

Virtual Conference of Wargamers 2024 Programme

2-4 February 2024

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 2024 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 [REDACTED] by **1200 noon UK time on Friday 26 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 [REDACTED]
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 [REDACTED].

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. **ting** 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 make audio or video recordings of sessions, or take screen shots of online sessions which show people, without agreement. Some sessions may be recorded by or on behalf of the presenter. Recordings will only be made available to the public with the consent of the presenter and anyone who can be identified in the recording

In order to root them out, the Reichsfuhrer SS has now empowered the state security services to submit this specially designed questionnaire to every officer holding a responsible position in the battle line.

You must attempt to answer every question

David Burden

CITYFIGHT 2024

2 hours 2-4

Cityfight 2024 is an updated version of the classic Cityfight game of small-scale urban combat. The game will be played double-blind with each side having its own map and relying on umpire reports to identify locations of the enemy forces. The game has been modified for playing on a square grid. The game will probably be played on a mix of Zoom, Jitsi and Google Slides and a technical rehearsal will be held before the VCOW weekend.

Nick Riggs

QU-AI SERA SERA

2 hours 3-6

A matrix-ish game. The players represent World Powers, each of whom has only just become aware of a nascent Artificial Intelligence. The AI is growing in intelligence and power at an exponential rate, and the players have very little time in which to determine how they will individually or collectively respond.

Pete Sizer

BLACK GOLD, BLUE FLAMES AND FIBREOPTIC CABLES: A NORTH SEA MATRIX GAME.

2 hours 6

A matrix game for six players to explore present day hybrid warfare and grey zone activities in the North Sea.

Ian Robinson

PEOPLE'S WAR IN VORONOI

90 minutes 4

People's War in Voronoi' is a new COIN game with simple rules and combat system. It is based in the mythical country of Voronoi and looks at a Red insurgency vs a Blue defending force. The Red insurgency can spread and overwhelm Blue, or likewise Blue can stop the insurgency and reverse it. The map is based on a Voronoi diagram, and it's an alternative to standard hex or square boards. Each area represents a space that can be crossed in a move. The rural areas (green/brown) are larger, and the urban areas are smaller with more regular shape. The size differences arise since distance = speed x time (time being constant), and you'll move more slowly in an urban area compared to a rural area. The game will run using Google Drive - Meet and links to be send out later.

John Armatys

ON RANKS IN THE BRITISH ARMY

90 minutes any

A talk about ranks in the British Army, including some pretty obscure ones (my favourites are the Sub-Brigadier and the Marshal). The wargaming applications are limited, it might be of use to those contemplating career games or role playing games, but I hope that the session will provide an interesting diversion into some obscure bits of military history.

Toby Ewin

THE LAST WORD ON OFFICIAL PRE-1914 WARGAMES... FOR NOW...

1 hour

any

Including the various German games (several of which have been detailed in printed sources), the origins of the German naval games (drawing on an as-yet-unpublished article by Prof Wintjes), plus a little about French and Italian and (the lack of) Austro-Hungarian games, as these have generally not been so well covered, at least in English. Also a mention of US games and what we now know of Russian tactical games.

Michael D'Alessandro

DEATH IN PARADISE - THE BATTLE OF NU'UANU 1795 - A VIRTUAL BATTLEFIELD TOUR OF THE FINAL BATTLE FOR HAWAIIAN UNIFICATION

1 hour

any

We will begin with the unique civilization and culture of 18th century Hawaii and how its first contact with the West led to a desire to unify the Hawaiian Islands to help balance them against the West. Landing with Kamehameha I on Oahu at Waikiki Beach and Diamond Head Crater, we will march up country with his army, battling at the Punch Bowl and ultimately at the Pail Cliffs. The campaign features naval, land and aerial combat while external agents the British and the Russians engage in a form of a Pacific Great Game. Spears vs. cannons - what can go wrong? We will conclude by considering the effect a unified Hawaiian kingdom had on 19th Century history and how that effect continued to resonate in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Gary Sheffield, Graham Evans and John Bassett

HISTORY, HISTORICAL FICTION, BOGUS HISTORY AND WARGAMING

90 minutes

any

A discussion on the links between history, historical fiction, historical drama and wargaming, and how bogus history can undermine them all.

Evan D'Alessandro

BREAKING: BERLIN!

1 hour

6 players (any number of observers)

West Berlin, 1984, the Warsaw Pact is about to invade...

Through the door of a nondescript building in East Berlin six men enter. One from the Stasi, one from the Ministry of the Interior, one from the Nationale Volksarmee, and three from the unit the meeting is about: the Spezialeinheiten. In 24 hours the tanks will roll across the wall and the SKK will have a very important mission: by guile use the full force of East German propaganda to convince the defenders to give up.

The Spezialeinheiten's 120 men are well equipped with a mobile printing-press, editorial facilities, loudspeakers, a pamphlet mortar for "agitation grenades", and a liaison with the Luftstreitkräfte's 8th Fighter Wing to arrange for leaflets to be distributed by aircraft. With all the words allowable by East German censors, can the plucky SKK come up with a propaganda plan to win the day?

John Bassett

CRUSTIES!

90 minutes

4-6

A matrix game about anti-capitalist protest in the City of London in the late 1990s. Will the March Against Mammon bring the City to its knees or will Group 5 Security keep trade

going? Will the protest be exclusively peaceful? Will the police use excessive force? Will the game collapse into an embarrassing fiasco for all concerned?

Tim Gow et al

THE VCOW 2023 CLOSING EVENT

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

Screenshots will be taken of this session, make sure that your camera is off if you do not agree to having your picture appear in The Nugget or on the Internet.

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 2024 Timetable

Friday		
1600-1630		
1630-1730	Death in Paradise - Nuuanu 1795 – Virtual Battlefield Tour	
1730-1900		
1900-1915	Welcome & Introduction	
1915-2115	National Socialist Dragon’s Den	Crusties!
2130-2230	Paddy’s Nazi Ideological Fervour Quiz	
2230+		
Saturday		
0930-1000		
1000-1130	On Ranks in the British Army	
1145-1245	My Aunt’s War	Breaking: Berlin!
1245-1430		
1430-1600	Amritsar to Kargil – Wargaming South Asian conflicts 1919-1999	
1615-1815	Black Gold, Blue Flames...	People’s War in Voronoi
1815-2000		
2000-2200	Qu-AI-Sera-Sera	Cityfight 2024
2200-late		
Sunday		
0900-1000		
1000-1100	A Medieval Staff College Problem	The last word on pre-1914 wargames
1115-1245	History, Historical Fiction, Bogus History and Wargaming	
1245-1300	Conference Closes	

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