's* Daniel Jackson; the sharpshooter's superhuman efficiency under pressure guaranteed it. And I'm sure the private's last stand was on Steven Spielberg's mind as the director inked the DreamWorks Interactive deal that put *Medal of Honor* on shelves in 1999, one year after *Ryan's* box-office debut. Only, when Jackson's Springfield rifle went click-clack-boom, somebody died. When I shoot Jerry, he as often as not does a jack-in-the-box number.

Games drawn from history don't have to be realistic. This isn't *that* argument. *Saving Private Ryan* took liberties with the truth, too, though the difference is that of Jackson forgetting to rezero his rifle sights and still shooting a German sniper straight through his own scope, and *Medal of Honor: Airborne's* Gestapo men who step from a train, firing MG42s from the hip like jackbooted John J. Rambos. But Spielberg's war movie, alongside HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers*, established today's

authenticity trend—to the extent that anything less looks like yesterday's kitsch. And *MOH* certainly isn't advertised as a John Wayne film, let alone a *Captain America* comic.

As *Brothers in Arms* and *Call of Duty* challenge *MOH* by inching further along the believability spectrum, it's impossible to imagine an anonymous EA level designer sneaking the Red Skull and assorted superstormtroopers into the game—while, elsewhere, advertising material touts the studio's "commitment to historical accuracy and authenticity." However it happens, the people marketing the game aren't making it, and—just *maybe*—aren't even playing it. That's too bad, though; *Airborne* is a good game.

As in any arcade punch-athon, paratrooper Boyd Travers tops off his health bar by walking into flashing power-ups (first-aid tins rather than roast poultry). And as in role-playing games, repeated use improves weapon proficiency. In the same way that *Airborne* transforms German flak towers into a daring assault on one the size of the Death Star, it turns the fact that real GIs often modified guns in the field into rifles that fire faster and more accurately after >

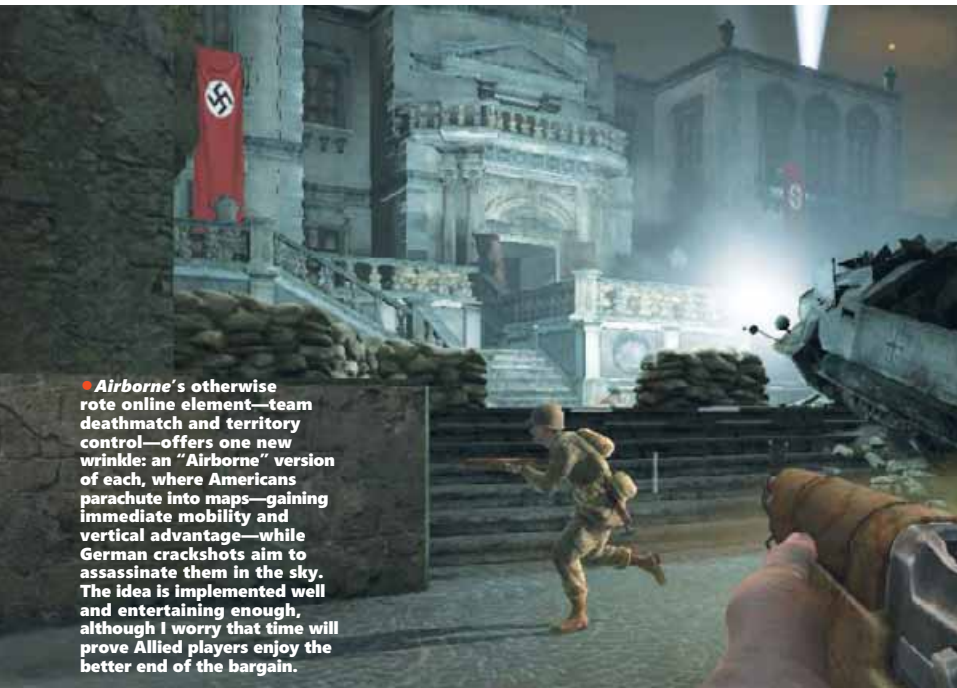


● "Autograph this s\*\*\* for me, son?"

MOH CERTAINLY ISN'T ADVERTISED AS A JOHN WAYNE FILM, LET ALONE A CAPTAIN AMERICA COMIC.



● **MOH: Airborne's** in-the-sky spawn system takes the sting out of death.



● **Airborne's** otherwise rote online element—team deathmatch and territory control—offers one new wrinkle: an “Airborne” version of each, where Americans parachute into maps—gaining immediate mobility and vertical advantage—while German crackshots aim to assassinate them in the sky. The idea is implemented well and entertaining enough, although I worry that time will prove Allied players enjoy the better end of the bargain.



scoring umpteen bull's-eyes. Pure bulls\*\*\*, in other words...but worth buying, so to speak, because the carrot is enticing enough.

Similarly, *Airborne's* standout feature—land where you will and fight your way through objectives in whatever order you want—is less about reliving history than saving a sagging series for which decision-making has meant “where to shoot” and “what to shoot with.” Touching down on steeples and *rathaus* rooftops isn't suicide; it's a viable tactic in a campaign that, to its credit, often feels more like a multiplayer match—death doesn't mean do-overs so much as another drop zone, a different approach—even if your A.I. allies won't win the war without you.

**YOU AGAIN**

Really, though, you aren't supposed to stop shooting, and you're not supposed to note anything other than whether Jerry's in your sights, since seams show the second you do: fake and glitchy fights, an officer waving infantry forward though he's inside and all alone, tanks whose turrets are already traversed to fire the split second you poke out of a window. Whether or not his movement is tactically meaningful, what matters is that the enemy is ever on the move, hesitating long enough to let you zap his helmet off now and then. Here, *Airborne* triumphs, as Axis and Allies alike race every which way, charging and retreating through Sicilian villas, concrete

coastal emplacements, and bomb-shattered streets engineered to encourage frantic exchanges.

But lifting a lesson from *Call of Duty* could've boosted *Airborne* further beyond average (“We'd see games jump around from theater to theater—the kind of thing you see just before a genre jumps the shark,” producer Patrick Gilmore writes in EA's review guide, seemingly slamming Infinity Ward's shooter for recognizing Russia's role in the Second World War, and unaware that *MOH: European Assault*, too, did just that). In *COD*, the single rifle round or submachine-gun burst that strikes center mass is lethal—more a matter of capitalizing on the satisfaction that comes from prioritizing targets and taking them out one after another than degree of challenge. In contrast, *Medal of Honor* bots sop bullets, so instead of swinging your sights from Hun to Hun, you linger over each, expecting those you hadn't shot through the skull to rise like Lazarus—or *Wolfenstein* zombies—an outcome neither “realistic” nor good for the game. ● **Shawn Elliott**



● **Red Skull's** Waffen SS toadies inhale aerosolized Cosmic Cube shavings, making their skin supertough.

**VERDICT**

★ **Free-form fighting; dramatic airdrops.**

■ **Sometimes-wonky A.I. sees through walls.**

7/10

GOOD



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