

THE REGIMENTAL WARGAME

by
Captain Friedrich Immanuel

The importance of the war game to the training of the officers that served the German Empire, and the importance of the director to the conduct of each war game can be seen in the following chapter from The Regimental Wargame. At the time he wrote this work, Captain Immanuel was an instructor at the War School (Kriegsschule) at Engers, one of the many schools set up to teach German officer candidates the rudiments of their profession. This translation, published in Kansas City in 1907, was made by Lieutenant Walter Krueger, USA. Though never as famous as his protege Dwight David Eisenhower, Krueger would rise to four-star rank and play an important role in the liberation of the Philippines.

[Albrecht von] Boguslawski hits the nail on the head when he says, "A tedious war game is the grave of all interest." If a war game does not arouse the interest of the participants, they will certainly not play it with zest, and will look on it as an unwelcome addition to their other duties. The complaint that it is difficult to frame a number of simple and interesting war-game problems for a small force, is often heard; still more frequent is the complaint that the execution of a good problem often fails, and that the amount of instruction received is not commensurate with the time and labor expended. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the younger officers, who, at the close of their winter day's duties stand around the war-game table tired and bored, often derive little benefit from the game, and that the director terminates the same with a feeling of disappointment and failure. These drawbacks are not the fault of the game itself, but of the manner in which it is played.

Field exercises are the best training; they are supplemented by tactical rides and discussions. In a field maneuver, however, the young officer, tied down to the narrow limits of his command, usually gets only a restricted or con-

fused idea of the whole situation, and his tactical education is little benefited thereby. Duty with troops, expense, and lack of time prevent the young officer from frequent participation in tactical rides and discussions on the terrain; and besides, these exercises, to be of real benefit, presuppose a certain amount of training, a vivid imagination, and an able instructor, who will conduct them in a business-like manner. Therefore the war game forms a valuable supplementary expedient for the training of officers. Properly conducted, it familiarizes the young officer with the tactical handling of the three arms, gives him opportunities to estimate situations, to arrive at decisions, and to issue orders, and offers him a pleasant change from the monotony of routine duty by giving him an insight into the higher branch of our profession—the art of troop-leading. [Note: The German term *Truppenführung*, here translated as "troop-leading," refers to the leading of large bodies of troops - mixed brigades, divisions, and corps.]

The war game owes its existence to the decade following the downfall of Napoleon, when it was found necessary to provide for the higher training of officers. [Prince Krafft zu Hohenlohe [-Ingelfingen], with good reason, states that the power of quickly arriving at a decision, and the cheerful assumption of responsibility which characterized our officers during the war of 1870-71, and to which we owe so much, was in no small measure due to the war game. At present the war game is common property of the [German] Army. It is everywhere regarded as an excellent expedient for the training of officers; it has even found its way into other armies, and it has long ago been recognized that the war game is not a theoretical plaything, but a training school for war.

General [Julius] von Verdy [du Vernois], an authority on everything pertaining to mental training in the Army, said in his work on the war game, published in 1876: "The value of the war game is to-day everywhere appreciated. Nevertheless, we often

find cases where the attempt to play it was soon abandoned. To my inquiry as to the cause of these failures I have generally received the answer, "There is no one who can properly conduct it." In the meantime conditions have changed considerably. The attempt to play the game is not abandoned nowadays, for it is, as a matter of course, included in the program me of winter instruction for officers in every battalion and detachment [*Abteilung*, i.e. battalion of field artillery.]

The commander is expected to hold war-game exercises with his officers frequently on winter evenings. In most of the regiments the colonel, or in his place the lieutenant-colonel, calls the officers together for a similar purpose, and everywhere this method of training is diligently pursued. Every field officer [i.e. major or lieutenant colonel] and older captain is expected to be able to direct a wargame.

