

Virtual Conference of Wargamers 2021



Knuston Hall – the home of COW but sadly not the location of VCOW!

5-7 February 2021

INTRODUCTION

Virtual COW 2020 (VCOW) was been set up so that Wargame Developments could run its annual conference - the Conference of Wargamers or COW - during the current COVID-19 pandemic. VCOW 2021 follows on from it's success. It will consist of a programme of talks, lectures, online discussions, and games.

VCOW is brought to you by Wargame Developments and has been created by an informal management committee comprising John Bassett, Bob Cordery, John Curry, Tim Gow, Matthew Hartley, Alex Kleanthous, John Armatys and Jerry Elsmore, assisted by Martin Rapier.

NOTES FOR SESSION PRESENTERS

If you need to use a Zoom account other than your own, or other help with IT for your session, please contact [REDACTED] Sooner rather than later please!

BOOKING FOR SESSIONS

Sessions fall into two categories – those with no limit on numbers and smaller, numbers-limited games sessions. On the timetable these are colour coded in green and yellow respectively.

For the first, Zoom links will be sent to attendees a few days before VCOW.

If you'd like to attend any of the smaller sessions, please send an email with the subject heading 'VCOW SESSIONS' to [REDACTED] **by 1200 on Friday 29 January** with a list of the sessions you'd like to book for in order of preference. Any late, mislabelled or garbled emails may be disregarded.

For oversubscribed sessions, players will be selected randomly, though we'll make an effort to ensure that those who want to are able to attend at least one such session.

If you secure a place in a game session, the presenter will contact you by email in the week before VCOW. The presenter may expect a reply to their email – so remember to check your inbox!

If sessions are oversubscribed you may be offered a reserve place or the chance to 'sit in' as an observer. 'Spare' player places may be advertised on the Slack channel.

Jitsi chat facilities and a *Slack* channel will run throughout the weekend.

IMPORTANT NOTES FOR ZOOM MEETINGS

All sessions will run on Zoom unless stated in the notes.

Only registered attendees will be allowed into the meeting. You **MUST** ensure that your full name (as used to sign up) is showing as your name in Zoom. People calling themselves e.g. tim or Wargamer01 will not be admitted. If you are unsure how to do this, look at the instructions at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362193> [support.zoom.us]. Specifically, if you are signed into Zoom, check the name it has for you and amend if necessary before joining the meeting. If you are not signed in, put your name in.

When you have joined a session, please mute your microphone unless the presenter has asked for your input.

Please join sessions 5 minutes before the start time.

SESSION TIMINGS

All times given relate to UK time. If you are resident in another time zone you may like to have a ‘world clock’ running to keep you straight, such as :

<https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/>

COW regulars will notice that the timetable has fewer session slots than usual. This is due both to several sessions being lectures which can accommodate all attendees and the need to have longer than usual meal breaks, on the assumption that attendees will be either cooking for themselves or spending time with the other members of their households.

Speaking of breaks, please remember that there is such a thing as too much screen time. So, take breaks, move about and stay hydrated! Told you there’d be lectures...

THE SESSION LIST:

The sessions are presented in the following format:

Presenter(s)

TITLE OF SESSION

running time

number of players

description

Brian Train

TWO SIDES OF THE COIN

45 minutes

any

Brian has been designing conflict simulation games for the civilian market for over 25 years, with over 50 published designs to date. His articles and games have been published by a wide range of large and small firms. His special interests in game design are irregular warfare, "pol-mil" games, concepts of political influence in games, and asymmetry in games generally. In his spare time, he is an Education Officer in the Ministry of Advanced Education of British Columbia, Canada.

In this presentation, Brian will speak briefly about his work in designing asymmetric games on irregular warfare and how this has contributed to the origin and development of the popular "GMT COIN" system. Brian co-designed *A Distant Plain* (Afghanistan 2003-13) with Volko Ruhnke and designed *Colonial Twilight* (Algeria 1954-62). His third game using this system, *China's War* (China 1937-41), is currently under development.

John Bassett

GRAPPLE X

2 hours

8-12

A game in finest WD taste about testing the British H-bomb in the 1950s. Features boffins, Valiants, the last generation of imperial administrators and a trusting but slightly anxious local population.

