

POLITICS OF PLAY

WARGAMING WITH THE US MILITARY



AGGIE HIRST

Good reads

THE CRAFT OF WARGAMING

A DETAILED PLANNING GUIDE FOR DEFENSE PLANNERS AND ANALYSTS



COL. JEFF APPELGET, USA (RET.), COL. ROBERT BURKS, USA (RET.), AND FRED CAMERON

11 Sep: 1130-1300

WARGAMES ACCORDING TO MARK



AN HISTORIAN'S VIEW OF WARGAME DESIGN
BY MARK HERMAN

On Wargaming

Second Edition

Volume Two, The Application of Wargaming

How Wargaming Can Help Us Achieve a Better Future

by Matthew B. Caffrey Jr.



Published by The Admiralty Trilogy Group



Connections UK

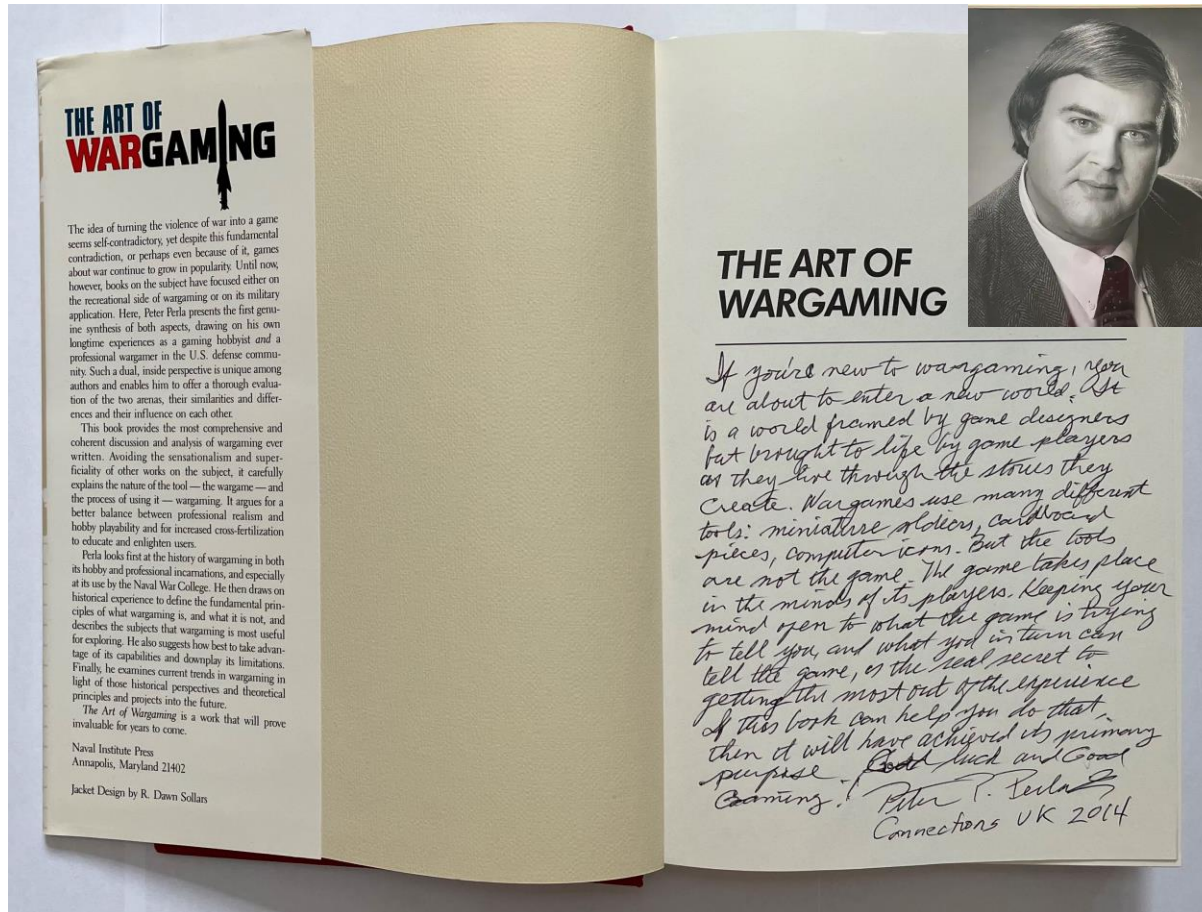


Defence Academy
of the United Kingdom



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“What advice would you give to someone new to (professional) wargaming?”