It frequently happens that on the first evening the regimental commander is present as a spectator, his presence naturally putting everyone on his mettle. His presence may also embarrass the director, who, perhaps through lack of practice or experience in conducting these exercises, is struggling with an excusable awkwardness and confusion. A great deal is demanded of a field officer if, as at present, he is not only expected to direct a war game, but also to stimulate the interest of the players and to further their tactical instruction. This, however, has the advantage of compelling those officers to devote much time and study to a subject with which their own interests require them to be familiar. They must thoroughly master the general tactical principles of the three arms, the estimate, criticism, and handling of tactical situations, and give deep study to the question as to how subordinates may be trained in leading troops and in issuing orders. Most officers when first detailed to conduct a war game find themselves immediately on a strange field. On account of the great demands made upon them by routine duties, our company and other commanders nowadays

have very few leisure moments, and consequently no great liking for tactical studies, and are not at all enthusiastic when they, at their age, are expected to devote a great deal of time to study for the purpose of properly conducting war games. If these officers themselves are only beginners, but are nevertheless detailed as instructors for their juniors, the war game, as pointed out above, may often prove unattractive, and loss of interest and dislike for the game result. It is not my intention to assert that officers who may be obliged to conduct a war game under the above-described circumstances are deficient in tactical knowledge, or lack the understanding necessary for a successful conduct of the game. On the contrary, I am convinced that those gentlemen do their very best, and neglect no opportunity to perfect themselves in this subject in order to be equal to the demand made upon them. It is certain that in time they will do excellent work, for by constant effort and practice progress is made, and gradually the once difficult problem becomes as easy as any routine work.

In the field of tactical instruction, as exemplified in the war game, practice does not make one altogether perfect, but insures, nevertheless, valuable and fruitful results. If the war game, nevertheless, fails to be interesting and instructive despite the best efforts, it is usually due to lack of familiarity with the handling of the game, lack of practice in framing suitable problems and in conducting them. In most cases theory and practice are not properly proportioned. It is only when everything which takes place in a war game, whether in plain view or in the imagination, is graphically pictured so as to appeal to the minds of the players, that interest can be aroused and maintained until the close of the game. No doubt, to accomplish this the first requisite is a certain amount of talent which manifests itself in the power of imagination, in the power of illustration, in the power of good delivery, in the grasp and mastery of the situation, and in the power to adapt the discourse so as to appeal to the minds of the participants. "These

demands," says Litzmann, in his excellent work on the tactical training of our officers, "the director will be able to meet only if, aside from tactical knowledge and experience, he possesses a lively imagination, which he understands how to keep in check by a cool, business-like judgment. He needs eloquence in order to describe situations in a realistic and interesting manner, as well as a good memory in order to keep track of troops and time accurately, thus facilitating his hearers' grasp of the situation and the progress of the game." This passage refers to the conduct of tactical rides, but applies with equal force to that of the war game.

It is impossible to arouse the interest of the players with learned, dry lectures, with theoretical discussions, with empty formalities. A knack of teaching, a fluent delivery, an easy, interesting manner of handling the subject, and a thorough mastery of the whole subject are bound to compel and hold the interest of the hearers.

Perhaps many readers remember war games in which road spaces and the arrangement of trains were minutely calculated, or long-winded discussions of the terrain, or lengthy instructions for patrols and sentinels, and even arguments as to the probabilities of an engagement and the resulting losses determined by means of tables were indulged in. Loss of time and loss of all interest were the inevitable results. Of course such conditions are not contemplated by the director, but are due to a lack of skill, through which, losing the thread of the subject under consideration, he goes off on a tangent, introducing discussions of questions of secondary importance without being able to come back to the original theme. If a game with such serious drawbacks is of little value, neither will one which is conducted with too little regard for details find many friends. By the latter is meant a game which rushes pell-mell over the different events without offering the players a single complete picture of the whole, based on the general situation.

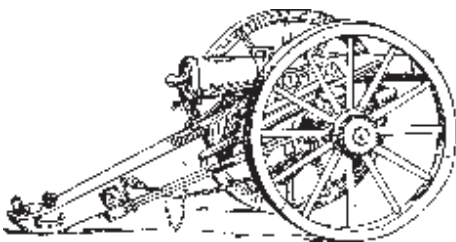
With these difficulties in view, we easily understand the assertion that the success or failure of every war game is absolutely dependent on the director. His personality is a decisive factor. Talent or practice—better still, both together—ensure success. The same problem has been played in two different garrisons; in the one attended with interesting and instructive results, in the other with failure. The failure in this case was not due to the situation created by the problem, but to a faulty decision and execution, based on an erroneous estimate of the situation. This state of affairs is covered by a provision of the *Felddienstordnung* [*Field Service Regulations*], which enunciates the following principle: "*Skillful conduct (of a war game) by persons particularly fitted for the task, without regard to rank and length of service, is a preliminary condition.*"

