

A synopsis of

# *War Games*

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1. After WWI, the German army increasingly used war games for training because it was impossible to conduct large field maneuvers. Due to wide use, the quality of these games improved considerably. To avoid regimentation, no instructions were issued by official sources.
2. In the German Army, the term “war game” was used to describe many types of exercises: **War Games, Map Exercises, Staff Exercises or Command Post Exercises, Training Trips, Tactical Walks, and Sand-Table Exercises.**
3. **War Games** train leaders in **estimates, decisions, and issuing orders.** The main emphasis is on the concise presentation of ideas. Two sides compete across a map table. A director supervises and serves as the higher headquarters and umpire.

In all branches, in every unit, at all garrisons, and especially in officer schools, a large portion of the instruction consisted of war games. This continued even during the war. Many sources of friction and wrong measures were detected and rehearsed on maps that saved the lives of our soldiers.

Knowledge gained in war games never replaces experience, but does aid in recognizing the demands of warfare. A secondary purpose is that war games give commanders an opportunity to observe their subordinate officers for fitness, knowledge, and strong and weak points of mind and character.

The director of the war game is critical. He must have knowledge, credibility and experience. Junior officers learn to direct war games in small groups under the coaching of an experienced officer. The director and the senior officer present should always establish an atmosphere of friendliness and camaraderie aimed at instruction rather than examination.

The choice of the situation depends on the purpose of the war game. The commander of each side should not be given more information than he would receive in actual warfare. Uncertainty is required. Orders destined for a unit in a war game should be crafted with particular care and must be exemplary in all respects. The situation should include a general setting and a specific mission.

It is dangerous to conduct a war game based on an actual example from military history. Examples from history are best used to elaborate principles – the influence of an individual, responsibility, misunderstanding, fatigue, and other factors that are impossible to represent on a map.

One side starts. The commander states his estimate, decision, and orders. The director challenges the commander with objections to test his resolve and clarify unclear points. During games with advanced students, the commander is then released and the other participants, acting as subordinate commanders, give their orders without consulting their commander. This technique however, takes time. The director dismisses the side, moves unit markers, and then covers them with a sheet.

The opposing side is then called in. Any updates to the situation caused by the initial move are briefed by describing impressions, actions, or reports. The commander then states his estimate, decision, and orders. The director and assistants resolve actions and update the map. The game progresses turn by turn in this manner. The final move is often made in the presence of both sides. This move is

concluded with a request for a new decision.

In every game, efforts should be made to confront each commander, and ideally at least one subordinate commander, with at least one critical, ticklish situation which forces a difficult decision. This increases the value of the game for all participants.

After a pause to allow the participants and directing staff to make notes, the final discussion by the director should not exceed thirty minutes. The director does not describe the game, but picks out interesting aspects, comments on decisions made, clarifies the goals of the exercise, and issues praise and criticism. Approval should be expressed as freely as disapproval. Although the director may present his own decisions, there is no standard solution.

A war game with two sides requires three rooms – one main room and two adjacent rooms for each side. Scales are needed to measure distance. Manuals should be available. For a war game with two parties, four or five hours are required, or an entire afternoon plus evening. Two days are not unusual.

4. **Map Exercises** train leaders on tactical concepts. The emphasis is on making decisions on **weapons** and **unit employment**. Conducted by one side on a large scale – 1:5000 or larger – map board, the director plays the opposing force to maintain focus on the subject of the game. A well-prepared map exercise may be conducted in three hours, including thirty minutes for the final conference.

Before the campaigns of 1940 and 1941, all officers and NCOs trained on map exercises to become familiar with plans. Difficulties were recognized and corrected with field experiments.

As a division commander, I conducted a map exercise every four weeks. All regimental, battalion, and primary staff members participated. I acted as director and represented the actions of the enemy.

5. **Staff Exercises** or **Command Post Exercises** train the participants in teamwork and the command and signal system of a **staff in combat**. These are usually conducted by one side. All the staff, from commander down to drivers, participates. Command decisions are relegated to the background.

The command post is set up in the field or in garrison. The director and his assistants simulate various headquarters sections, adjacent units, and subordinate units. The staff is deluged day and night with messages, intelligence summaries, rumors, adjacent unit reports, aerial photographs, prisoner interrogations, supply problems, and higher headquarters orders. This forces the staff to quickly recognize what is important. Friction can be introduced by assigning casualties. Full military measures, ground defense plans, and activities of the headquarters commandant should be exercised.

Staff exercises are conducted before major exercises or when new staffs are formed. Special exercises to test new orders of battle, supply arrangements, or tactical principals can also be executed as command post exercises.

6. **Training Trips** are war games outdoors to train leaders in **estimates, decisions, and issuing orders**. The main emphasis is on the concise presentation of ideas. One or two sides compete on actual terrain for several days, sometimes a week or more.

Multiple types of training trips exist. A tactical training trip was a series of tactical terrain discussions. An operational training trip focuses on the command of large armies. Supply trips train leaders on the practical problems of the supply and medical services.

Training trips are useful to train General Staff officers, select school instructors, gain impressions of an officer's fitness for future employment, provide training, and test proposed military operations.