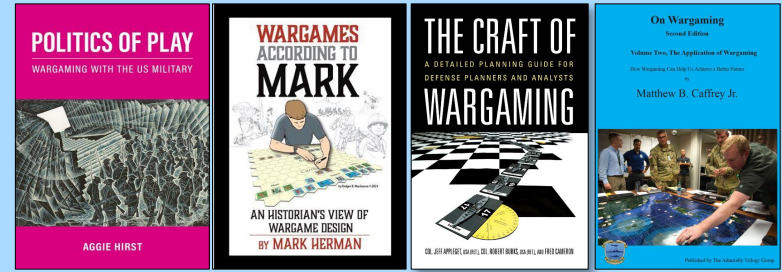
“If you are new to wargaming, you are about to enter a new world. It is a world framed by game designers but brought to life by game players as they live through the stories they create. Wargames use many different tools: miniature soldiers, cardboard pieces, computer icons. But the tools are not the game. The game takes place in the minds of its players. Keeping your mind open to what the game is trying to tell you, and what you in turn can tell the game, is the real secret to getting the most out of the experience. If this book can help you do that, then it will have achieved its primary purpose. Good luck and good gaming.”

Peter Perla

Connections UK 2014

Peter’s wargaming reports: <https://www.cna.org/centers-and-divisions/cna/ow/gaming-and-integration/peter-perla>

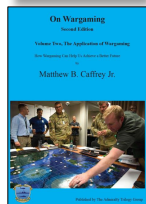
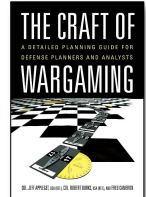
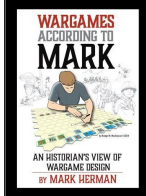
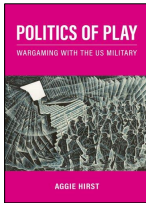
Good reads



Chair: Colin Marston

1. Dr Aggie Hirst (KCL) – ***Politics of Play: Wargaming with the US Military (Oxford University Press, 2024)***
2. Mark Herman – ***Wargames according to Mark: An Historian's View of Wargame Design***
3. Jeff Appleget (NPS) – ***The Craft of Wargaming***
4. Matt Caffrey – ***On Wargaming, Second Edition***

Q&A panel at end of speaker session



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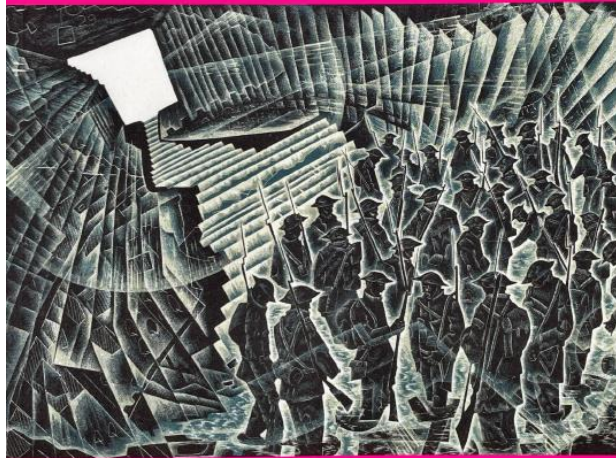
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POLITICS OF PLAY

