

Virtual Conference of Wargamers 2026 Programme

6-8 February 2026

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 of events. VCOW 2026 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, Stephen Aguilar-Millan, Michael D'Alessandro and Pete Sizer.

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 30 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 be 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 Discord.

Some presenters of "numbers limited sessions" may be prepared to have spectators. 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.

DISCORD AT VCOW

It is recommended that all VCOW 2026 attendees join the WD Discord as it will be used to share files and for discussions related to sessions that you are participating in.

A channel has been set up for VCOW general chat and a separate channel has been set up for each VCOW session. Please put related session discussions and files in the appropriate channel dedicated to that session. Not all presenters will make the files for their game available in Discord. This may be due to copyright issues or personal preference.

Discord is best used through the Discord app, available for PC and Mac computers and iOS and Android mobile devices. If you cannot get access to a Discord app you can use Discord through your Web browser for a more limited experience.

Once you join the WD Discord, make sure to change your Discord server name to the name that you are registered as in the WD membership database.

Here is your invite to the WD Discord server. If you are using the Discord app, click on the "+" button in the left hand column, then click on the button that lets you "Join a Server", and then paste the invite link into the box. If you are using Discord from a Web browser, paste the invite into the Web browser and follow the directions.

WD Discord invite: [REDACTED]

A useful guide to Discord can be found here: [REDACTED]

THE BENCH OUTSIDE

One of the great joys of VCOW for many is the chance to meet and chat with friends old and new. When not otherwise in use – please refer to the timetable - the main Zoom channel will be open for chatting. There is also a VCOW2026 general chat channel on Discord.

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 the main VCOW Discord channel – specifically the VCOW2026-general-chat.

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 – this will be made clear at the start of the session. Recordings will only be made available to the public with the consent of the presenter and anyone who can be identified in the recording

THE SESSION LIST:

The sessions are presented in the following format:

Presenter(s)

TITLE OF SESSION

running time

number of players

description

Michael D'Alessandro

A VIRTUAL BATTLEFIELD TOUR OF THE AIR, SEA AND SPACE DEFENCE OF THE REALM IN 2026 – A LOOK AT HOW THE UK'S CRITICAL NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS PROTECTED TODAY

1 hour

any

In the last year, the vulnerability of the United Kingdom's Critical National Infrastructure to Russian attack has come under increased scrutiny. The purpose of this tour is to explore how vulnerable the UK is to Russian attack today.

The tour will commence with a look at some of the UK's historic air defence sites for perspective.

The tour will then continue with an overview of the UK's Critical National Infrastructure today on land, under the sea, and in space. We will then launch into an exploration of the UK's current air, sea, and space defences and the Russian threats they face.

The tour will culminate with a description and analysis of what occurred the last time the UK came under sustained cruise missile and ballistic missile attack in 1944 and 1945 and how that attack may compare to the kind of attack the UK may experience in the near future.

This tour may serve as an introduction to the Battle of Britain II 2026 game that will take place during VCOW.

John Bassett

THE IRON CURTAIN DESCENDS

2 hours

4-6

January 1945: last summer the Waffen SS destroyed the Warsaw uprising while the Soviet army watched from across the Vistula. Now the Soviets have imposed a puppet regime on the ruins of the capital. But will Soviet Communism succeed in breaking the spirit of the Polish people where the Third Reich failed?

A matrix game of oppression, reconstruction, resistance and remembrance, featuring the NKVD, different factions of Polish Communists, the People's Party, underground armed resistance and the Catholic Church.

John Bassett, Tim Gow, Peter Sizer

THE OMEGA MEN

60 to 75 minutes

any

A panel discussion on post-apocalyptic games. The 1970s and 1980s were the heyday of games like SPI's After The Holocaust, Steve Jackson's Car Wars and TSR's Metamorphosis Alpha, set after some, often nuclear, catastrophe. And the new edition of Twilight 2000 and recent games and rules like Zona Alfa and This War of Mine show that such settings have renewed popularity. Our discussion will look at some of these games, the reasons for their enduring popularity and what they say about us and our preoccupations.

John Curry

NUCLEAR WARGAMES OF COLD WAR I

2 hours

any

An interactive introduction to the nuclear wargames during Cold War I.

John Curry

BATTLE OF BRITAIN II 2026

90 minutes

any

A general war has broken out and the UK is about to fight for survival in what history would later call the Battle of Britain II. The players represent the senior decision makers of the UK in an operational level game defending the UK.

John Armatys

1066 - A MATRIX GAME OF A TROUBLED YEAR IN ENGLISH HISTORY

2 hours

4-6

A chance to try the first matrix game I ever wrote, which was run at COW 2000 (see Nugget 148 and the May 2002 edition of Wargames Illustrated). The game has been updated to modern standards and adapted to be played online.

David Burden

OF AIS AND METAVERSES – A MATRIXISH GAME

2 hours

6-8

This will be a bit of an experimental session, as I've never run a matrix game before and need to try some ideas out before running a game at a Summer School later in the year. The game may have shades of Nick Rigg's Qu-Ai Sera Sera from VCOW 2024, and will be looking at how technology might develop over the coming years and the different agendas of Western and Eastern governments, corporations and populations.

John Curry

WHEN GOVERNMENTS PLAY

90 minutes

any

This will demonstrate a current government tool used to generate wargames at a moment's notice using AI. Someone will suggest a topic and I will generate the game within 3 minutes. We will play a turn or two of the game, then discuss what are the implications of AI creating wargames that influence policy. I will then introduce tactical decision games using AI and how AI is transforming solo wargaming.

