



Kriegspiel Renaissance

The wargaming community met at **Connections UK 2015**² in September supporting the revival of wargaming (Kriegspiel) as a vital tool in training, education and analysis. Gareth Davies reports.

Wargaming, an important and longstanding form of training and education,

as well as a vital tool in the analytical armoury, has undergone something of a revival in recent years and part of that revival can be directly attributed to the Connections community of practice. Connections was established in the US in 1993 and for many years was the only formal group that brought together the users and players from defence, the research community, academia, and industry. This side of the Atlantic there are a number of wargame evangelists including Professor Phil Sabin of King's College London who has studied, taught and published on wargaming for many years. He, together with Graham Longley-Brown from LBS Consultancy and Major Tom Mouat from the Defence Academy saw the benefits that spreading this community would bring and they are the leading lights behind the first Connections franchise, Connections UK, which came to life in 2013. The network is continuing to grow, Connections Australia followed in 2014 and Connections Netherlands is the newest member.

Connections UK 2015 held their annual convention event over three days at King's College London's Strand campus in early September, the aim of which was to "advance and sustain the art,

science and application of wargaming."

Day 1 focused on the basics, aimed at those with limited knowledge of wargaming, and then built that knowledge rapidly so that by the close delegates would be able to understand the concept and its application. Days 2 and 3 were very much all about how to wargame better, how to spread the word about wargaming developments, and the opportunity to participate in a number of wargames. The 130 attendees were a mix of academics, game designers, MOD analysts, defence contractors and consultants, and serving military personnel. The number of people attending the UK event has steadily risen over the past three years and it is now almost as large as its US cousin. While there were four main themes to the conference: Global developments, UK developments, best practice, and hobby/professional synergies, this article looks at the conference from two perspectives: training & education, and analysis & research.

Analysis & Research

The main speakers in the first session were all American. Peter Perla, the very well-known game designer and wargame expert, spoke about the recent reinvigoration of wargaming in the US that is being led by the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He explained how the

Above
International delegates participating in
Connections UK 2015.
Image credit: PAXsims.

US DoD leadership have identified the proven importance of wargames in similar periods of rapid change, that they realize the importance of learning from and about wargames in professional military education, and that they recognise that wargaming needs to take place in concert with other analytical and experimental activities. Matt Caffrey, who set up Connections, followed with an overview of international wargaming efforts. His central point was that wargaming not only provides its users with an edge, it is the catalyst for other edges. Wargaming can help refine ordinary ideas (and possibly bad ones) into much better ideas.

As one would expect from a UK event the UK's research and analytical use of wargaming was a major part of the agenda. The UK MOD's research organisation, Dstl, briefed on how it uses wargaming as an analytical tool. Emphasis was placed on how wargaming can aid divergent thinking and innovation. David England from Niteworks, who is leading the Army's Combat experimentation, spoke on how wargaming formed a critical element of the analytical process, and he made the very interesting point that

the outcomes are not an end in themselves, they are the start point for further discussion and analysis. And for those who might have harboured some scepticism regarding the validity of wargames when used as analytical tools, Cranfield University's explanation of the recent successful verification and validation of the Rapid Campaign Analysis Toolset, an analytical manual wargame designed to enable the rapid testing (validation) of all phases of a campaign plan to identify areas of risk at the military strategic level, should have proven them wrong.

Training & Education

Ahead of a session for which he was the chair, Major General (Retd) Andrew Sharpe, head of the British Army's Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research (CHACR), shared a few of his thoughts on the subject. He is quite clear that the *raison d'être* of the officer corps is to be the conceptual component of fighting power. In all of its guises, wargaming, like sport for the body, is an ideal way of taking relevant exercise for the

mind. It is in this spirit that the CHACR is currently developing a *Kriegspiel* (assisted by a team headed up by Prof Phil Sabin and Maj Gen (retd) John Drewienkiewicz), based on the original von Reisswitz version, that can be used for simple 'tactical press ups for the mind' at modern battlegroup and brigade level. He believes that wargaming is a skill that should be taught at Sandhurst (which as you will read below, it is) and developed throughout an officer's career. He went on to draw an obvious comparison with physical fitness; officers are required to exercise their bodies regularly and they should also be required to relevantly exercise their minds in the same way. It is also intended that the CHACR should play as full a part as possible in the wide range of analytical and developmental wargaming activities undertaken by the Army.