WARGAMING WITH THE US MILITARY



AGGIE HIRST

Politics of Play

Wargaming with the US Military

AGGIE HIRST

Wargaming produces people. It engages us intellectually and affectively, leaving us changed by and after gameplay. This means that far from being frivolous fun, wargames must be used carefully and self-reflexively so that we pay attention to the kind of people and politics they produce. The good news is that wargames can be created and played to address the pressing problems of our era, from Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza, to Russian aggression in Ukraine, to more everyday issues such as the empowerment of women, people of color, and other minoritised groups. It is up to all wargamers, established and new, to think carefully about the messages and effects of the games they create and utilise so they can contribute to producing people and a world they want to live with and in.

Aggie Hirst, Connections 2025.

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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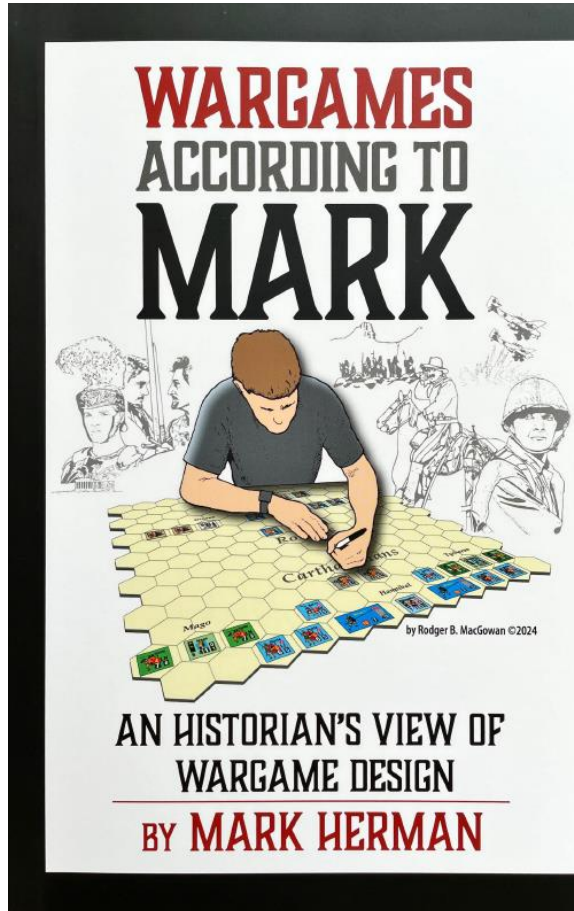
Aggie Hirst

Connections UK 2025





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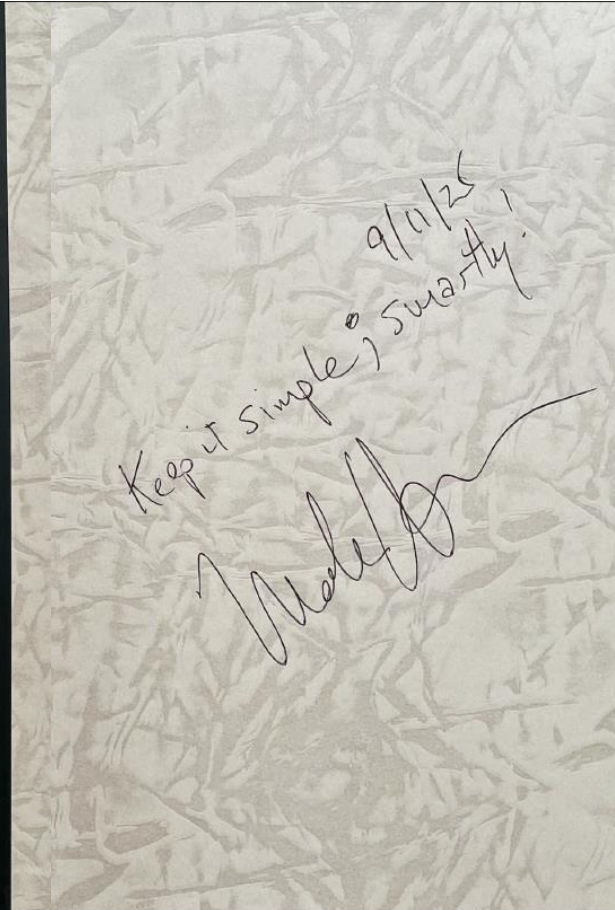


