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## [Softpedia News talks with the creators of Silent Hunter III](#)

*Ubisoft Romania*

**Softpedia News:** Hello and thank you for giving us this interview. First of all I would like you to make a brief introduction of yourselves: what games have you been working on, how long have you been working at Ubisoft, and what part did you play in the development of Silent Hunter III?

**Tiberius Lazar:** Hi, my name is Tiberius Lazar, I was lead game designer for Silent Hunter III and a member of the Ubisoft team since 2000. Before working at Silent Hunter III, I worked at four other projects: Pod Speedzone which was a racing game for DreamCast, then Chessmaster GBA, which was followed by Chessmaster for PS2, and the porting of Taxi 3 for PS2.

**Cristian Hriscu-Badea:** The first project I was involved in was Pod2 for DreamCast, and then I worked at a futuristic Formula 1 simulation under the guidance of Jacques Villeneuve followed by the DreamCast of Taxi3 and finally CityRacer which was an arcade racer for Playstation2. After finishing CityRacer I joined the Silent Hunter III as Game Designer and 3D Artist.

**Softpedia News:** Tell me, how long did the development of Silent Hunter III take and what was the most difficult part?

**Cristian:** We began work for Silent Hunter III at the end of 2002, around November-December, and we concluded the project at the beginning of this year's March.

**Softpedia News:** We know the game had to be launched in 2004, but it was postponed until 2005, at that time the reason being the dynamic campaign. What else can you tell us about that?

**Tiberius:** Yes, after reaching an advanced stage, enough for the game to be presented, giving the audience an idea of the direction for Silent Hunter III, the community of naval simulators, which was very active on the game's website, insistently demanded the inclusion of a dynamic campaign.

This demand was also in accordance with our preferences, and fortunately, the management from France decided it's an idea worth taking into consideration. That is why, we decided to postpone the game for another half a year, and had to work day in and day out to introduce this dynamic campaign in time.

**Cristian:** Actually, this was the most difficult part of our project.

**Tiberius:** Yes, the most difficult part of the development was the last one, when the dead lines were near, and there were a lot of things we had to introduce in the game, this process pushing the team to its limits, especially since it occurred after a two year project. Fortunately, our team made one final effort and with the help of the community, we decided it's better to postpone the game rather than wasting all the hard work up to that point.

**Softpedia News: Indeed, the game was anxiously expected by the community. Could you tell me how many copies did Silent Hunter III sell?**

**Tiberius:** We only have estimative figures.

**Cristian:** We don't have yet accurate sale figures, but I think we can make some estimations based on commercial sites, like: Amazon and others. Silent Hunter III was in the Top Ten PC games and is still in the Top Ten for sales. In the first weeks since its launching, we were number one in Germany, now we are on third place, and in the United States we occupied the seventh position.

**Tiberius:** This was a surprise for us and we were very happy with the results. Although the opinions were divided, we knew we have a very good game, one that tries to go beyond the boundaries of this gaming segment and the restrictions imposed to a naval simulator, but on the other hand, we were uncertain of the market's response to a game that addresses only a limited number of players. It's difficult for such a game to convince the regular player to get involved and play it. We were pleasantly surprised of the game's success, but I was confident we have advantages that cannot be neglected. In a way, our expectations have been confirmed by the critics.

**Cristian:** For instance, GameSpy.com has rated the game 5 stars out of 5, which is a lot for a simulator. Out of curiosity, I wanted to see what other games have been rated 5 stars by GameSpy. Since 2002 until now, there have been 15 titles, among which: Half Life 2 and World of Warcraft. The achievement is even greater considering that our game is a simulator. Actually, it's the only simulator from all 15 titles.

**Softpedia News: Are there any aspects you would have wanted to change? In other words: if you had the time to change something, what would that be?**

**Tiberius:** It's not about changing, but more like adding, there are a lot of things we would have wanted to add to the game.

**Cristian:** We will try to compensate these missing things with the patches released along the way.

**Softpedia News: Aside from patches, do you also have an add-on in progress?**

**Cristian:** This thing is still being discussed. It takes time to develop it. For the time being we are focusing on the patches, but yes, there will also be an add-on.

**Softpedia News: What about Silent Hunter IV, is there anything you can tell us about that?**

**Cristian:** There are also some prospects about Silent Hunter IV, but we cannot tell you anything for sure, it all depends on how things evolve.

**Tiberius:** It all depends on how the game is received on the market. If management considers it's worth investing in, then it's probable we shall make that step. Until now, there are good signs, let's just hope the current trend leads to the series' sequel.

**Softpedia News: Are we to understand you are planning other games based on the**

**same engine?**

**Tiberius:** Just as Silent Hunter IV is still under question, so is every project related to naval simulation. This concept has been questioned many times. Though some suggestions were rather interesting, any future decision depends on the success of the initial title.

**Cristian:** If the results are confirmed by the sales figures, then...

**Softpedia News: Coming back to Silent Hunter III, did you consider the suggestions of the naval simulator enthusiasts?**

**Tiberius:** I think we can without a doubt that we had one of the most active and surprisingly...

**Cristian:** well-informed communities.

**Tiberius:** We received suggestions from a lot of people, although some of them were a little bit exaggerated. Even so, we would like to thank some of them for the suggestions and support.

**Cristian:** Especially the person in charge of SubSim site, who is the mentor of the community formed around that site.

**Tiberius:** We took into consideration their opinions and a part of the suggestions have been integrated in the game. Personally, I think that you should always take into consideration the things appraised as necessary by the community.

