

Military Recruiting Vans Draw Fire

Teaching American Kids how to Kill

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A ninth grader in a suburban Washington DC classroom is delighted to be excused from Algebra class to spend a half hour shooting a life-like 9 MM pistol and lobbing explosive ordinance from an M1A2 Abrams tank simulator. At the same time 3,000 miles away in La Habra, California, a 15 year-old girl is released from English class to squeeze off rounds from a very real looking M-16 rifle. The kids thoroughly enjoy the experience, especially the part about getting out of class.

The two students have experienced the [Army's Adventure Van](#), a 60-foot, 30-ton 18-wheeler with several interactive exhibits that bring an adrenaline rush and glorify weaponry and combat. The Army's 19 vans frequent various community events and two thousand schools a year, generating more than 63,000 recruiter leads. In addition to the Adventure Van, the Army has three other 18-wheelers for recruiting purposes. The Aviation Recruiting Van contains an AH 64 Helicopter flight simulator and an interactive air warrior and weapons display.

The American Soldier Adventure Van has an interactive air/land warrior display and a future warrior display. The Army Marksmanship Trainer has an interactive rifle range.

In addition to the fleet of 18-wheelers, the Army has four RockWalls, the popular rock climbing wall for youth. The Army also brings machine gun toting humvees, tanks and other military vehicles on high school campuses to enhance their recruiting efforts. Both the Army and Air Force have their own recruiting motorcycles.

The interactive theatrical weapons simulators provide a mesmerizing experience for many teens, captivated by the awesome accuracy and power of the Army's killing machines. The banter between adolescent and Army recruiter is empowering for the Maryland teenager as he holds an absolutely frightening replica of the cold, metallic 8.5 pound M-16-A-2. "This is awesome!" The recruiter explains, "The weapon is a 5.56 mm caliber, air-cooled, gas-operated, magazine-fed rifle, with a rotating bolt. It is constructed of steel, aluminum and composite plastics."

Firing the simulator produces a minor kick to the weapon and a small red dot is projected on a bull's eye target about 20 feet away. The shooter is accurate from left to right on the target, but he's hitting it a few inches below bull's eye. His recruiter explains that soldiers shooting the M-16-A-2 must aim high in order to place shots on the desired target, especially at close range. "Cool!" is the reply.

Despite protests by parents and civic groups across the country, the Army defends its right

to enter high school campuses with their high-tech mobile cinemas. Kelly Rowe, public affairs officer for the Baltimore Recruiting Battalion, compared the Army Adventure Van to efforts by colleges to recruit students. "I don't think it's any different from an athlete who gets 10 letters saying, 'Come play for us,' " Rowe said.

Of course, these military vehicles go beyond the access required by Section 9528 of the No Child Left Behind Act, which states that military recruiters are to have the same access as college and career recruiters.

The Air Force and the Navy also have fleets of trucks and vans that visit high schools. The Air Force has a Raptor Trailer, with a miniature replica of the Air Force's newest fighter aircraft and two video game stations that put children behind the joystick piloting an F-22 fighter that's coming to the aid of a friendly F-4 under attack by hostile MiG-29s. Five Navy Exhibit Centers include a "Nuclear Power Van," and an "America's Sea Power Van."

Some school districts, like the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Montgomery County, Maryland Public Schools have policies that forbid military vehicles on public school campuses.

If you see a military vehicle at your high school, let your local school officials know of your concerns. These vehicles don't belong in our schools.

Pat Elder is a member of the Coordinating Committee of the [National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth](#)

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