The trip is preceded by a take-home problem and selected leaders need to submit their first major

decisions before the start of the game. Large groups are broken up into groups of twelve with a separate director for each group. It is advisable to change directors in the middle of the exercise.

Participants of training trips test plans and gain insights in how long a campaign may last. During the war, top-level headquarters had ample opportunity to study problems of troop assembly and initial deployments in war games, map exercises, and training trips.

Training trips do not proceed as a continuous game, but as a series bounds to focus on controversial problems. The situations are briefed anew at each location. Every participant is required to submit his estimate, decision, and orders. The director then determines the commanders whose solutions he will use. The final conference of the day should announce tomorrow's situation and set a deadline for submitting decisions and orders. This shows how officers can work under pressure.

When two sides play, the director alternates between locations. It may take half a day to play through the moves of one side. The final conference, conducted on suitable map boards, should last half a day.

Training trips require several days, but subject matter should not be condensed to save time. During training trips it is not advisable to occupy all participants every evening with written problems. Visits to nearby historic sites or natural features provide relaxation and prevent the monotony of excess technical instruction. Attendance at dinner is mandatory.

7. **Tactical Walks** train the participants in **commanding small units** in combat. One or two sides execute the tactical walk on actual terrain in the vicinity of the garrison or school. At schools, the tactical walk can replace the indoor game, generally once per week.

Participants train in judging terrain, developing an eye for weapons employment on terrain, making decisions in respect to space, and quickly briefing a military appreciation of given terrain. The director selects interesting terrain that supports the purpose of the exercise. The defense of a defile or the struggle for a river crossing requires that specific type of terrain.

For a two-sided game, each side moves out of earshot when not briefing. A tactical walk lasts four to six hours. The final conference, of no more than thirty minutes, should offer a good view of the area.

8. **Sand-Table Exercises** train small units, from battalions to squads, in **tactics**. Estimates, decision, and orders are issued, terrain is analyzed, and weapons employment and maneuver is discussed.
9. **Notes for Directors.** To direct a war game is an art. This talent cannot be developed without practice, knowledge, ability, and experience. Every game should be made as realistic as possible through the efforts of the director. The director needs to maintain control of the game no matter what decisions the commanders of the two sides make. The director must insist on concise clear-cut answers. Long-winded answers should be cut off abruptly. Speech discipline, important in actual warfare, is thus developed.

Every exercise is driven by a training purpose. It is not sufficient to designate the topic vaguely as "attack" or "defense," but specifically: "A division advancing in two columns is attacked in its flank and is temporarily compelled to defend itself." The director may diagram the mission independently of the terrain. Each situation should be simple and involve no larger scale than is absolutely necessary. The mission of the next higher headquarters must be clear. Nothing occurs in war independent of adjacent units and higher headquarters. The situation should be kept secret before the game unless preparatory work is required of the participants.

The level of a game should be one echelon higher than the headquarters conducting it. A game conducted at regimental headquarters should be at division level. Participants should command the same size and type unit that they actually command, or the next higher one. General Staff Officers

and Division Commanders are appointed without regard to rank or seniority.

The disposition, composition, value, and condition of the units should be clearly spelled out. In critical situations, these conditions materially influence the commander's decision. The terrain selected should allow the participants to make a decision. Where only one river crossing site, one reverse slope, one road, or one hill is available, the decision is already made.

The director needs assistants. If the problem involves artillery or engineer-specific problems, assistants in these areas should be included. Exhaustive preparation on the part of the director and the staff will lessen problems during the exercise. Command post exercises require a large directing staff. The cost of the exercise repays itself, as participants will take home information to train their own troops.

The director should not try to cover too much subject matter in any one exercise, no matter what type.

Every veteran of WWII will concur that a detailed description of visual and auditory combat impressions is needed. Higher headquarters and adjacent units must feed impressions. The director should keep a large number of messages, telephone calls, and reports available to edit and dispatch when needed. Commanders should ask for reports from adjacent units when none are forthcoming.

Every commander must have an opportunity to announce his decision. The director may require important decisions be recorded in writing.

10. **The Value of War Games for Training.** After WWI, Generaloberst von Seeckt repeatedly encouraged war games as an indispensable element of training until every last unit commander was convinced of their value for training officers and men. Sand table exercises were conducted by company commanders with their NCOs, training trips were conducted by all commands, including the Chief of the Army command, and all schools.

War games are excellent for training unit commanders of all ranks. The value of any game is directly related to the skill of the director. Games confront commanders with large varieties of situations in quick succession. Commanders improve their grasp of tactical conditions.

War games test a commander's ability to make estimates and decisions, support their decisions with concise reasoning, adhere to decisions without being stubborn, and modify them as situations change.

The necessity of giving prompt offhand answers without assistance in front of a large number of people and in the presence of superiors develops a person's confidence, bearing, and skill at extemporary speaking.

War games are an excellent chance to test the knowledge and ability of all participants, and measure qualities of temperament and character. One should not draw too many conclusions about a person after having witnessed only a single performance, but an experienced superior will always gain valuable impressions.

In judging a person's fitness for the General Staff, as chief of staff, or as an instructor, the impression gained in several tests during a training trip will be sufficient. The conditions in judging a person's fitness for a command position are similar.