



# WARGAMING IN THE SEMINAR: A STUDENT'S VIEW (WARGAMING ROOM)

By Tina Cancel and Ken Gilliam, June 30, 2021

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**Ken Gilliam:** Hi, I'm Colonel Ken Gilliam and today on **A BETTER PEACE**, we will once again venture into the **Wargaming Room**, a series dedicated to wargames and other innovative methods used at the U.S. Army War College and other institutions for education, research and experience. This episode was originally recorded in May 2020, where I asked Ms. Tina Cancel, a 2020 graduate of the Army War College to provide a civilian students retrospect on her experience with LEGO® Serious Play® and the wargame Joint Overmatch: Euro-Atlantic in her classroom.

Welcome to the **Wargaming Room**, a podcast about strategic games designed, developed, and played at the United States Army War College. I'm Ken Gillum, your host and director of Strategic Wargaming. I'm glad you could join us today. My guest is Ms. Tina Cancel, a current student at the Army War College. Tina is a Department of Defense civilian with 15 years experience supporting the Navy and before attending the Army War College, she was a lead financial management analyst for the Navy working capital fund portfolio and she tells me that was roughly an oversight of about eight to nine billion annually. Tina, I assume that's like what half an aircraft?

**Tina Cancel:** Maybe.

**KG:** Welcome to the **Wargaming Room**.

**TC:** Thank you.

**KG:** So Tina, I ask the same opening question of all our first-time guests. What was your favorite game or play activity as a kid and do you still play it?

**TC:** So I was a fidgety kid. I always wanted to be outside, so in terms of games, I really liked unstructured play, so I was outside a lot with my brother, and we would just do a lot of pretend

play activities. In terms of board games, we did a lot of chance type board games, so it wasn't until I met my husband that I got into like strategy games, per se.

**KG:** Do you still do any of those today? I'm curious about the unstructured play part.

**TC:** So my brother and I...I have a younger brother, so it's always the tyranny of an older sister, I guess, so that I had control and we had a really big fence and backyard and a lot of time to play and my dad would say, "okay, go outside", and we would, and so I would make up all kinds of games to include...We joke that I would make up a language and I would teach him, it would be like my own instructional classroom where I'd be the teacher. It doesn't really sound as much fun for him, now when we talk about it as adults, but I think at the time we both had a really good time.

**KG:** Wow. Do you see a modern parallel to that in your life anywhere?

**TC:** Not for me, but it's interesting. I have four children and my oldest daughter is like a mini me, in terms of personality and she reigned supreme with the younger kids, and I see her making up these amazingly creative games and structures with the other kids that keep them enthralled, but usually, from a power play perspective, she's definitely the one in charge, so I have that mirroring back at me.

**KG:** Yeah. That's actually very personal. Thank you for sharing that. That's something nice. Did you find yourself doing any of the same types of things in the current environment? I assume they're at home and you have to interact with them on an educational level as well.

**TC:** Right, so we're sort of homeschooling, if you want to call it that. We play a lot of board games with the kids, so it's more, we let them play unstructured and have a lot of free time, but as a family, especially now to kill time with COVID-19, we play a lot of board games. My husband is into strategy board games like Dominion and Settlers of Catan, a wide variety of games, so now I'm into that because I like beating him and we play with the kids, so we'll play children's Munchkin or Dice City, things that have some chance, but really do have some basic strategy and we find that even my six year old son, my nine year old daughter and my ten year old daughter, they can all do it on their own and we just kind of buddy up with the four year old, so it's fun. They all get to play. It's very creative, but we allow them to win or lose on their own and so it's a nice family time and I think it helps with building basic strategy from young age.

**KG:** Oh, wow, nice. All right. Let's get down to business. I'm going to read you part of the Army War College mission statement at least and the mission of the Army War College is to, and I quote, "enhance national and global security by developing ideas and educating U.S. and international leaders to serve and lead at the strategic enterprise level."

This past year, you were part of a seminar team that experienced some new educational methods, instead of what might be considered the standard classroom experience and I'd like to capture some of your experience with two elements specifically that were used during your matriculation. One of those was LEGO Serious Play and the other was a game called Joint Overmatch: Europe. We might as well start in order that you experienced those, and I think LEGO Serious Play was first. Your seminar had an interesting experience with LEGO bricks during your joint functions lesson. I've talked to one of your faculty already and what we've found in other places, as well as your seminar is that there are some reactions to LEGO Serious Play that can be on the extreme ends of the spectrum.

