

Berlin Wall Shooting Game Stirs Anger

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BERLIN — A German student has created a computer game giving players a taste of life as an East German border guard shooting political fugitives fleeing to the West, to the outrage of victims' relatives.

The game "1378" — the length in kilometers of the border between East and West Germany in the Cold War — awards border guards who shoot an exceptional number of escapees a medal. They then find themselves in the year 2000, on trial for the shootings they carried out in the name of the East German communist regime.

Players can also take on the role of East German fugitives trying to escape over the Berlin Wall. If caught, they are either shot or arrested and taken to prison.

Jens Stober, the 23-year-old who created the game as part of his university degree, said it had an educational aspect.

"Becoming an East German escapee or border guard enables players to identify with these figures," he said. "It's a novel way of encouraging young people to take an interest in coming to terms with recent German history."

But the Federal Foundation for the Reconciliation of the Communist Dictatorship said that while it welcomed different ways to come to terms with the 1949-89 regime, it doubted that young people would learn anything by shooting dissidents.

"Ultimately, it's just an ego-shooter game, which is unacceptable given the historical context," said Dietrich Wolf, spokesman for the foundation.

Theodor Mettrup of the Association for Victims of Communist Tyranny said the game "makes a mockery of the victims."

An estimated 1,000 East German citizens were killed trying to escape after the wall was built in 1961. East German border guards were under instruction to shoot anyone trying to flee. The last East German to be shot crossing the border was Chris Gueffroy in February 1989.

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