Virtual Conference of Wargamers 2023 Programme

3-5 February 2023

INTRODUCTION

Virtual COW 2020 (VCOW) was set up so that Wargame Developments could run its annual conference - the Conference of Wargamers or COW - during the COVID-19 pandemic. An annual VCOW is now firmly on WD's calendar. VCOW 2023 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 a management committee comprising Tim Gow, Bob Cordery, Matthew Hartley, John Armatys, John Bassett, David Burden, John Curry, Alex Kleanthous, Judith Rawle and Stephen Aguilar-Millan.

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/

Please remember that there is such a thing as too much screen time.
So, take breaks, move about and stay hydrated!

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, **you must send an email** with the subject heading 'VCOW SESSIONS' to ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ by **1200 noon UK time on Friday 27 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.

Your booking will acknowledged by e-mail within 24 hours - if you haven't got an acknowledgement you should assume that you haven't booked.

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.

Some presenters of "numbers limited sessions" may be prepared to have spectators. This might be mentioned in the programme or advertised on Slack. If you particularly want to watch a "yellow" session you can ask to do so by following the instructions in the "Booking Sessions" section of the programme and specifying that you want to watch and not play.

THE BENCH OUTSIDE

One of the great joys of COW for many is the chance to meet and chat with friends old and new, often while perched on the benches outside the main door at Knuston Hall. To this end we present a Jitsi chat session which will run throughout the weekend. Other chat sessions will be available on Zoom, as per the timetable.

VCOW SLACK CHANNEL

This will run throughout the weekend at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Presenters of talks may put their slides on the Slack channel.

IMPORTANT NOTES FOR ZOOM MEETINGS

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

In the event of an emergency (like a Zoom channel falling over or a link failing) attendees should evacuate to ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

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. **timg** 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.

Attendees must not record or film sessions.

Some talk sessions may be recorded by the presenter or by the organisers with the agreement of the presenter.

Recordings will only be made available to the public with the consent of the presenter.

THE SESSION LIST:

The sessions are presented in the following format:
Presenter(s)
TITLE OF SESSION
running time   number of players
description

David Burden
VERTICAL URBAN WARGAME
2 hrs   2-4
This will be an urban wargame in 10mm, with big multi-storey buildings and limited sight lines, and all you get to see is what your (mostly) street-level webcam tells you. A bit of an experiment to see if remote wargaming is actually better in some ways for tactical urban wargaming.

John Bassett
KAPUZINER
90 minutes   up to 5
A Zeitgeist game about Viennese coffee house culture in the years before World War One, when Freud, Klimt and Wittgenstein rubbed shoulders with the likes of Stalin, Hitler and Trotsky. An experimental game, part role play, part matrix, part balloon debate and almost certainly a complete fiasco...

John Bassett, Russell King & Ian Drury
OMDURMAN TO SARAJEVO: WARGAMING THE PERIOD 1898 TO 1914
90 minutes   any
A discussion on wargaming the decade and a half that saw Kitchener in the Sudan, San Juan Hill, Mafeking, the relief of Beijing, the battles of Mukden and Tsushima, Italian aerial bombardment of the Ottomans and the chaos of the Balkan wars. It's also the era of Sidney Reilly, the Russian revolution of 1905, the Sidney Street siege and the Curragh mutiny. It's a fascinating period that perhaps deserves to be wargamed more than it is.

Michael D'Alessandro
PEARL HARBOR - A VIRTUAL BATTLEFIELD TOUR
1 hour   any
Covering why the Japanese considered the war inevitable, why Oahu was the optimal target, the technological leaps the Japanese had to make to ensure the success of the attack, and why the Americans considered Oahu impregnable. We will start at the tea house which the Japanese used to gather open source intelligence on the disposition and operations of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and tour the coastal artillery defenses the U.S. invested in and the air defenses they did not invest in. We will visit the the fleet anchorage and airfields at Ford Island and Bellows Field that therefore were taken by surprise. We will reflect on the cost by visiting the USS Arizona Memorial and the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific and end by considering the aftermath for all involved.