Pete Sizer

BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN: AN OVERVIEW OF COUNTERINSURGENCY GAMES

30 minutes

any

Based on research undertaken for a PhD this talk will look at the commonly fought but infrequently gamed issue of counterinsurgency and guerrilla warfare looking at those games that have tried to simulate this complicated environment.

Pete Sizer is a gamer of 30 years' experience with a special interest in guerrilla warfare, counter insurgency and asymmetric warfare. He is currently doing a PhD in Wargaming at Bath Spa University, supervised by John Curry and Dr. Clifford Williamson.

Pete Sizer

3D PRINTING FOR WARGAMERS

1 hour

any

A beginner's guide to the technology that will change wargaming. An introduction to choosing a printer, finding models and printing toy soldiers, tanks and terrain.

John Armatys

DETTINGEN

2 hours

4

A simple refight of the Battle of Dettingen (1743) using Brown Bess Squared (a gridded version of my Brown Bess rules - see Nugget 317) on a PowerPoint table with toy soldiers and terrain mainly from Tom Mouat's Mapsymbols range.

John Bassett, Ian Drury, Russell King

WARGAMING THE 1960s

90 minutes

any

A panel discussion on wargaming the decade of Algeria and Vietnam, the Berlin wall and Cuban missile crisis, OAS and UDI, Selma, Detroit and Chicago. John, Ian and Russell are inveterate 1960s gamers and will discuss approaches to recreating the era using toy soldiers, board games, free Kriegspiel and role play and will address both the attractions of this decade and what makes a good 1960s wargame.

Nick Riggs

GAMING TACTICAL INFANTRY ACTIONS IN THE MODERN ERA

1 hour

any

In this session I will present the first six months of my PhD research into squad-level infantry combat in the 20th and 21st centuries, and how best to represent it in a wargame, via Tabletop Simulator. The session will end with Q&A and a general discussion on what wargaming on this topic does well, less well, or not at all (but should do).

Graham Evans

WELL, DID YOU EVA!

3 hours

2-4

A game of the Taiping Rebellion. In the vicinity of Shanghai the Ever Victorious Army bid to free a village from the clutches of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace. This will be a proper toy soldier game run using video streaming. Marvel at the marvellously detailed 15mm figures, which you won't be able to touch, as the puppet master pushes them across the table, liberally interpreting your instruction. Using the "Taiping Era" rule set, (triallyed at previous COWs, and now available for purchase), this game will provide a unique opportunity to participate in a game at the legendary Shedquarters.

Evan D'Alessandro

TIME FOR TRUTH

2 hours

2-5

Tallinn, Estonia: A statue put in place by the Soviet Union in 1955 that commemorates the Red Army has been deemed inappropriate to have so near to Parliament. The statue is removed at midnight from near parliament to a suburb park. Due to the violence in 2007 over a similar statue removal, the plans were filed a week in advance and only a small public works crew was briefed. Last night the statue was moved without incident, however, someone got knowledge and social media is quickly aflame. As the morning breaks, a protest is being quickly organized and fears of a second Bronze Night are palpable. As the Russian bear watches from across the border, the question is open: will the situation be defused, or will 2007 repeat? Players will play real life characters, representing the government of Estonia and Tallinn, but need not stick strictly to their roles.

John Wilkie

PAPAL CONCLAVE 1492

2 hours

4-23

It is August 1492 and Innocent VIII has finally done the first honest thing in his life and actually died, though there are those who were not convinced he had even managed this. But he is now in the ground and so it is time to elect a new pope, to banish the years of misrule and to tread carefully along the tightrope of 15th century Italian politics while not upsetting the French, Spanish, Neapolitans, Venetians or Turks.

As a Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church you have been charged with the task of electing a man to take on that role. You may even fancy doing it yourself.

The game is played in accelerated real time with 15 mins covering 1 day, 1 vote per day and as much plotting, scheming and back-stabbing as you can fit in, all conducted on zoom using chat messages, break-out rooms and announcements to the assembled Cardinals. No mobile phones or whatsapp - it is 1492 after all.