Ian Robinson

THE PENINSULAR WAR

90 minutes

2-4

This is a simplified wargame simulating the Peninsular War in Portugal, Spain, and Southern France. You can command either the French and their Bonapartist allies or the coalition of the Spanish army, guerrillas, and the Anglo-Portuguese force opposing them. The game models the historical French troop drawdown – from their 1810 peak to depletion by the Russian and Sixth Coalition Wars. Each counter represents about 20,000 soldiers, or a concentration of guerrilla forces. The game map uses a Voronoi system based on political boundaries, river and mountain demarcations.

Jim Roche

SOLITAIRE TO MULTIPLAYER

2 hours

any

Over the last couple of years, I have modified several Solitaire games to play with members of Tim Gow's Sheffield Zoom wargame group. In this session, I will describe some examples and demonstrate one of the games. The basic approach is to identify individual roles within the Solitaire game and allocate tasks accordingly. The game will be: DER TAG 1916; A game of the German Fleet's attacks on Britain and the Royal Navy's response. The Royal Navy will try to maintain the Blockade to starve Germany. There will be German attacks on defenceless coastal towns, Cruisers provoking the Dover Patrol and many more excitements. When will the major Fleet engagement happen?

Tim Gow

GMT's BENEATH THE MED – A MULTI-PLAYER SOLO GAME

90 minutes

4-6

We (the Sheffield Zoom Wargames group) have played this a few times as a multi payer experience. It has provided us with knowledge, entertainment and hilarity – but not necessarily in that order! Now it's your opportunity to lurk beneath the surface and take on the might of the British Royal Navy as an officer on a Regia Marina submarine. What could possibly go wrong? Bring your own hat & medals.

Nick Riggs

PRACTICAL GAME IMPLEMENTATION ON TABLETOP SIMULATOR

1 hour

any

A workshop session taking you through the process of implementing a game with a board, playing pieces and cards on TTS. There might possibly also be a little light scripting, but the focus will be on simplicity and achieving practical results in short order.

Nick Riggs

TACTICAL WARGAME 'ACCURACY', DESIGN AND IMPROVEMENT SURVEY RESULTS

1 hour

any

A presentation of the interim results of my two surveys of players and designers of tactical wargames. While these currently live surveys will continue until the beginning of March, the bulk of participants' results are expected to be in by then. The presentation will be followed by a group discussion of any implications arising and possible subjects of future research.

Mark Flanagan

THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA - SCRATCH ONE FLAT-TOP

2 hours

3-7

Still reeling from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and their follow-on sweeping victories, the USN must stop the IJN extending their power into New Guinea and the Solomon Islands threatening Australia. Aware that a Japanese invasion convoy was already at sea heading to Port Moresby (New Guinea), along with a strong IJN covering forces (including aircraft carriers), Admiral Nimitz directed Admiral Fletcher to use TF11 (Lexington) and TF17 (Yorktown) to stop them. The scene was set for the first carrier versus carrier battle of the Pacific War.

James Langham

FIREARMS IN POPULAR BRITISH MUSIC

30 minutes

any

A talk that looks at how named weapons have featured in British music from 1949 onwards and how those songs have reflected how society has seen the weapons and by extension warfare.

James Langham

US ARMY WARGAMING 1948-2019

30 minutes

any

A talk that is a companion to my talk at the Autumnal Gathering talk on USMC wargaming over the same period and what points we as rule writers can take from them.

Evan D'Alessandro

EAGLE'S FLIGHT

2 hours

10

A planning game about conducting a US embassy evacuation from Taiwan in the build up to, or during crisis.

Evan D'Alessandro

IF WE DARE...

2 hours

6

A committee game about nuclear use in the case of a war over Taiwan, from both the US and China's perspective.

Evan D'Alessandro

THE EAGLE'S DEN

2 hours

8

A light-hearted Dragons' Den-like game of pitching black projects to the US government in the mid to late Cold War. Some pitches are real things the US Government looked at, and some not very real (and off into the weird and fantastical!). Great seriousness about unserious things required!

Tim Gow et al

THE VCOW 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 1st September 2024.

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 2026 Timetable

Friday			
1600-1630			
1630-1730	Virtual Battlefield Tour – Defence of the Realm 2026		
1730-1900			
1900-1915	Welcome & Introduction		
1915-2045	Battle of Britain II 2026	The Peninsular War	
2100-2230	Solitaire to Multi Player	The Eagle’s Den	
2230+			
Saturday			
0900-0930			
0930-1100	Tactical Wargame ‘Accuracy’	When Governments Play	
1115-1315	The Iron Curtain Descends	1066	The Coral Sea
1315-1430			
1430-1545	The Omega Men		
1600-1800	Nuclear Wargames of Cold War 1	Of AIs and Metaverses	
1815-2000			
2000-2200	Eagle’s Flight	Beneath the Med	
2200-late			
Sunday			
0900-1000			
1000-1100	Practical Game Implementation	If We Dare...	
1100-1200	US Army Wargaming followed by Firearms in Popular British Music		
1200-1215	Conference Closes		

Colour Coding	Green	unlimited numbers – just turn up
	Yellow	must be booked in advance (some may welcome spectators)
	Blue	main Zoom call open for chatting