So don't worry about hurting anybody's feelings today, especially mine, because I was in the room. Do you remember your reactions when you first realized what you were going to do?

**TC:** Yes. I don't really play with LEGOS. The kids do, so when I got in there, I really wasn't as open to it as I might've been. I was more anxious like, "oh my gosh, I'm going to have to build something. I'm in a room with all these creative people," because I'm also competitive. There's no way to win. I was really anxious, and I think that's surprising, but what I was.

**KG:** Tina, do you remember the joint functions lesson and how that day progressed?

**TC:** I do. I do.

**KG:** Do you want to tell me how... so what happened? How did it start? What were some of the things you remember about the day?

**TC:** With the LEGO Serious Play? Well, we started off, I think, making a duck, so having a simple form and then we got more and more comfortable to say that with, a bunch of 40-year-olds in the room, more and more comfortable with mimicking and playing with the LEGOS and then we went into the seven joint war fighting functions and each of us were assigned a function and there were two different teams. I had information and another colleague of mine also had information and so we had to represent that joint function in the form of Legos. I think mine was really abstract, like it had lots of tubes and connections and then with our teams, each person had a different joint function of the seven, so then we built those together and integrated the joint functions again through the LEGOS and we briefed it out and it was pretty interesting because both teams had very different structures to represent really the same functions.

**KG:** I am very glad that you remember very well how that day went. That's one of the things we try to get to with LEGO Serious Play, is the stickiness of the lesson and part of that is making those memories a little more vivid with the bricks. I'm trying to remember. I'm pretty sure that at the beginning of that lesson, that I looked at everybody and I said, "how many of you have already decided that you're not going to enjoy what's going to happen today?"

**TC:** You did say that. I think I was the only one that raised my hand.

**KG:** Yeah, it was you and there was a tentative behind you and I'm pretty sure I accused at least half of the rest of the class of lying because they were unsure about what they were going to get into, so body language is a big part of that one. Do you happen to remember any of the models? You remember yours; do you remember anybody else's?

**TC:** So I remember the other teams just because I was very impressed. They used not only the LEGO forms that they had, but they also use the containers of the LEGOS to...as they integrated the joint functions, so they had... I'm trying to think of the actual individual forms, but they had a tower and I think information was the base and then I think they integrated cyber somehow and they just built it up where the C2, command and control was on top forward looking and I think we also talked about risks and vulnerabilities. I remember looking at theirs, thinking how firm the structure was. I think that had to do with their logistical base, but I'm not quite sure how in my mind, if I can visualize that, but I think they had a very solid base, so when we were asked to critique the other team's structure, I really felt like they had a pretty solid foundation of very few vulnerabilities from the sense of LEGOS.

**KG:** Oh, yeah. I think I had forgotten that they use their plastic bins to actually do something different in there. One of the things, when you try to force someone to be innovative, sometimes they go places you don't think they're going to go, and that team definitely did it that day with me in there. Do you think your opinion changed during the day about what was happening and how you were learning?

**TC:** I got more comfortable with it. I'm generally a very open person, like when we took the senior leadership assessments, I was the most open person in the room from my seminar and when we went LEGO play, I was surprised at myself how closed I was to it. I think through the day I personally found it more at ease as a civilian that does finance. I really hadn't even thought about a lot of the joint functions before coming to the War College, if at all and so I don't know if it changed my thinking on the joint functions.

I know we talked about some of that, but I don't know if I personally changed. I think, would it help us solidify what those were? Then when we went forward in time and played the Joint Overmatch, it helped me recall the interplay between the joint functions, just because it's something that, again, I hadn't been exposed to and personally wasn't as interested in, as maybe some of the others, so I think it helped get me interested in it. It really came in handy, I think in terms of comps, quite honestly, because again, it just helps you with, with recall, I think that tactile learning.

**KG:** Was there anything about it that you didn't like?

**TC:** No, not really. I mean, I think it was an enjoyable experience. I think it was fun to come home and tell the kids that I had been playing with Legos all day, in terms of the experience itself. I liked buddying up with another colleague on the same function and then separating into groups. I think some of it, right, was that discomfort. I guess, not disliked, but there's a discomfort when you have to explain what you did when it's really creative and there's a vulnerability in that, but I don't know if I disliked it. I just think it was a part of that divergence and getting comfortable with something different.

**KG:** Well, is there any way that you think we could help make students more comfortable by doing some of those things in there?