Jonathan Crowe

IN THE HEART OF AMERICA: BUFFALO HUNTERS

90 minutes

2-6

A game based on the Plains Indians' (Native Americans') buffalo or bison hunts. Players take the role of a Native American buffalo hunter. Their aim is to gallop alongside one of these magnificent animals and bring it down. Everything about it is then usable. Meat, sinew, hide, hair, hooves, horns. To sustain the tribe.

The plan is to play the game over Zoom, but with a real table with toys (bison and hunters) being manoeuvred by me, plus screen layouts so players can see where they are and what to do next to bring down one of the big beasts. Hoka hey!

Russell King

THE WARSAW PACT POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE 1986

1 hour

8-10

Nuclear crises come and go, but yet again the great and the good of the Eastern Bloc get together to mull over key issues and the plans for progress in their countries - and the inevitable march to Full Socialism. Your speech will be provided to you by your friendly domestic political adviser shortly before the meeting. The minutes of the meeting, and the success of the meeting, have been agreed in advance. Presided over in the beautiful Socialist city of Budapest by the youthful - and relatively sober - team of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze.

John Curry

THE SIX-WEEK NAVAL WAR, 1789

2 hours

3-15

It is 1 May 1789, and a new war has just broken out between Britain (and her Portuguese allies), and France (and her allies Spain and USA), over the vexed question of the Andorra Succession (the sordid diplomatic details of which need not detain us here).

Britain is thirsting for revenge after her defeat in the American Revolutionary War, and her fleet is in good order, maintaining an open blockade on all enemy ports.

The French Alliance also has a number of old scores to settle, such as regaining Gibraltar, subduing Portugal and wiping out the British sugar islands (or preferably, the City of London herself). The French Alliance can muster more and better ships than the British Alliance; but they are not in such good order.

Every one knows that the war will be over quickly as all three of their governments are nearly bankrupt.

The players represent the naval committees of Spain, France and England. Using a hex based map, the game is run using a semi rigid kriegsspiel.

John Curry

THE FARM

90 mins

1-6

The British army has advanced over the Pyrenees into France in 1814 and the long war is about to end. After a small misunderstanding over goods belonging to a French farmer, you were given an option to prevent a court martial; retrieve a cannon that was left behind in yesterday's skirmishing by a farm over the next ridge.

Players represent one character in the game. Using the Tabletop simulator software, you can only see from ground level, the game is using the Donald Featherstone Skirmish rules. An Irish soldier, a Scottish soldier, an English soldier etc. led by an upper-class English officer. What could possibly go wrong? The game is a manual first person shooter.

Martin Rapier

WW2 BRIGADE COMMANDER

2 hours

4- 7

Ever since Tim Gow brought NATO Brigade Commander to COW many, many years ago, we've been using it run games at the Sheffield club. These have ranged from very modern (Gulf Wars 1 and 2), through traditional Cold War games and also many WW2 games.

During lockdown we've found it works very well for remote gaming as it is grid based and combined with its 'unit at a time' activation mechanism, it helps mitigate the issues of large groups trying to communicate over Zoom.

I'll be running a small game, typical of the ones we've been running since March, which covers the US 84th Infantry Division attacking the Westwall in late 1944.

Active roles for up four US players, three German players and as many observers as can be accommodated sensibly.

Potential players should indicate a preference for sides when booking so I can send out the right briefings.

Tom Mouat

THE TAKAGI MARCH

3 hours

3-5

A one-shot RPG session for 3-5 people set in a 1980's vision of the far future. The players are new crewmembers on a 5,000 ton transport ship, the TAKAGI, heading out from Nakmoye Highport, to the Belter Colony around Jak, then off to the Imperial Naval Base around Adamanthea. They have a mixed cargo of electronics, chemicals, bio-nutrient paste, medical radioactive isotopes, and some newly made ship's boats... What could possibly go wrong?

Soon to be published by Drive Thru RPG.

Bob Cordery & Gary Sheffield

LOCKDOWN AND THE PORTABLE WARGAME

90 minutes

2-6 plus spectators

A session on the Portable Wargame and how it can be used virtually during lockdown. In the first part of the session Bob & Gary will talk about the origins of PW, variations on the original (Bob's idea being that it is a toolkit which can be amended in all sorts of ways), PW

campaigns, and above all, how they have adapted it for use online to play virtual games during the lockdown.