**Softpedia News: How many beta testers did the game have and how many of them have been recruited from the community?**

**Tiberius:** The number of beta testers was equal to the numbers of members of the team. We didn't resort to the regular process of beta-testing, on account of technical problems and of the need to keep the discretion regarding the features of the game. It's probable we would have received better feedback if we had used the regular beta testing routine, but when the game has reached an advanced development stage, radical conceptual changes are hard to make. Our decision to introduce the dynamic campaign and to release the game in the spring of 2005 was a little bit tedious and didn't leave enough time for extensive testing.

To be more precise, the first stages of the testing process started in the summer of last year, but coincided with the vacation period. In any case, in autumn, around November-December, the testing team already numbered 20 persons, and in the last 2-3 months, there have been more than 30 game-testers.

**Softpedia News: Compared to other simulators, what other advantages does Silent Hunter III have aside from the excellent graphics?**

**Tiberius:** One of the main differences is the 3D representation of the crew, which was one of the key elements of our concept. We wanted to give up the regular approach in which the ship you command is entirely under your control and it feels like a being on a « ghost ship ». You never see anyone, you just hear some voices. This was the first radical change compared to other simulators; the second key element was to make the game accessible to the occasional gamer who is not a simulator enthusiast and to rise up to the expectations of the hardcore gamers. I think we wanted Silent Hunter III to satisfy both extremes.

**Cristian:** For example, on simulator forums people talk about how the dynamic campaign is really dynamic, a thing we didn't manage to successfully test. We had a general concept about this campaign. Tiberius knows best this area, because he was involved in its

development along with Mihai Enescu, a great guy, a programmer who also helped on the design part.

**Tiberius:** This was a great challenge for us: to meet the requirements of the hardcore players who said: “we don’t want to see an empty world where you have to accomplish a well defined mission that takes place in a limited area and where nothing else happens”. Actually, Silent Hunter III has a very dynamic environment. The player can go everywhere in the world, anywhere there’s an ocean, and what’s more, there is always something to do: events, ships and new situations you have to deal with. One of our desires was to provide the gamers with the tools employed by us in the development of the campaign, so that they may take it anywhere they want.

**Cristian:** The best part about the dynamic campaign is that it used a general concept. We didn’t employ scripts and we relied on general-structural interactivity. Our virtual world was regarded as a whole: with aircraft bases, convoy routes, just like in the real world, because everything was designed at macro level.

### **Softpedia News: What was Jurgen Oesten’s contribution to Silent Hunter III?**

**Tiberius:** First of all, he confirmed some of our research regarding the usage of submarines, the life aboard such a vessel and the tasks of a submarine commander. We also benefited from more obscure technical information unavailable anywhere else, like the famous dispute about « thermal layers ». The notion of « thermal layer » represents a property of the water to reflect the sound in certain weather and hydrological conditions. Herr Oesten has confirmed us that during the war, although the German navy was evolved from technological point of view, they didn’t succeed in devising a system that accurately detects these « thermal layers » so that they can be used in combat. We were considering about using this concept to allow the player to create specific tactics, but after talking to Herr Oesten, we decided to use it just as a random element.

On the other hand, he told us about some of his attacks, including the one against a British convoy, in which he succeeded in damaging a large warship, the Malaya battleship. Moreover, he offered us the perspective of a superior officer who also occupied the position of Chief of Staff for the North Sea theater of operations. This thing provided us with a better image on the development of the dynamic campaign. And for me, the anecdotes related to his war stories, are invaluable, because it’s very hard to find someone that was an eye witness to those events and who is capable of accurately and objectively relating it.

**Cristian:** At his 91 years, he is flawless person, regarding the coherence of speech, the way he drives ...

**Tiberius:** Herr Oesten is a complete gentleman: he talks excellent English, he didn’t approve to take the cab or to let us drive. He plays the computer, and related to the anecdotes I’ve mentioned before, he told us he played a submarine game, and one of the battles he was involved in was being simulated there and he said that: “It’s very difficult to win, they beat me almost all the time. In real life it was much easier” (ha!ha!ha!)

### **Softpedia News: During the two years of development have there been any incidents or crisis situations?**

**Tiberius:** Like any other project that involves a large number of people and strong personalities, of course there have been situations of conflict, but fortunately, we had a team of professionals, people with experience who were dedicated to the cause and I think that helped us to overcome any potential conflict. Obviously, because of the fatigue and the

stress, there were moments when the tension was building up, but the fact that everyone understood we wanted to make a qualitative product helped us overcome any crisis.

**Cristian:** For us, this project was one of our most important achievements and it was obvious there was no point in fighting among us.

**Softpedia News: In this very moment, what project is Silent Hunter's team involved in?**

**Cristian:** I want to tell you that as soon as we finish the work on the 1.3 patch, we should start working on the add-on, but I cannot give you more details about it.

**Softpedia News: Is it true that for now Silent Hunter III won't be ported on any console?**

**Tiberius:** It's difficult to adapt this type of game to consoles, but according to its evolution, management could decide to port it to consoles. If that happens, it won't be quite a simulation, but more like an arcade simulation.

**Softpedia News: One last question: will the game be Longhorn compatible?**

**Tiberius:** In this moment, one of our biggest problems is the compatibility with the previous systems. Any problem related to support will be dealt with when the operating system is released. If Longhorn is used as much as the previous systems, no efforts will be spared in adapting the game for it.

**Softpedia News: Thank you for your time and good luck!**

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