From the Author:
My goal when designing a wargame is to embed the known narrative within an alternate historically supported envelope. I not only want you to see and understand aspects of history which are poorly conveyed in books, such as the impact of geography on maneuver, but the debates around paths not taken. I want you to see the plausible alternate lanes that history could have taken and, in many cases, how singular and even unlikely what actually happened was. I see wargames as an historical laboratory where understanding the interaction of factors adds richness to understanding the actual events that unfolded.

How much design detail is required to parse an historically themed game from an historical wargame is like many things, in the eye of the beholder, but as I will describe I know it when I see it. As I said, this is my method and views on the subject, so if you disagree with me, all good, but at least you will know where I stand on the topic.

When I design a wargame, I am trying to do several things, but first and foremost I am putting you into the historical narrative. Within that narrative I am balancing kinetic and psychological history. Kinetic history is getting the physical force, space, and time factors correctly integrated into the game system or simulation. Think of this as the 'science' aspect of design. Getting these physical values integrated into the simulation engine are necessary for any good wargame, but they are always insufficient if one wants to correctly capture the context of the actual events. Psychological history (or the 'art' of design) is what is often lacking in many wargames. The absence of psychological factors means the players are just going through the physical motions of the event, as informed by hindsight. Designers too often restrict player actions through special rules, victory points, or conditions to shoehorn the design into following the historical narrative, while glossing over the real tensions that restricted the actions of the participants and drove their behavior in the original situation.

In the end a good design needs to present the player with the integration of kinetic and psychological history otherwise the historical narrative will suffer. It is the areas of intelligence gathering, cultural differences, and commander psychology that continue to fascinate me when I am researching a new design. Getting the kinetic factors right is necessary, but insufficient if one is to successfully capture the essence of an historical narrative.



*“Keep it simple;
smartly!”*

Mark Herman

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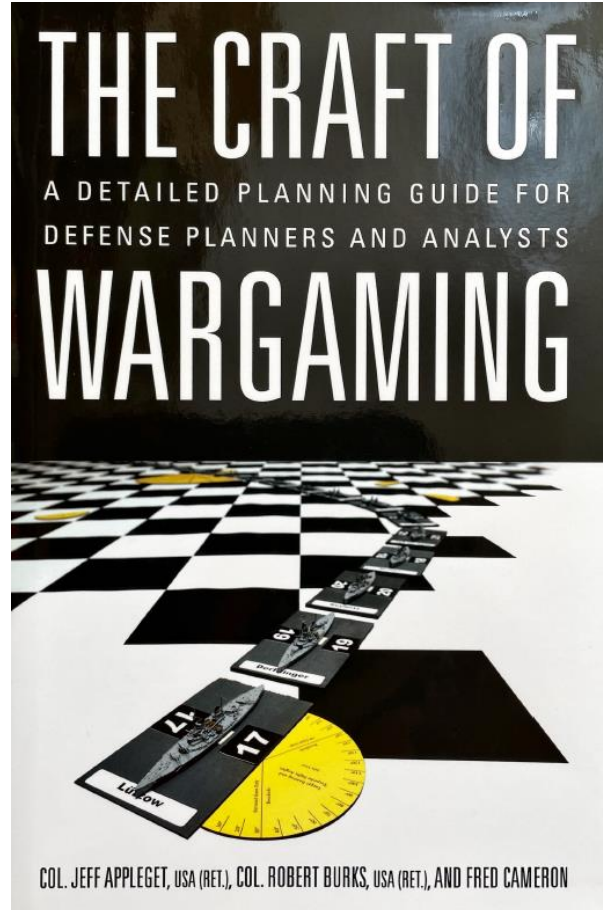
Further information, please see Mark's brief (& audio) here:

<https://www.professionalwargaming.co.uk/CUK25-WargamesAccordingtoMarkDiscussionv3.pdf>





“What advice would you give to someone new to (professional) wargaming?”