In the second part, there will be a Portable Wargame based on a simple scenario. Players will need to equip themselves with a gridded board (easily improvised from Christmas wrapping paper, which has a grid conveniently printed on the back). The organisers will provide a QRS for the rules, and counters (or players can provide their own toy soldiers)'.

Jim Roche

PANDEMIC BLUES

1 hour

any

A Singalong review of Historic Plagues and Flu, with Karaoke videos. This short exploration of pandemics past, will feature politics and military events. Plus a rewritten version of the 1960s hit from Bob Dylan Corona, Corona, You are on my mind

John Bassett

VALKYRIE

2 hours

5-10

A game of the attempted Berlin putsch against Hitler on 20 July 1944.
"That's the last thing I need" - Albert Speer, 20 July 1944.

Gary Sheffield

AUGUST 1914: BUSINESS AS USUAL?

2 hours

6-10

The game is about British strategy in the earliest days of the First World War. Each player role plays a major figure (Kitchener, Churchill, Lloyd George, French, McKenna, Jellicoe, Haig, Grey, Spring-Rice) and has to arguing their particular case (e.g. a maritime strategy, or deploying a big army to France, or attacking Turkey) over a series of turns trying to win over waverers, especially the notoriously laid back and indecisive Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, played by the umpire (Gary). Each player also has personal aims (e.g. you hate X and will try to undermine him at every opportunity).

The umpire will also feed in various bits of news at intervals, which might influence the various arguments.

Each player is allocated a role & given a brief in advance. At the end of the game there is a vote which will influence (but not necessarily determine) Asquith's decision as to the correct strategy to pursue.

John Curry

TARGET WIGHT – A WW2 INVASION PLANNING EXERCISE

90 minutes

any

Germany is about to launch operation Sealion in July 1941. Your task is to plan the invasion of the Isle of Wight as the precursor to the Luftwaffe establishing airfields to support the invasion of England. You have paratroopers, gliders, swimming tanks, infantry, air support to help you seize this strategic island by storm. Based on excellent German intelligence and a 1940 map. There will be several German teams. and a British team will plan the defences.

Jonathan Crowe

VIRTUAL BATTLEFIELD WALK: BRÉCOURT MANOR

1 hour

any

The small scale action inland from Utah Beach in Normandy on June 06 1944. Lt. Dick Winters and a small band of paratroopers from Easy Company, 2nd Battalion 506th

Zoom hosting tips Thanks to John Wilkie for providing this.

At start

Everyone turn mics off but, if possible videos on, use a waiting room to let people in so encourage everyone to use recognisable names

We also ask people to keep general chat free so the facilitator could send messages directly to the session lead (though these were private messages, we wanted to keep the session leads chat window mostly clear so they could see these messages)

In sessions

- Keep sessions short
- Have a separate facilitator and session lead with division of roles between them
- Mics off through sessions except for facilitator and session lead
 - Use “press to talk” to ask questions – pressing the space bar activates the microphone while space bar is pressed and turns off when space bar is released
 - (something different on macs)
 - Someone always forgets so having the facilitator turn people off is useful
 - Facilitator can also kick people out if rogues get in
- Consider leaving time at the end of the session for general unstructured chat in place of chat over coffee – breakout groups might be useful for this
- Do jazz hands at the end of presentations and end of sessions to let speakers know the appreciation. Without this it can be difficult to get a feel for how a presentation/session has gone

Facilitator:

Control microphones, allow participants in, control who can share screen, put hands down once they have asked their question (quite a lot forget so you don't know if they have a new question or have just forgotten), keep track of timing and give a heads up to the session lead that someone is coming close to running over, give a verbal two-minute warning to speakers over-running (never actually had to do this).

