



COMMANDOS BATTLE PACK REVIEW

Tactical action / strategy shooter

Seeing off the Nazis and winning World War II is no walk in the park.

For

- + Two huge games in one
- + Enormous levels
- + Fantastic character abilities
- + Detailed and wonderful environments

Against

- Training is draining
- Painfully steep learning curve

Verdict

5 Stars

"Difficulty issues aside, Commandos Battle Pack is like acting every part in one of the best (make that two of the best) World War II movies ever."

Its taken months of painful waiting for Commandos: Battle Pack to arrive. Now it's finally here you can experience what has to be one of the most enthusiastically crafted World War II games ever.

For the modest price of 35 notes Feral have actually given us two games in one. Bearing in mind that Commandos 2: Men of Courage and Commandos 3: Destination Berlin were full standalone titles (rather than expansion packs), we can say up front that this is terrific value for money.

For the uninitiated, the Commandos series captures the essence of the World War 2 movie, rather than the horrors of the war itself. From the suitably stereotypical members of your squad to the sinister Nazi threat and wonderfully contrived, adventurous missions, there's a definite cinematic tone to it all. The first game takes place over ten missions (plus assorted bonus missions) with curiously familiar names such as Das Boot, Bridge over the River Kwai and Saving Private Smith.

In the second game the levels are arranged over three campaigns. The Stalingrad missions provide a snowy Soviet backdrop before moving on through levels based in Central Europe and eventually a recreation of the Normandy Beach landings. It's difficult to generalise about such a diverse range of missions, but on each mission you are given a quick overview of what lies ahead and provided with a list of objectives to tick off as you complete them.

In order to complete your long lists of objectives you need to enlist the help of your squad of commandos. Depending on the mission you'll need to control a number of different character types. They all have apt nicknames such as Rene "Spooky" Duchamp but their actual professions are Green Beret, Sapper, Spy, Diver, Sniper and Thief. Each has unique abilities, so while your

Sapper knocks out enemies, ties them up and hunts for landmines, your thief will busy himself shimmying up telegraph poles and relieving enemies of important objects. Spies can don enemy uniforms while snipers provide beady eyed cover for their comrades. These abilities (among a boggling array of others), married to the exquisite level design provide challenges that are intelligently constructed and positively ooze with the spot-on atmosphere of heroic World War II derring-do.

There are a few negative issues, firstly in the differences between the two games. Oddly you can only select a resolution of 800x600 in Commandos 3 so the game will look the same no matter how much grunt your machine has. Also, the loading screens and control interfaces in the second game have been given a more modern look, which is not really in keeping with the WWII subject matter.

The next problem is in the general difficulty. If you're in any way a work-shy gamer, you'd better steer clear because Battlepack only rewards extreme effort. From the start, these games are hugely demanding. Progress through each enormous mission is a gradual process of trial and error... lots of error. You can use the Quicksave feature whenever you want, but easier levels with less save points might arguably have been more rewarding.

Compounding this problem is the fact that the less-than-intuitive interfaces can leave you in the dark as to how to progress. Notably in one training level, it's not clear how to distract an enemy guard and the solution to this is neither in the training mode, or the manual. Getting stuck in a main level would be understandable, but to struggle during training is frustrating. To be fair, though, the folks at Feral have at least tried to remedy such difficulties with the creation of a consistent keyboard setup across the two games and some comprehensive accompanying documentation, so full marks for that.

Despite these problems, perseverance pays rich dividends. Our advice is to work hard at the training, keep the keyboard guides and manuals close at hand and make using the keyboard shortcuts and interfaces second nature because once you have, you'll enjoy these epic games immensely. From the richness and atmospheric detail of the environments to the wonderful balance in the vast array of character abilities, Commandos Battle Pack proves – eventually – a superior evocation of World War II heroism.