Alan Paull

KINGMAKER II – THE RESURRECTION

1 hour   any

Back in 2019, Gibsons Games asked me if I would be interested in re-developing Andrew McNeil's seminal Wars of the Roses board game, Kingmaker. It seemed like a good idea at the time, though it turned out to be a longer and bumpier journey than originally conceived. Now, we've had a successful Kickstarter campaign, and Gibsons' new edition is on track for delivery in or around March 2023. In this session I'll present some thoughts about my experience between then and now. There will be space for questions

Jim Roche

1943 AND ALL THAT

1 hour   any

Singalong session including the delights of Stalingrad.

Jim Roche

LA GUERRE DE DEMAIN

90 minutes   7

A Paddy Griffiths game. French Officers Mess discussion in a fort under siege in the Franco-German War of 1893. Political future - what are we fighting for?   What tactics to employ? Participants are members of the Officers Mess in Fort de Liouville, Fort de Gironville and Fort du Camp-des-Romains. In addition to the major issues already set-out, we must address the issues such as Le Pantalon Rouge, c'est la France and the role of the Chasseurs Alpin (a Lieutenant on secondment) Jamais être pris vivant (Eng: Never to be Taken Alive)

Russell King

JAMES F DUNNIGAN'S ORIGINS OF WORLD WAR ONE (1969)

2 hours   5

Take part in a moderated session of Origins of World War One by JFD, one of wargaming's great designers. This is a keenly competitive political game in which the five major nations in pre-World War I Europe all figure. They will pitch with and against each other to achieve each nation's objectives using diplomatic effort and international treaties. Ranging across theatres from mainland Europe to North Africa and India via the troubled Balkans, a simple system of play shows clearly how feverish intrigue developed across the world from 1909 to 1914.

John Curry

BOSNIAN MERCENARY

90 minutes   1-15

The aim of this game is teach something about the life and psychology of modern mercenary. Build your character, then work through a series of situations as the war develops. Each of your decisions is then compared to what the actual mercenaries did. At the end of the campaign, your performance will be evaluated. Note: some might consider some of the content to be exploring some very black situations.

Graham Evans

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE'S COUNTRY HOUSES IN THE CIVIL WAR

90 minutes   any

We all know about the siege of Basing House, but Northamptonshire has more stately homes per square mile than any other county in Britain. Whilst this meant the county was the

playground for the rich and powerful, it was staunchly Parliamentarian during the Civil war. However, its country houses offered an opportunity to exert power by both sides. This talk looks at what did and did not happen with them.

Tim Gow
DOODLEBUGGERS
1 hour   6-8
The 2014 WD Display Team North game – which has been found to work well over Zoom. A fast-paced solo game. Take to the skies over Kent to prevent those new unsporting V-1 flying bombs reaching London. This only take a few minutes to play so will run several times. Who will be the top scorer in No. 607 'Knuston' Wing? Features 1/72 scale toy aeroplanes. Bring your own silly hat and implausible RAF moustache.

Ian Robinson
QUADWRANGLES – WORLD AT WAR
2 hours   4
Quadwrangles is a simple game system that provides chaotic fun and explores history. In this game we look at the classic struggle between Liberal Democracy, Fascism, Communism and East Asian Nationalism in a four-player game. The game will be run using Google Drive – players will be provided with the relevant links.

Mark Flanagan and Ian Robinson
SWEEPING SATELLITES
2 hours   4
This is a turn-based adversarial game played between two teams representing opposing superpowers. The players are presented with the role of being members of an information gathering analyst team with access to limited satellite reconnaissance resources but with the scope of determining the strategic intentions of the opposing superpower. The team knows of their own side's long-term strategic intentions and what deployed resources are being hidden from their opponent, recommending an appropriate defensive strategy to hide these assets from hostile spying eyes. Thus, the game play is a form of a sophisticated hide and seek, with an element of player guided misinformation and deception. The players will tactically choose from a variety of search patterns based from the ground tracks of common satellite characteristics appropriate to each side's (Red and Blue) real world capabilities and decide an appropriate sampling pattern. Detection is not necessarily guaranteed or immediate, so several passes may be required before the identity of hidden facilities are revealed. Players will be challenged to prioritise these planned searching operations alongside new tasks required from unexpected evolving world events that can generate new assets for both sides or third parties. ASAT operations may be conducted by both sides. The game ends with a player-led briefing back to the umpire team (representing their chain of command) as to the intentions of the opposite superpower and an evaluation of world events generated during the game. They also reflect on how compromised the or own sides assets could be. This would lead to an end of game discussion between the two sides, with additional umpire and subject matter expertise commentary in a breakout session. Spectators are welcome for this session.