But not all officers think it advisable to follow this good suggestion. In many cases battalion commanders, for instance conduct the war game for their officers without regard to the fact that there may be younger officers under their command who are better qualified to conduct the game than the officers who perform that duty simply because of their official position. I admit it is inconvenient to give way to a subordinate, practically to acknowledge his superiority on a field of mental and professional attainments. It is probably feared that the feelings of older officers will be hurt if a subordinate is detailed as director of a war game and they are required to play the game under his direction.



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On the contrary, the reverse is true, for an officer who has had very little practice in the game would certainly be glad to play it under the direction of a subordinate, rather than expose his own ignorance by conducting it poorly himself. The capacity to conduct a successful and interesting war game does not depend on the official position or length of service of the director, but on his aptitude and the practice he has had. In every garrison there are doubtless many officers to whom the conduct of the war game may be entrusted with confidence. Very young officers will naturally not be selected, for they lack experience and practice. Officers who have completed a tour at the War Academy, on the General Staff, or as instructors, and who have further educated themselves, will probably be the most desirable, provided they are not mere theorists, and combine thorough mastery of the subject with practical judgment and a capacity to conduct the game in an interesting and instructive manner. That training in the War Academy or on the General Staff is not essential for conducting the game successfully, goes without saying. I am, moreover, of the opinion that there are many of our older officers who, through deep study of the subject and diligent practice of the war game, have so trained themselves that they will be able to conduct the regimental war game just as successfully and with just as happy results. From this discussion we may draw the conclusion that the principle which is laid down in our *Felddienstordnung* is the only correct one. The conduct of war games must be entrusted to the hands of officers who possess the requisite skill and talent there for, regardless of age.



It will be the business of commanders to make a wise choice, besides inducing other officers to take up the study of the subject. The result will be a healthy competition, which cannot be dispensed within any field of military activity, if we do not wish to drift into narrowness and mental apathy. The social and official tact of the officers will be sure to prevent friction and disputes when a junior officer conducts the game, and his seniors work, think, and learn under his direction. This principle alone can ensure success, can make the war game what it should be—a valuable educator for officers in troop-leading and a promoter of mental effort.

The war game is adapted to all branches of activity of leaders and troops. There is, for instance, the strategical war game for the estimate and criticism of situations in connection with the leading of armies and for the practice of issuing orders and leading troops on a large scale. This form of the game pertains to the higher staffs and to the General Staff.

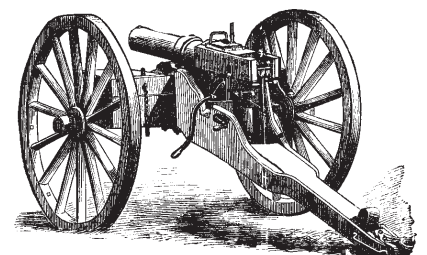
Then there is a tactical war game, dealing with army corps and divisions—their movements, development, and tactics. This form of the game may be expanded so as to furnish instruction in logistics, and all movements in rear of the troops. War games of this class are played in the larger garrisons, where field and staff officers of all arms can be assembled a few times in the course of a winter, together with General staff officers and the adjutants of the superior staffs, for the purpose of holding such exercises.

There are further several other kinds of war games designed for special purposes; for instance, cavalry war games for illustrating strategical reconnaissance work, and the fortress war game, designed to give object lessons in fortress and position warfare. Combined tactical and technical war games, dealing with artillery fire, are also frequently played. In fact, war game problems may be planned for every field of military activity, which, if conducted in a skillful and interesting manner, will

impart a valuable fund of knowledge. In this work the above-described classes of the war game will not be considered. Its compass is narrower, being restricted to the war game played in separate regiments, separate battalions, and detachments of the size of the former. We will call this game simply the *Regimental War Game*.”