Keep the waiting room running during the whole session as people may come and go (whether by choice or after being cut off by network issues)

Twin screens for hosting helps a lot –have the presentation on one and all the admin (waiting room, participant list, chat window) on the other

Admin tools

Participants list is arranged alphabetically with yourself at the top then facilitator (i.e. Zoom host). Raising a hand lifts the person to just below the facilitator, then ranked by microphone use (so it's easy to identify rogue mics and turn them off)

Technology

Proper microphones are a must for anyone presenting – sound quality is the most critical component. If presenters are using webcam mics, they need to be close to them. We would encourage either headset mics or clip-on lavalier mics as even a cheap lavalier will be better than a webcam mic. (Lavalier mics easily available, eg search for “lavalier microphone on Amazon”. NB can either be USB or round jack depending on your computer set up.

Get everyone (presenters, facilitator and session leads at least) to check out their tech beforehand

VCOW DATA PROTECTION POLICY

The organisation which holds your data is Wargame Developments (WD). The VCOW Organisers are responsible for data protection compliance. You can contact the VCOW Organisers via the VCOW blog <https://wdvirtualcow.blogspot.com/> or via the WD Website <http://www.wargamedevelopments.org/feedback.htm>.

WD holds the following personal data about you in relation to your booking at VCOW: your name and your e-mail address. The main methods of communication used for VCOW are e-mail and notices posted on the VCOW blog.

The lawful bases for processing your data are “contract” and “legitimate interest”. The legitimate interests for the processing of your data are to provide you with information relevant to your attendance at and enjoyment of VCOW and for the administration of VCOW, including making and retaining historic records of the event.

Your data is used to keep a record of those who have booked a place at VCOW and to send you information about VCOW. Your name will appear in lists of attendees and may appear in the agenda for meetings and in sundry correspondence.

Your name and contact details are available to all members of the committee and will be made available to the presenter of any session at VCOW where you ask to book a place in advance. Note that the presenter of a session you have booked a place at may circulate your contact details to other attendees of that session so that players in a game can do some pre-planning. WD will not give your contact details to anyone else unless required to do so by law.

Paper records are stored in secure locations. Electronic records are held on password protected devices, backed up either onto portable hard drives which are kept in secure locations or backed up to remote locations.

The retention periods for personal data held by WD for VCOW is:

- Attendee data – a list of attendees and their e-mail addresses will be retained indefinitely.
- Minutes - the minutes of and other documents relating to meetings are retained indefinitely.
- Sundry correspondence - is retained for up to six years and then deleted or destroyed unless it is considered to be an important part of the history of the WD when it may be retained indefinitely.

You have the following rights in respect of your personal data: the right to withdraw consent; the right of access; the right to rectification; the right to erasure; the right to restrict processing; and the right to object. If you make a request regarding any of the above it will be dealt with within 28 days. If your request is refused you will be told why.

You have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner’s Office (<https://ico.org.uk/>) if you consider that the processing of personal data relating to you infringes the General Data Protection Regulation.

VCOW 2021 Timetable

Friday			
1530-1630	Virtual Battlefield Tour		
1900-1915	Welcome and introduction	Note that the welcome and <u>both</u> COIN presentations will run as a single Zoom session	
1915-2000	Two Sides of the COIN		
2010-2040	Both Sides of the COIN		
2050-late	Grapple X	The Takagi March	Seize Warsaw
2050+	Jitsi chat		
Saturday			
0800-0900	Breakfast Chat		
0900-1000	Gaming Tactical Actions		Well, Did You Eva!
1010-1110	3D Printing for Wargamers	The Six Week Naval War, 1789	
1120-1220	Warsaw Pact Consultative Committee 1986		
1400-1530	Lockdown and the Portable Wargame		The Farm
1600-1800	Target Wight	In The Heart Of America	Dettingen
1930-2130	WW2 Brigade Commander	August 1914 – Business As Usual?	Valkyrie
2140-2240	Pandemic Blues		
2240+	Late night Jitsi chat		
Sunday			
0830-0930	Breakfast Chat		
0930-1100	Wargaming the 1960s	Politics By Means Of Pointy Sticks	
1110-1310	Papal Conclave 1492	Time for Truth	
1310-1330	Closing Event		

Colour Coding:

Green sessions – unlimited numbers – just turn up

Yellow sessions – must be booked in advance

Blue sessions – Jitsi chatrooms – open all weekend – just turn up