



HAPPY RETURNS

Return Fire simulates war for mainstream gamers

Those traditional enemies, Brown and Green, are at it again in this real-time military strategy game. As supreme commander, the player artfully mixes the capabilities of a combined arms force (tanks, helicopters, armored support vehicles and jeeps) to locate the other side's flag. When a commander captures the opposition's flag, it must be retrieved by a jeep and brought to headquarters to claim the victory.

Perhaps in mockery of exaggerated reward screens, **Return Fire** salutes a successful mission with a black-and-white newsreel of a mammoth victory parade, accompanied by thunderous martial music.

Return Fire offers the solitaire player full-screen animated graphics. In

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	Prolific Software
SYSTEM:	3DO
THEME:	military
MEGABITS:	n/a
PLAYERS:	1 or 2
LEVELS:	9

head-to-head competition, a split screen shows each leader the closest enemy.

The artificial intelligence for the machine-directed side in one-player contests is no pushover. The robot-led forces fight tenaciously and can orchestrate some lethal ambushes and surprise attacks. Enemy submarines, for instance, can puncture the serenity of a copter skimming over otherwise uninhabited waters.

The smaller display cuts enjoyment of the Two-player Mode, but the heightened competition more than balances any weakening of the visuals. **Return Fire** will gain tremendously in popularity when a network version makes it possible for each commander to have a full-size playfield.

Developer Silent Software put the

accent on playability in **Return Fire**. The fast pace and responsive movement system are a far cry from the exacting detail and convoluted play-mechanics of hex-grid wargames. **Return Fire** won't be a great favorite with hard corps armchair soldiers. It's not realistic enough to thrill Gary Grigsby's legion of fans.

Return Fire is really for the rest of us, who want some mind-stretching fun without the necessity of eating field rations and bivouacking in the backyard.



It's fast and fun strategizing with enough explosions and other frills to make it visually entertaining.

How easy is it to play? The disc comes without a rules folder. All that's provided in hard copy is an order form



for **Return Fire**-related merchandise. This absence of massive documentation immediately distinguishes it from conventional military sims with their telephone book-size manuals.

Replacing written documentation is an on-screen tutorial guide. With text and illustrations, it skillfully communicates the game's essentials. Most game enthusiasts will be playing adequately by the time they finish the first mission. **Return Fire** could still have benefited from a set of written instructions, but few experienced electronic gamers will suffer badly.

The control systems for the four vehicles are effective and simple. In fact, the game gives a choice of vehicle-centered or screen-oriented movement control. The choice is made on a case-by-case basis, so the jeep can use one system and the chopper another.



The basic perspective is top-down, though the focus narrows and widens to suit the on-screen events. A strategic map pinpoints objectives, though the helicopters are also useful for in-the-field reconnaissance for those whose map-reading skills need some polish.

The key to the game is limited resources. When pulling a new vehicle

BEHIND THE SCREENS

Return Fire resembles no game more than a mid-1980s computer title, **Raid on Bungling Bay** (Broderbund). The differences between the two shows how far electronic gaming has progressed in the last decade.

This action-strategy entry borrows Broderbund's generic enemies, well-known from **Lode Runner**, and makes them a terrorist group that must be successfully rooted out of its stronghold by valiant helicopter raids.

Although the choppers were very well rendered, the hardware's limitations showed in the sparse background graphics and limited play. The Bunglings wouldn't have stood a chance against **Return Fire**'s varied arsenal of death.



from the bunker, it is possible to check how many of each type remain in storage—and how much ammo of the appropriate type is available.

It boils down to the price of victory. Even the toughest scenarios are winnable by a persistent if inept, general. Anyone can slug through the missions, especially the first couple. However, overall success in **Return Fire** depends on winning battles economically rather than by sheer attrition. The term "Pyrrhic Victory" is particularly germane to this game. The army that

in any mission. As the player rolls through, or flies above, hostile streets, the goal is to find and obliterate flag towers until a flag is discovered in the smoking ruins of one of them. Triumph is not as quickly earned as just blowing up the right flag tower. The player then guides the active vehicle back to headquarters and sends out a jeep to get the flag and bring it home. Since the jeeps are lightly armed, it's usually a good idea to blow away all or most of the opposing forces before sending the vulnerable vehicle after the banner.



loses all its helicopters in one of the program's 100 island groups is assured of ultimate defeat. Depots that dispense fuel and ammo are prime targets for any wise commander.

Return Fire, as previously mentioned, is a lethal variant of Capture the Flag. The foe's battle standard is conveniently stored in a flag tower. Somewhat frustratingly, the enemy has erected quite a few of these towers, but the flag is only to be found in one such building

Return Fire is not so much a war game as a strategy contest in which war provides the context for the mind-stretching fun. No knowledge of military history or even orthodox tactics is likely to prove of much aid.

Some magazines, the ones that cater to really gung-ho military simulationists, may dislike **Return Fire**, because it's not truly authentic. Gamers with wider-ranging interests will love it **B+** (Arnie Katz)