**TC:** Maybe do it more often. I mean, this lesson came after some of the joint function lessons I believe, and it might've been helpful, or it might be interesting to try it throughout the year, if possible. I don't know how you would integrate it, but I think it was different and I think it was unexpected. I liked being a part of it, so I really don't have a critique. I think to when we, I'm thinking back now, when our team built our model, we were able to visualize like command and control and how we almost built it on a tower, but that seemed...then we later broke it out and integrated it throughout the field as well and I think it helped visualize how the function could be more than just a standalone function with the different layers of the functions, if that makes sense, so I enjoyed it. I just think it takes time and several hours in a room sometimes can be daunting, maybe breaking it up or having different pieces of it throughout the year, but I thought how it was rolled out was really fun.

**KG:** Okay. Now let's talk about a little bit of the group model that you built and some of the dynamics that went on there too. You've just talked a little bit about trying to put that model together. Do you remember any of the discussions around it? Not maybe specifically, but some of the tensions that were starting to show as you were trying to place the different joint functions relative to each other.

**TC:** I think at first it was a mess cause we all had our individual joint functions and trying to figure out the basics of how to integrate it in a way that makes sense and I think information and intelligence was sort of harder because I had mine as information standalone and it's really the basis for the joint function, so having that broken up and how to integrate it with all the others, it had some good discussion. I don't know about tensions, but I think how to visualize it correctly...Again, that word sounds silly, but how to do it in a way that make sense? I think to where to position some of the others, like where to position fires versus forest protection, like where to put all this stuff. We definitely had lively discussion on that because we weren't necessarily all in agreement, I think, on the positions. We did have limited time, so it sort of forced that discussion. It forced a resolution, but again, I think there wasn't a right answer, when

you have a bunch of type A's generally, you can have a lively discussion on things that are more abstract.

**KG:** So I want to go back to your comment about potentially using it in other places in the curriculum. Do you have any in mind that might be good slots for that? Anything that you can think back on, now that you're done with all your coursework? If you say, "if it had been in this lesson, I might have paid attention more, been more engaged, gotten a little more out of the lesson", in any of those?

**TC:** I'm not going to say pay attention more, definitely paid attention. I think from a tactile learning perspective, I don't know how you would do this, but anything that builds up on each other, so if we're talking about the strategy formulation framework or if we're talking about...and this kind of came into play with Joint Overmatch, but some of the GFMIG (Global Force Management Implementation Guidance) like processes and if there are ways, like I had a more challenging time with some of the combat commander strategy campaign plans and how that all interacted from the tactical strategic and I eventually got it, but for me, that was just the harder lesson to learn and if there was a way to, as things build or integrate, to include a LEGO Serious Play with that, I think it might be fun.

I don't know where you would put it, right? Because I mean, you already have a jam-packed curriculum, but I think that for someone like me, who is almost an outsider coming in and learning this fresh, and hasn't worked at a combat and command level, anything that would help with the interrelation would be helpful, even if you could have almost, not necessarily in the seminar, but almost like they have a writing curriculum, if there's something that could be done outside, there's people who want to come in and talk about it as almost like a self-help.

**KG:** You're saying almost like a noon-time lecture style thing, where an expert might build their model, their representation of what that system is and then students can come in and they can explain the different parts of their model and how they interact with each other.

**TC:** Right, or even have almost a little workshop where it's interactive, like a limited workshop where you say, "okay, come in, we're going to do X and have the students build it with the professors leading it." I really enjoyed the Tuesday strategic film series and I really liked how that kind of reinforced the lessons and it went along with the curriculum throughout the year, and if there was something similar you could do with this, that might be helpful. I think you might get some resistance from students that aren't exposed to this. You might want to expose them to it beforehand, just to kind of break down people like me who had those walls up, but once you get into it, I mean, it's fun. It might even be something to do with the family.

**KG:** Wow. That's an interesting concept. I had not thought about doing something like that. We've thought about other things with other games, but not...you're really right. It could almost

be a guest LEGO lecture series, when you bring in that one expert on defense management and they are not necessarily the facilitator, so you could have a LEGO Serious Play facilitator in the room, driving the process and have the DM (Defense Management) mastermind right there when students are trying to grasp those concepts and how they interact with each other. I'm making a note because I will try to figure out how I can get something like that to go next year.

