

Phoenix (1982) – Anschuetz/Weisgerber/Anschuetz

Game Play

Phoenix had the player control a black and white ship at the bottom of the screen made up of multiple text characters, and a single large bird with flapping wings that dodged all over the screen. A press of the fire button on the joystick produced a vertical shot aimed at the bird. If the bird was hit, the player scored a point, and the bird would turn upside down and fall straight to the bottom and the player would try for the next bird. After 9 birds were hit, the game ended and the player was rated as “Phoenix Commander”, “Bird Captain”, “Butterfly Netter”, or “Bird Watcher” depending on the score.

Recollections

Phoenix was the very first video game written by Robert Anschuetz of the A/W/A Team shortly after they got their Atari 400 for Christmas in 1981. The game was implemented in a simple text mode using an alternate built-in Atari font library called ATASCII “control” characters. The game was based on an example program called “Seagull Over Ocean” from the Atari BASIC Reference Manual that demonstrated a seagull flapping its wings and flying around the screen. There were no special graphics techniques used to develop the game. This game had been missing for almost 30 years, because the A/W/A Team did not back the game up to a PC using an SIO2PC cable in the early 1990’s. The game was retrieved from an original 5 ¼” floppy disk in 2017 and finally saw the light of day again.