The name is not designed to restrict the game to a set form or to an iron-clad scheme. On the contrary, I insist that the development of personal initiative, without which no war game can possibly be of real benefit, must not be restricted by regulations and set schemes. Within the above enumerated organizations the war-game problems must be made as varied as possible, according to the abilities of the directors and the knowledge and experience of the participants. It is, for instance, advisable to play the game by battalions, and to play a few games by regiment for the benefit of the older and more experienced officers. On the other hand, it may be deemed more beneficial not to play the game by battalions, but to form several groups out of the officers of the whole regiment, who, according to their preliminary tactical education and practice, play easy or difficult problems: I leave these views for the present to the consideration of the student, but will discuss them more in detail in Chapter VII.

The methods of playing the game itself are as various as the schemes for detail into groups. Based on the works of Trotha, [Jakob] Meckel, [Julius von] Verdy [du Vernois], and Zimmermann on the war game, several different methods of playing the game have developed, which have been retained without material change until the present day. The opinion is general to-day that



everything in the war game which savors of theory, of conjectural calculations, of decisions by means of dice according to fixed rules, etc., should be done away with, or at least simplified. Thus the war game will also be of value to officers who are not familiar with the old rules of the game and who have heretofore experienced a certain hesitation in undertaking to master its intricacies.

The author is of the opinion that in the field of tactical instruction as exemplified in the war game, the most diversified means are most conducive to success. It is not claimed that the solutions of problems offered herein are the only correct ones. If this or that statement differs from widely accepted methods, it is mainly due to a desire to simplify the war game and to strip it of all unnecessary matter which has heretofore made the conduct of the game so difficult for many officers. This book is written with this principle in view, as a stimulus and guide for those officers who desire to acquaint themselves with the elements of the war game, and who wish to prepare themselves for conducting the same.

The first principle which this book enunciates is that the war game should be a free exchange of opinions between director and players, in the form of conversations, in which the former transmits his knowledge in the shape of interesting situations to the latter, furthers the development of their tactical judgment and their capacity for rapidly arriving at a decision, and in this manner making his conversation a vehicle, as it were, for conveying elementary instruction in the subject of troop-leading.

In order to realize this, it is important, in addition to having a capable director, to abstain from inflicting tedious written preliminary work and long-winded theoretical discussions on the players during the game. These considerations are no less necessary for arousing and maintaining the interest of the players than a lively conduct of the game. To this end it is necessary to guard against protracted games. Two to two and one-half hours is the maximum, which should not be exceeded, it being impossible, as a rule, for the director to remain fresh during a lively game and to maintain the interest of his hearers for a longer period. If, however, the length of the game is restricted to a certain period, the director will find himself obliged to curtail his work by determining beforehand on a definite plan as to the situation and the particular point to be illustrated. It goes without saying that this procedure must not be permitted to produce unnatural situations or artificial combinations, which are sure to restrict the initiative of the players and impair their judgment. The director must, on the contrary, be in a posi-

tion to guarantee freedom of action to the players and allow the results of their decisions to mature, without, however, losing the threads of the game and without losing sight of the object to be attained. The true art of conducting a war game in a business-like and beneficial manner lies in the conduct of the director, who ostensibly approves decisions arrived at by the players, and who possesses the power to create many-sided and interesting situations, in which new decisions must be continually made, and who exercises complete authority over the whole in an unobtrusive manner, and is absolute master of what he intends to teach.

Besides the principle that the really instructive war game must be, above all, an exchange of opinions between director and players, a number of principles to be observed will be described in the following pages of this work for the consideration of the student. Briefly stated, they are as follows:

- (1) The greatest possible simplicity of problems, especial importance being attached to operations of small organizations;
- (2) Curtailment of the written preliminary work;
- (3) Avoidance of problems which can only be solved by playing a great number of war games;
- (4) *Importance of arriving at a decision in any situation; [Note: The italics are in the original!]*
- (5) Illustration of the most important principles of troop-leading and of the tactics of the combined arms;
- (6) The use of dice only in exceptional cases; in their stead, umpires, who give reasons for their decisions;
- (7) Substituting for the calculations of losses (still customary), the decisions of director or umpire, who gives reasons for his decision—in fact, removal of every empty form which impairs the liveliness of the game and reduces its value. These principles will be discussed more fully and demonstrated in the course of the following chapters.

