



Learning Lessons from American COIN games: Vietnam, a war, gamed.

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Introduction.



- Biography.
- The Sigma Series of games
- Rural AGILE/ COIN wargame.
- Urban COIN Wargame.
- Tacspiel Wargame.
- Why do these games still matter?

Biography.

- Currently a PhD student at Bath Spa University.
 - MA in Military History.
 - BA in History.
 - Hobby gamer for over 35 years.
 - Day job in commercial hobby game design.
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- All opinions and comments in this presentation are my own and should not be taken as representative of any organisation or company I am affiliated to.

America's games about the Vietnam War.

- The Sigma Series- 10 seminar games run between 1963 and 1967.
- Rural AGILE/ COIN- multiplayer game – 1966.
- Urban COIN – multiplayer game- 1966.
- Tacspiel tactical wargame- 1966.

The Sigma Series.

- Set of seminar war games.
- Strategic level scenarios and resolution.
- Multiple teams filled with SME, and relevant high-ranking officials.
- White (Control) cell adjudicated out comes.
- Run at classified level.
- The series intent was to map out possible futures and testing of strategic options.

Overview of the Sigma Series.

- Sigma I-62: examined emerging situation in Southeast Asia.
- Sigma I-63: looked at longer term prospects of a possible war.
- Sigma I-64: explored escalatory options- including strategic bombing.
- Sigma II-64: further exploration of the efficacy of a bombing campaign.
- Sigma I-65: the files for this game have not been released yet.
- Sigma II-65: studied attritional strategies and the war.
- Sigma I-66: concerned with potential for negotiation and de-escalation.
- Sigma II-66: the scenario looked at an end to hostilities and its ramifications.
- Sigma I-67: looked for war ending strategies.
- Sigma I-67: a continuation of the above.

Sigma: Lessons learned and not learned.

- The games started during the Kennedy administration and continued under Johnson- perceived value.
- Many situations from the games mirrored what would later come to pass: shootdowns, failures of bombing, quagmire with little progress, locations of battles.
- Indicative not predictive.
- Games were one off events, not multiple iterations.
- Did they merely show the most likely outcome?
- How were they disseminated and understood?

Rural AGILE/ COIN Wargame (1966).

- Large multiplayer game, proto- megagame.
- Three teams of players: American/ VC/ Civilian.
- Game structure: Day turn, Night turn.
- Civilians could decide to inform one side of ambushes laid by the other.
- Player behaviour in the game.

Urban COIN Wargame (1966).

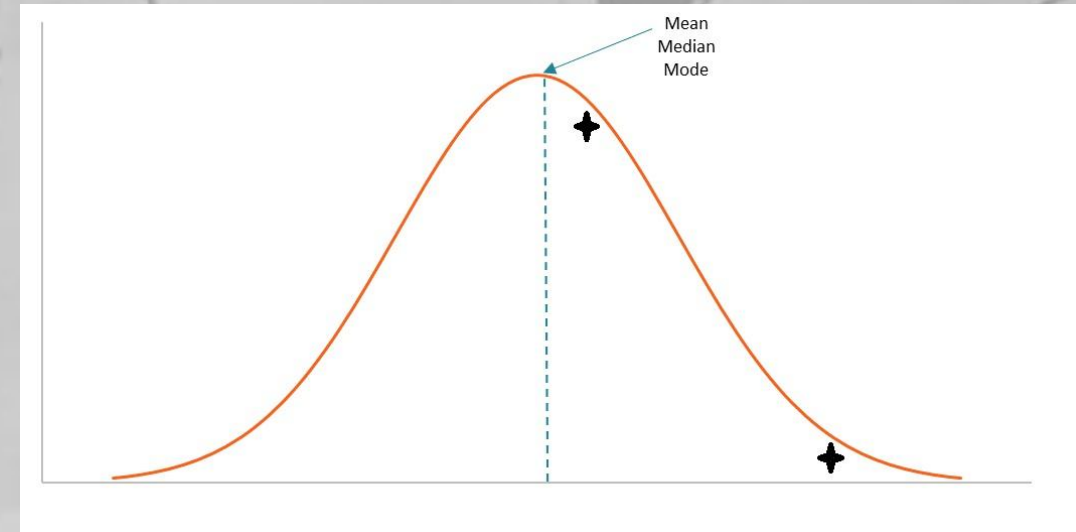
- Similar to the Rural game, it was a large multiplayer game.
- Focus on population management: control and screening of civilians as they game their working day.
- Balancing security against economic disruption.
- Relevance to US Army's role in Vietnam.

TACSPIEL (1966).

- Traditional Kriegsspiel: double-blind tactical wargame.
- Explored air-mobile helicopter-based operations, in difficult terrain.
- The enemy had asymmetric abilities in the game.
- The right game, but at the wrong time?

Wargames and the limits of predictability.

- Seminar games run once only provide one outcome or ludic future.
- Small, tactical, games run several times can produce many ludic futures. The randomness of play can be averaged out.
- Big historical events only happen once, the result given to posterity might not be the one that was most likely at the time.
- The challenge is how much and how to add sufficient weight to game outcomes when it comes to informing policy.



Professional games today: why these 1960s games still matter.

- Historical significance- how the US was thinking about the war.
- Lessons for each game can be drawn for good practice in professional wargaming
- Despite the current interest in peer, and near- peer warfare, counterinsurgency campaigns will not go away. Could very well be a feature of conflicts after the main kinetic fighting has finished.



Thank You.

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