**TC:** Well, I'm local. You can just call me up.

**KG:** Oh, Nice! The other thing is you talked about using it in other places. What we do have is a plan right now to use it in the Complex Adaptive Systems lesson for the entire class and that using those case studies, what we did this year with two other seminars we had them go through individual models. The individuals built their models of their case studies or their backgrounders, I think they called them and then those small groups, probably five students together, had to put all of their backgrounders together to explain their problem and then those three different problems had to explain to each other and then they looked for connectivity between those three different problem sets, which on the surface kind of appear like they're not related to each other, but when you start pulling the threads, you can see some connectivity between them and how they might interact with each other. I'm with you.

I'm also trying to get some backing to do it for the joint functions lesson for the entire curriculum or for the entire student body, because I remember being a student. It was the most boring lesson I had ever gone to because it was six hours of straight up PowerPoint. I can read this stuff, don't sit here and try to talk to me cause you're not going to gain any additional information on whether I know this or not by spewing PowerPoint at me.

**TC:** Well, I think the pilot that you did with our...and maybe some of the other seminars with this, I mean, for me, I retained it and I'm not someone who's played with it before, and this is well after comps, so hopefully that's considered a success as you seek to kind of roll it out because it's not something that... I mean, I don't enjoy PowerPoint either, even though I kind of live in the world of Excel and so I liked this because it was something different. We got to get up and move.

**KG:** Yeah, absolutely. You talked about retention. What we really wanted you to retain it for was for your, end-of-course exercise, well, we want you to retain it much longer than that, but at least until you get to your end-of-course exercise for the Military Strategy and Campaigning Course and you actually played Joint Overmatch: Europe, which is a game that was developed completely separately of LEGO Serious Play, in order to have an experiential exercise at the end of that course. Can you describe that game and how it went for your seminar?

**TC:** Sure. So there were two teams for Joint Overmatch, a red and a blue. We're playing against each other using essentially the military power, but there were elements, if you pulled them in of

the others of information and economic and diplomatic, if you're thinking outside the box, so the two teams, there was a red team, which was Russia and a blue team, which was the U.S. and our NATO allies, and our Joint Overmatch was set in the European theater. It was really at a strategic level and there were all different elements of military power, but we did have to think at sometimes at an operational level and so there were a wide variety of military functions.

These were air power, land power, logistics, etc., and then we had dice that were used, I read back through the practicum just to jog my memory, for Clausewitz's fog and friction. Just so you could roll the dice and see whether your logistics, a sustainment piece came in or not. I do finance for the Navy as a civilian, so naturally as a part of the game, they made me in charge of air power. I don't know why, that makes me laugh.

**KG:** Okay, standard budget cycle there. You had to run the ATO (Air Tasking Order), is that it?

**TC:** Yeah, I guess, I don't know! Maybe they thought it was a less engaging piece, but so the game played out over a series of turns and I believe red was able to go first or they made the first move and looking at the game horizon and you could quickly tell that red's going to get an advantage initially and then over time, the blue team, as because of our superior sustainment logistical pipelines, that we would get parity, if not, supremacy sort of later on in the game, but what bothered me about the game because I do play and I play to win and I like strategy games is that it took so long for my colleagues and I to make decisions, which I think is funny because it's something we complain about.

We complain about leadership decision-making timelines, but here in this game, it took us so long that we were never really able to get past like turn four or five, which of course then being on the blue team means that we aren't going to win.

**KG:** Oh yeah.

**TC:** It bothered me immensely. Doug Bennett knows all about that, that I wanted it to either be longer timeline to play the game or to have some sort of like timer where we were forced to make a decision to just speed it up, but I think in the real world, you can't control how fast things happen and so from our realistic perspective, I think you could tell there was a lot of care and intent put in developing the game and making it as realistic as possible within certain constraints, so I liked it, it was a good game.

**KG:** I think it probably wants you to do more of the planning side and the game is really just a way to engage you a little bit longer. Any memorable reactions from you or any of the other students during the game?

**TC:** I think we all enjoyed it. We definitely got into it, and I liked...we were all around like different groups around the table and everybody with me really had their uniforms on, so it



looked very official, and I remember cause again, I could see this horizon and I was probably more focused at times at winning the game than planning.

I like to be in the disruptor and so in terms of decision making, both teams had a good group dynamic and the leadership commander part of our team did a really good job of listening to everybody and I wanted to have like a rogue person behind the Russian lines and he allowed it and so we were able to kind of disrupt Russian efforts for a little while and I think the red team wasn't expecting that, so they had to divert some of their resources to take care of that rogue in the Baltics, so it was kind of fun being able to advocate for something that was different within our long range planning cycle and kind of going back and forth, and then also kind of being a disruptor and having to tie up red team assets.