- There is a delicate balance between playability and realism. Create a simple wargame quickly, playtest it, and only add detail when you must.
- There will always be the temptation to “modernize” wargames with the latest technology. However, the craft of wargaming requires that you design each game to address a unique problem. You can't know the methods, models, and tools (MMTs) your game will require until you understand the sponsor's problem. Thus, any MMTs that you incorporate into your wargame must be “fit for purpose,” not “one size fits all.”
- Conducting a wargame for record without ever conducting a blind playtest of the game is like driving an automobile blindfolded - you can do it, but you won't like the result!
- Your wargame's results will only be as good as your worst player. The classic weakest link in Defence wargames is our portrayal of our adversary. We must find culturally and doctrinally proficient threat players to keep our wargames' results relevant!

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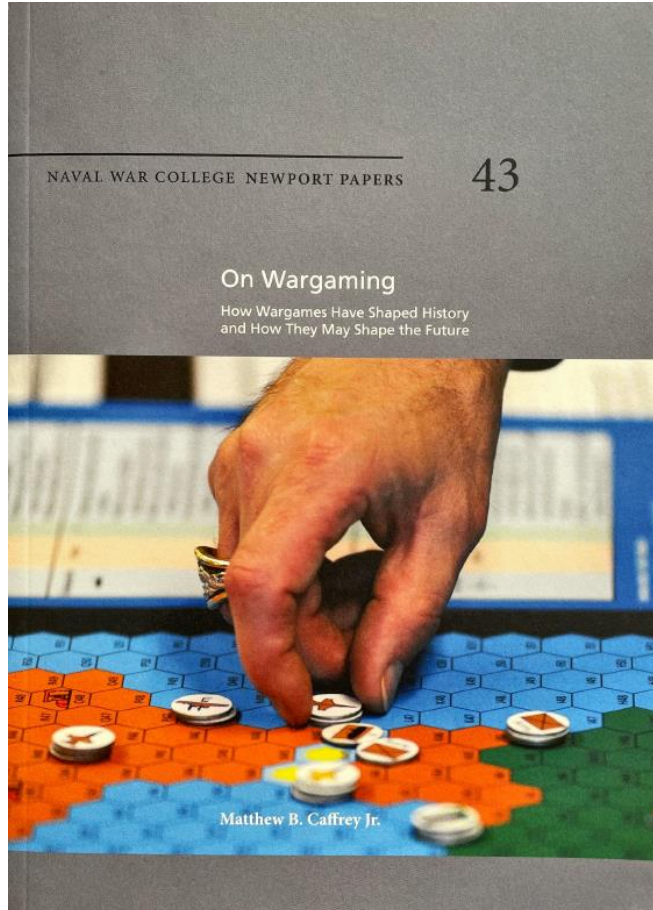
Jeff Appleget

Connections UK 2025





“What advice would you give to someone new to (professional) wargaming?”



*Dear Matt,
In the coming years our democracies will face a period of great danger. You can best help by working with others to advance and sustain the art, science and application of wargaming. Such wargames will help leaders develop their abilities as strategists and help them to develop effective strategies. You will need to develop yourself and others as wargame architects, ensuring the optimum mix of art & science, ensuring the best fit of offer play and adjudication. For wargames developing strategists you will need to ensure all participants have both decision making roles (no going to the gym to watch) and as many repetitions as feasible. For wargames developing strategies you will need to balance rigor with available time within each decision loop and the depth and breath of the conflict being examined. To succeed you will need to work with others within the USAF, the US, and our community of democracies. If all of you succeed we may yet achieve the highest of all victories - a just and lasting peace.*

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