Toby Ewin
STRATEGIC WARGAMES IN THE IMPERIAL RUSSIAN NAVY 1896-1914
1 hour   any
A presentation of material which will form the basis of an article for the journal The Mariner's Mirror.

Nick Riggs

<mark>COYLE'S BEST II</mark>

2 hours   1-4

A game of '80s Cold War tactical armoured combat for 1-4 players, incorporating player feedback from COW 2022 and an examination of American Tank Ace from Compass Games. To be played on Roll20 (a free virtual tabletop platform aimed at hosting RPGs)

John Armatys

<mark>PUTIN'S HEIRS</mark>

2 hours   4-6

A matrix game set in Russia in February 2023, which will feature a number of experimental variations to the traditional matrix game format:

1. Players may EITHER make an argument (stating an ACTION, a RESULT, and UP TO three REASONS WHY) OR support or oppose an argument put forward by a player earlier in the round (which requires no reasons; support or opposition will give +1 or -1 to the dice roll) OR pass.

2. Order of play in each round after the first will be based on success in the preceding round.

3. Players will write their own secret objectives, so a certain amount of preparation will be required. Objectives will be revealed in the de-brief, when those who have set themselves ludicrously easy or vague objectives can be subject to ritual mockery.

I will be disappointed if the session does not turn out to be in bad taste - those who are uncomfortable with Black Games have been warned…

Ian Robinson & Mark Flanagan

<mark>TAKE THAT HILL</mark>

1 hour   2-3

You command an Infantry Platoon made up of three sections and a Pl HQ. Your mission is to DESTROY an enemy section hastily dug in on the hill 500m away as quickly as possible. The ground in front of your position is open and offers no cover from view or fire. To do this you will need to fire and manoeuvre your platoon into an assault position adjacent to the hill whilst keeping the enemy suppressed. Advanced rules add complexity and additional realism as required by the players., whilst staying true to the base rules.

Tim Gow et al

<mark style="background-color:#92d050">THE VCOW 2023 CLOSING EVENT</mark>

A mercifully brief closing session – come along, you may wear a silly hat if you wish!

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, e.g. 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 and Data Protection

VCOW is held under the WD Data Protection Policy dated 7th November 2021.

Attendees are asked to note that:

- WD shares your data with all members of the WD Committee.

- Your name and contact details 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.

- If you want to contact a fellow member or attendee and do not have their contact details you can ask for a message including your contact details to be forwarded to the person concerned.

VCOW 2023 Timetable

Friday			
1600-1630			
1630-1730	Pearl Harbour – Virtual Battlefield Tour		
1730-1900			
1900-1915	Welcome & Introduction		
1915-2015	Kingmaker II – The Resurrection		
2030-2230	Vertical Urban Wargame	La Guerre De Demain	
2230+			
Saturday			
0930-1015			
1015-1145	Northamptonshire's Country Houses in the Civil War		
1200-1300	Doodlebuggers	Take that Hill	
1300-1430			
1430-1600	Omdurman to Sarajevo – Wargaming the period 1898 to 1914		
1615-1815	Origins of WW1	Quadwrangles	Putin's Heirs
1815-2000			
2000-2200	Sweeping Satellites	Kapuziner	
2215-late	1943 and all that		
Sunday			
0800-0900			
0900-1130	Bosnian Mercenary	Coyle's Best II	
1140-1240	Strategic Wargames in the Imperial Russian Navy		
1240-1300	Conference Closes		

Colour Coding	**Green**	unlimited numbers – just turn up
	Yellow	must be booked in advance
	Blue	main Zoom call open for chatting