

# MILIT



How they used to do it... shown here is an actual firefighting practice exercise on a Naval ship. Taken in 1968 by James L. Amos.

# FANTASY



## ADVANCES

NAVY TAPS INTO CENTRAL FLORIDA ATTRACTION INDUSTRY FOR TRAINING NEEDS

Central Florida is the acknowledged theme park capital of the world, and home to a large number of creative individuals and companies involved in the design and fabrication of these high-tech fantasy worlds. Park operators from around the world routinely tap into our region's theming talent pool. Increasingly, they are now being joined by a number of companies that one wouldn't traditionally associate with rides or shows.

By Brian Walker

» Terms such as “immersive experiences” and “sensory-based storytelling” are used to describe a process that taps into the tricks of the theme park trade to create a multi-sensory, virtual environment that delivers a powerful sales, educational or inspirational message. One of the highest visibility clients to leverage this emerging technology is the U.S. Navy, which wanted to add a heightened degree of realism to the final phase of their basic training program.

Their search eventually led to Central Florida and to entrepreneur Bob Allen’s uniquely meshed technology and entertainment company **i.d.e.a.s. at Disney-MGM Studios**. What emerged next was a unique naval training concept, named Battle Stations 21, that uses what i.d.e.a.s. calls “visceral reality” to mimic the difficulties and challenges of oceangoing emergencies and combat situations.

Battle Stations 21 will mark the culmination of a Navy sailor’s basic training program, with recruits being ushered onto what appears to be an operational naval vessel, complete with the sounds, sights and hardware they would encounter at sea. During the course of a harrowing night aboard, recruits will be put through a number of extremely realistic exercises and drills that might include contact with a hostile vessel and a simulated fire, complete with alarms, smoke and water.

“[This is] beyond multimedia or virtual reality,” Allen says. “What we’re doing is using a new process to create a real environment that can be touched, manipulated and felt with real consequences, but with little to no ‘true’ risk.”

Originally awarded the Phase I, \$1.4 million conceptual design contract in August 2002, Allen spearheaded a conceptual design team that included local players **Oceaneering Entertainment, Bob Weis Design Island and Blankenship-McMillen Architects**.

Oceaneering Entertainment is a locally based division of Oceaneering International, a leading player in the realm of deep-sea exploration and industry. The company’s Remote Operated Vehicles are used in offshore oil production and in underwater salvage. Having leveraged their robotics technology into the entertainment market, the company’s most recognized creation is the robotic shark from *Jaws* that thrills guests at **Universal Studios**.

## LIVE LEARNING

EBAT, or “Event Based Approach Training,” is not a new concept to our

military leaders responsible for turning raw recruits into the world’s best soldiers, sailors and airmen. However, the logistical difficulties faced by the Navy in simulating battle scenarios to train sailors are far more complex and difficult than those faced by the armed services training ground troops and pilots.

Scientific studies have shown that we are much more susceptible to learning and retention when we’re able to “willingly suspend our disbelief” and accept that we are truly experiencing an event firsthand.

“Imagine a movie-goer experiencing a film. A well-crafted movie immerses you in the story. It evokes emotions and memories, even physical responses,” says Kelly Pounds, i.d.e.a.s.’ vice president of learning. “This is a type of willing suspension of disbelief. We all know the people and events on screen aren’t real, but we accept them as such for the brief period of time we’re engaged by them.”

Allen adds further, “Now imagine instead of watching the movie, you become an actor on the set. You are now in the story and there’s no means of escape ... not emotionally, or from the



consequences of your actions, or from the set itself."

This is the primary challenge to be met in developing Battle Stations 21. From the Navy's perspective, there's the added benefit of being much better able to continually measure the performance and decision-making capabilities of recruits in times of stress and anxiety.

The actual details of how the i.d.e.a.s. team will go about creating a full-on immersive training environment for Battle Stations 21 are not readily shared. Still, one only needs to consider the types of special effects that must go into the creation of films, such as *U-571*, or the latest virtual reality effects brought to life in rides like *Spider-Man* at Universal Studios and *Mission: SPACE* at Disney's Epcot.

Nonetheless, Allen remains mum on certain aspects of his proposed system, saying, "We're not going to reveal how

incidents. While the Navy has used all available resources and ingenuity to make this training as realistic as possible, there's still a good deal of "role playing" responsibility that each recruit must take on. Additionally, because there is no continuity of mental engagement by the recruits, the prospective sailors go through a process of having to stop and start each individual training exercise. Each exercise is drawn from different real life U.S. Navy events that have occurred across the globe, and are generally unrelated to one another.



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we'll build the system. The reality would be lost if we did." Considering that it's a military training program, working on a "need to know" basis somehow seems appropriate. What's apparent is that recruits will most likely be facing real fire, smoke, water and other conditions that will seem all too real at the time, and they will be tasked with acting out learned procedures that will culminate with their transition from recruit into U.S. Navy sailor.

## THE NEXT LEVEL

The current Battle Stations training exercise program began in 1997, and is comprised of 13 separate one-hour training events. Each event is based on Naval history taken from actual tragic



**Clockwise from top: Two Navy recruits conducting an "investigate and rescue" event during a Battle Stations' exercise; The Fire Party enters into a burning compartment and attacks a fire; The USS Austin during its commissioning ceremony. Opposite page: The forecandle of a U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke destroyer.**

Battle Stations 21 will take Naval training to the next level and utilize storytelling techniques, tested immersion technology developed in the entertainment industry, and advanced instructional systems designed to create a fully integrated immersion learning experience for Navy recruits. Where recruits now transit to and from different locations at the Great Lakes Naval Training Facility to

complete their training, Battle Stations 21 will immerse recruits in an ongoing storyline "mission" that will take place entirely within the confines of a single building. Bob Allen believes in this concept wholeheartedly and, working with the Navy, claims that "by delivering the Battle Stations 21 training content inside a rich story and a high fidelity, immersive environment, we will achieve better retention, comprehension and integration of key training objectives."

Chief Warrant Officer Dave Becraft, BS-21 Navy Project Officer at the Great Lakes Training Facility, goes on to explain some of the other goals of the Navy

acronym BS-21. "A common goal of all the planned scenarios is to foster a team environment in which recruits must work together to complete specific exercises or overcome obstacles to be able to perform in an emergency situation."

Unlike the current Battle Stations program, where a recruit's participation is measured through a series of separate individual events, the BS-21 exercise will be geared towards overall success of working together as a team to "save their shipmates and the ship".

The program is designed to challenge the recruit's determination, endurance and Navy core values of honor, courage and commitment.

Rear Admiral Ann Rondeau, Commander, Naval Training Center Command, Great Lakes, Ill., sums it up nicely. "Our objective is to make the Battle Stations a more effective training evolution. If we achieve that goal, we send a better trained sailor to the fleet." ✕

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