

Ralph Baer Passes Away Aged 92

Many gamers of the current generation will be unaware of the name Ralph Baer. In an era where consoles are constantly pushing to be bigger, better and more powerful than they ever have been before, it is often far too easy to lose sight of the people who laid the foundations for establishing video games as both an entertainment medium and an art form.

Ralph Baer was one of those people. Often nicknamed the “Father of the Video Game Console”, Baer was instrumental in the development of the very first console that was made available to the public and could be played in the home. With the release of the Magnavox Odyssey Baer took the fledgling medium out of the arcades and introduced it into the homes of the lucky people who were able to purchase one at the time.

Born in 1922, Baer originally called Germany his home. However, with World War II looming, his family decided to leave Germany and head to America to escape the increasingly powerful Nazi regime. He was eventually drafted into the US Army, where he worked in the intelligence division.

Following the war Baer continued his studies, showing a particular aptitude for the developing sciences of computers and electronics. It was in the 1960s, following the creation of the Cathode Ray Tube Amusement Device and Tennis for Two that Baer began to envision the development of a computer that would allow regular people to play these “video games” from the comfort of their own homes.

His idea took a long time to reach fruition. Following his proposal of the idea Baer eventually received \$2,500 and the services of two men - Bill Harrison and Bill Rusch. Together the three began working on Baer’s concept, eventually creating a computer that they dubbed the “Brown Box” that was capable of playing video games on a regular television.

As development of the machine continued, Baer began to look around for a company that would be able to lend its name to the fledgling device. In the mean time an upstart company named Atari produced the first ever commercially available video game. Named Pong, the title was a revelation in local arcades and led to the great gaming boom of the 1970s, where a myriad of classic arcade titles were produced by Atari and a number of other early adopters of the medium.

This success increased interest in the possibility of bringing these games into the homes of the players and Baer eventually secured a partnership with Magnavox to release his Brown Box. Dubbed the Magnavox Odyssey, the console was released in 1972 and played a large part in laying the foundations for a medium that today grosses billions of pounds and is considered by many to be the largest entertainment form of the current era.

Following its release Baer continued to be an innovator in the field, inventing the light gun amongst a score of other devices that all aimed to further enhance the activity that he played such a large part in creating.

Though the Odyssey would soon be eclipsed by the likes of Atari’s home consoles, Baer’s contributions to the medium should never be underestimated. His vision and determination, along with his colleagues, helped establish video games as a viable medium that are still enjoyed to this

day.

Boo Games would like to give our condolences to Ralph Baer's family and we are sure gamers around the world will wish to thank him for the incredible contributions he made to our wonderful pastime.