Generally, it was really, for me as a civilian again, I don't really get to see my colleagues and their expertise, and it was really great to hear their perspectives and it kind of go back and forth and then be able to offer my own and realized I had learned a lot. It was good, the back and forth behind the scenes and then playing it because you never know what the other team's going to do.

**KG:** You don't know what the other alternatives were, but do you think that it was worth your time that you spent playing this game because it's a significant investment of time for students and faculty?

**TC:** I think so. I think so. For me honestly, things like planning... There's different types of learning and we spend an awful lot of time talking as a seminar and learning from each other through dialogue, we spend a lot of time sitting, as you had said through PowerPoint, sitting through panel lectures, sitting through Bliss Hall lectures. This was an opportunity where we could get out, engage with one another and apply a lot of the course curriculum through something that was an application and I actually think we had a long list of suggestions for the game, but I think just in playing the game itself, one of the biggest suggestions were we wished we could have played this throughout, at least throughout MSC (Military Strategy and Campaigning), but even tying in the DM, the resourcing piece with logistics.

It ties in all of the components of what we are set to learn at the War College and so having that maybe more upfront and playing it kind of off and on throughout the year or mixing up the teams would be beneficial, but I think overwhelmingly, my colleagues enjoyed getting up and being able to do something different and I think it definitely shows the different pieces of what I think you're seeking to teach us.

**KG:** We actually had a seminar that played a different game that did something similar to your suggestion of playing it throughout. They had a few iterations along the way with the game board that actually allowed them to culminate a little faster than they would have, so instead of four days, they were done in three days because they didn't have a lot of the learning curve on the front end. You gave me a little bit there of advice for faculty and so I'm going to phrase the

question specifically to see if there's anything else. What advice would you give faculty when they're working on a game or experience to include in the class?

**TC:** Our faculty did a very good job of making this inclusive and making sure that everyone had a role and I think we had enough time to prepare, so we all felt we knew what we were going into. The only thing I would say from my personal experience is that it would have been nice to have a shorter timeline, but again, it depends on what you're seeking to achieve, because if we want to ask, "did this help me in my mind as someone who had not been exposed to military planning much before, that it helps solidify that", the answer is yes. If it achieved the objective, so maybe it didn't have to go longer, maybe that would've been more distracting. Sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees and as a student, I was in it.

Sometimes you don't see the benefit of something until you're done with it, and I think that's how I viewed the Joint Overmatch instruction. I definitely enjoyed it and I might've gotten more tied up in the gameplay itself. The fact that in our faculty, they weren't hands-off, they let us drive a lot. They were facilitators and made sure we stayed on a timeline, but they allowed us to make a lot of decisions and we actually went over time I think just about every day, like we chose to stay longer to make decisions or to perfect plans or what have you and I think that shows the level of engagement and I liked that the professors allowed us that flexibility, so yes, I may have liked a shorter timeline, but I do think keeping that flexibility and letting the students drive, the level that they get into it and we were very into it, I think is also beneficial.

**KG:** All right, Tina, what does the future hold for you?

**TC:** I am in a Defense Senior Leadership Development Program, so that allows me not only to attend the War College, but to do a follow-on temporary duty assignment and so my next assignment will be at NATO headquarters, as a special advisor to the U.S. Mission to NATO.

**KG:** Do you think you're going to have any Joint Overmatch recall when you're there?

**TC:** I think what is interesting is that I'm going to NATO, and we played this game and I think I'll be definitely more aware of the Russian influence.

**KG:** There you go. I think you said at the beginning information was the base, right?

**TC:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**KG:** All right. Tina, thanks for talking to me today. I wish you the best as you transition to your new job and I'm a little bit jealous that you're getting to go back to Europe, and I do hope that the Joint Overmatch and the joint functions lessons will translate into some utility when you're at NATO.

**TC:** Thank you.

**KG:** It looks like we're about out of time. Thanks to Tina Cancel for joining us today and the **Wargaming Room** and thanks to all of you for joining us in the **Wargaming Room**. Please send us your comments on this and all the programs, including ideas for future programs. If you want to hear more, subscribe to **A BETTER PEACE**. After you've subscribed, please rate and review this podcast on your podcatcher of choice, because that helps others find us as well. We're also seeking articles for publication in the **Wargaming Room** series, so send us your pitch for innovative and provocative wargaming content, intended for a broad audience of well-informed leaders and listeners, including other governmental business and education audiences. We'll see you here next time, but until then, from the **Wargaming Room**, I'm Ken Gilliam. Play to win.