

May 31, 2020

Wargaming - What Can You Learn from Play?

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, T. Gum, Site Admin.)



WarGames, 1983, MGM/UA Entertainment.

As we age it seems the amount of playtime diminishes, as does the daily pause for a snack and is replaced by a mad rush of work fueled by coffee and stale cookies from the breakroom. However, the power of play has been researched and well documented by countless professionals. In the world of military history, various forms of ‘play’ have been utilized for centuries... this is not something that is isolated to a Matthew Broderick film, albeit a great film.



PSU Blue / White Game, 2018, 247sports.

The concept of rehearsal is quite similar to wargaming with perhaps a major difference is the use of a belligerent (opponent) that counters each move, or in some way reacts as opposition in real-time. Most closely related to this is when a varsity team scrimmages a junior varsity team – it allows the team to practice, coaches (commanders) to observe, and to make necessary adjustments.

Physically, for military units this has taken place on land, sea or in the air and most recently in the digital world.

A set of goals & objectives are identified with measurable outcomes, followed by a clear set of rules which are accompanied by set of identified tools and assets that can be utilized to accomplish the goals & objectives. A tertiary part of setting the game-board is the formation of teams... or sides so to speak (offense and defense).

The game play of offense versus defense is not a static movement. No, in fact the role of offense and defense can easily be switched, and even blur depending on the situation of the wargame. The ultimate goal of wargaming is to mimic real-life situations as closely as possible without the dire consequences.



Wargaming is also quite popular in tabletop games, card games, role playing games, and even historic board games such as Chess, and Go. These formats may appear to be solely civilian use however the such games have been used by countless battlefield commanders and boardrooms to illustrate the principles of war, leadership, decision v. indecision, communication, and flexibility.



Bildergebnis 1:72 diorama of the Battle of Waterloo

One common use of wargaming is through sand tables / trays. A traditional format of wargaming that has been used for centuries is the deployment of miniature figurines - which resembles the prior mentioned format, but there is a level of artistry and visual cues that are certainly enhanced.

Through the use of play participants are able to better prepare themselves emotionally, intellectually, and even physically (pilots, landwarfare teams, and naval gun crews for example) for the mission at hand. Once engaged in the mission, Newton's Third Law of physics should already be understood.

Lastly, wargaming in its most basic use activates a portion of our inner self that receives lessons through play far more constructively.

Go ahead – play. You might just learn something. If you would like to learn more about this topic on an academic and professional military level, the US Army War College interviewed eight professionals on the topic; [click here to be taken to the article](#).