Having been well teed up by General Andrew's comments ahead of the session, the newly appointed Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Major General Paul Nanson, explained

the Academy's use of wargaming in the education and training it delivers. What Sandhurst likes about wargaming is its adversarial nature, that its use helps improve the cadet's speed in decision making and flexibility of thought, and that it allows cadets to experience planning at different levels of command. He also gave an overview of how wargaming based on historical analysis is an excellent teaching tool. It is still early days for Sandhurst's wargaming but with clear interest and understanding of the benefits at the very top of the Academy the likelihood is that its use will grow.

Games Fair

The event wasn't an endless series of presentations; the organisers were very clear that only through exposure to wargames would people understand their application. Fifteen games were presented, the majority of which were manual wargames, but *Slitherine/Matrix Games* had a small collection of their PC based games available. What clearly stood out was the vast range of games

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available, in terms of both level of play (strategic, operational, tactical, sub-tactical), the scenarios (which ranged from the 2015 general election, a migration crisis, cyber warfare, as well as more traditional and pure military challenges), and the objectives of the game (analysis, decision making, team training, individual training). Some were even set up so that results from them (in this specific case casualty levels) were being used by one of the other games, enabling multiple levels of training almost simultaneously.

Perspectives

Having reported some of the key insights I offer five personal perspectives on the event. The first concerns the age old discussion on manual wargaming versus computer wargaming. The subject cropped up in one of the Q&A sessions and was discussed by many in the margins of the games fair and during other networking moments. While there maybe one or two who are firmly entrenched in their own specific camp, the strong consensus was that there is at worst a positive tension between the two and at best the view is that they are entirely complementary; there's no 'versus'. A greater relationship between the two communities will begin to open up further untapped potential of blended wargaming that utilises both digital and manual elements together. Although not applicable in all circumstances, this blend can offer an approach where the digital and manual elements cover for the weaknesses and amplify the strengths of the other.

Second, the role of industry. As

already mentioned attendees came from both industry and the military and the former were there in good numbers. I had a long chat with the team from NSC who were somewhat modest about their wargaming capability. They have been supplying the simulation that is used at the Joint Service Command & Staff College as the engine for the Theatre Wargame and they do something similar in Qatar and the Netherlands. And at the slightly lower (and thus more detailed) level of use their constructive simulation Contact has been used for Course of Action wargaming during planning exercises on the Captain's Warfare Course and on the Army's Intermediate Command and Staff Course. This is of course a good example of a tool being used for analysis and experimentation during training & education and perhaps goes to show that wargaming isn't something that can be stovepiped. Bohemia Interactive Simulations also had a strong contingent as they have an interest in wargaming at the personal and at the product level. Nicholas Edwards, one of their designers, whose KCL War Studies MA included the wargaming module, said that his studies helped develop an understanding of how necessary the process of abstraction is, something that is important to keep in mind in computerised games where designers are not necessarily as forced into it through limitations as manual game designers are. He also spoke about their latest development, VBS Tactics, which to his mind is most definitely a wargame.

Third, the next steps. There was consensus that for wargaming to become

a trusted analytical and educational tool it must be inculcated early in an officer's (and soldier's?) career, which as we heard is now happening at Sandhurst. In parallel there is still a need for better understanding of the distinction between an analytical wargame (such as a doctrinally mandated Course of Action Wargame) and a training wargame (such as a Command Post Exercise).

Fourth, it is important to remember that a wargame is not necessarily just the tool itself, the outcomes generated are as much down to the context and environment as they are the game. The ability of the instructors/umpires, the experience/expectations/biases of the players, and the way the game is presented, all have a significant impact on whether Training Objectives will be met.

And the fifth is a clear deduction from the first four, and that is of the opportunities that exist within the world of wargaming, manual, computer and potentially a blend of both. It is quite clear that the use of wargaming, for both education & training and for analysis & research, is on the increase, and this increase in use will almost certainly generate requirements for new wargames. The Kriegspiel Renaissance is well under way.

About the Author

Gareth Davies has recently retired from the British Army after 28 years as an officer in the Royal Armoured Corps. When he wasn't commanding tanks and reconnaissance vehicles he spent much of his career in the world of training, education and simulation. He is now a freelance analyst and writer. [mst](#)



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